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The Impact of a Formative Classroom Observation Tool on Teachers' Reflective Process
on Instructional Practices: An Action Research Study

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to all of the teachers and administrators who work daily to insure a better future for our students during this tumultuous time in the field of education and the greater world. Thank you for all you do for students.

Acknowledgements

I will forever be grateful to Dr. Todd Lilly who came into my life at just the right time and provided unwavering expertise, support and understanding throughout this process.   Without his guidance, this dissertation would not be all that it came to be.

Deepest appreciation to those that served on my defense committee: Dr. Hope Reed, Dr. Linda Silvernail and Dr. Troy Terry. Thank you for giving of your time and energy to help in not only my development, but in the development of leaders in the world of education.

I am grateful to the supervisors and mentors that I have worked with throughout my time in education, but am most grateful to those who continued to encourage me throughout this long process these last few years, Dr. Mike Cory, Mrs. Jane Harrison, and Mr. Barry Knight. Thank you for challenging me, for pushing my thought processes and, most importantly, for believing in me. I am the educator that I am today because of your influence on me.

I am appreciative of the teachers and leadership team members who willingly agreed to be a part of my study. Without you, this study would not exist.

I am so very thankful to my parents, Dale and Mardee Miller, for instilling a love of learning and a strong work ethic in me. Thank you for teaching me that I could do anything. I am also thankful to my sisters, Denise Lemasters and Samantha Cooke, for being my cheerleaders along the way and for encouraging me on the days that were particularly difficult.

I will forever be thankful to my two sons, Miller and Maxwell, who often did without 'Mom' these past few years. Thank you for understanding and for continuing to love me.

Most importantly, I will forever be indebted to my amazing husband, Jason, for all he has done to help me through this process. He has been my rock, my encourager, my best friend and my shoulder to cry on throughout this entire process. None of this would have been possible without his love and support. I will forever be grateful.

Abstract

This paper details a study focused on the impact of the utilization of a formative classroom observation tool on the teachers' reflective process as it pertains to instructional practices. The study was developed from a noted problem of practice at a middle school where approximately half of the teachers did not agree that teacher evaluation at their school focused on instructional improvement. The ultimate goal of the research study is to gain meaningful understanding concerning how to improve teacher practices through classroom observation and instructional leadership. This action research study incorporates a qualitative research design. Data was gathered from participating teachers in two phases. Phase one included a pre-intervention online anonymous questionnaire. The data gathered from this phase assisted in the development of the observational tool. Phase two, following the implementation of the observational tool, included an additional online questionnaire administered to all teacher-participants. Additionally, school level administrators participated in interviews to provide background information and their thoughts on the development of the tool.

Key Terms: action research, formative evaluation, instructional leadership, reflective practice, summative evaluation

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Chapter One

Introduction

Topic and Background

The idea of teacher evaluation has been evident in the United States since the early 1920s; however, until recent years, evaluation remained a matter of local judgment (Hazi & Arrendondo Rucinski, 2009). The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) shifted the emphasis of teacher evaluation being determined by local judgment to a requirement of teacher evaluation being used as a means to improve teacher quality (Hazi & Arrendondo Ruckinski, 2009). Later, the adoption of No Child Left Behind (US Department of Education, 2002) increased the focus on teacher evaluation as a way of improving student learning by ensuring a highly qualified teacher was placed in every classroom (Goldrick, 2002).

The emphasis on accountability has set high expectations for all students to learn in every school across the country. This focus on accountability has resulted in a need for enhancing teaching and learning so that student success has become the top priority in all schools (Ovando, 2005). With this expectation, school level administrators have moved from being the managers of their schools to becoming the *instructional leaders* in their schools. Classroom observations are a major component of instructional leadership. Classroom observations are an essential contact point for administrators to connect their role with teaching and learning (Whithurst, Chingos & Lindquist, 2015).

Ovanda (1994) distinguishes three separate types of evaluation: diagnostic, formative, and summative. This dissertation in practice focuses on formative evaluation which is used to "determine the need for adjustment, modification or additional study" (Ovanda, 1994, p. 20). It is important to note that formative evaluation differs from summative evaluation in that summative evaluation is used to "determine the overall success of teaching and learning" (p. 20). Formative evaluation is generally used when working with veteran teachers that have proven themselves capable, skilled professionals (Egelson, 1994).

Providing teachers with constructive feedback during formative evaluation allows teachers to enhance the quality of teaching within their classrooms and is believed to be essential for students to learn effectively (Garaza, 2001; Ovanda, 1994; Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2002). Teacher observations, the relationship between the principal and the teacher, the culture of learning and the impact of instructional coaching are all important to the effectiveness of developing teacher practices (Taylor, 2013).

Teacher evaluations and observations may be received by teachers either as positive interactions that lead to professional growth or as negative requirements that lead to frustration (Peterson & Comeau, 1990; Danielson, 2010). As a former teacher, school level administrator, and now district administrator, I have had the opportunity to receive and deliver feedback from classroom observations. Often, this feedback is vague, unspecific, or a mere checklist that does little, if anything, to improve classroom instruction or professional practices as intended. This is counterproductive to the theory many current lawmakers hold that evaluation of all educators will prompt the improvement of all educators (Donaldson & Papay, 2012). Though summative

evaluation processes have been developed in detail, little guidance is provided by the state or at the district-level to school level administrators in how often teachers should be observed when not undergoing the summative evaluation process or to the type of feedback that should be provided after these formative classroom observations take place. The State of South Carolina encourages schools and districts to engage in classroom observations with teachers in their formative evaluation years, but leaves the frequency and instrumentation to the discretion of the schools and districts (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). "An effective observational tool can provide a change in theory about the way teachers…view the observation process, and it can be the perfect link in closing students' achievement gap" (Taylor, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

This Dissertation in Practice will examine the utilization of a reflective observational tool, developed by the educator-researcher, to be used by the school level administrators when conducting formative classroom observations to provide teachers feedback and its impact on the teachers' reflective process on their instructional practices.

Upstate School District (pseudonym) where Lincoln Middle School (pseudonym) is located does not have a required formative observation tool in place for administrators to use. Each school uses its own tool, many of which do not provide detailed feedback for the teacher to use in reflective practice. The current tool being used at Lincoln Elementary School is a checklist that provides little detail to the teachers being observed and does not focus on professional development, reflection or student outcomes. Rather, the current tool merely notifies the teacher if a specific element was observed during the observation, i.e. student engagement, technology use, essential question posted.

Each year the South Carolina State Department of Education administers a Likert scale survey to all teachers at each public school in the state; results from these yearly surveys are reported by school to the District Office. Averages taken over a two-year period (2015-2017) show that only 53% of teachers at Lincoln Middle School agree that the school administration provides effective instructional leadership. Approximately 67% of these same teachers agree that teacher evaluation at their school focuses on instructional improvement.   With this in mind, the following Problem of Practice has been developed: Too many teachers at Lincoln Middle School do not believe that the teacher evaluation process focuses on instructional improvement, and therefore, rarely use the feedback provided by administrators to reflect upon and improve their teaching practices.

Study Rationale

Instructional leadership. For years, educational reform has focused on assisting teachers in their professional growth. Harold Spears (1953) described what he called *The Spirit of Supervision*. Though it was published over sixty-years ago, it reflects the thoughts found in many current publications on supervision. Along with many other things, Spears' list discusses the need for stimulation of instruction and learning, encouragement from the supervisor rather than discouragement, and the importance of administrators participating in classroom visits that are welcomed by the teachers (1953).

Administrators who strive to be instructional leaders for their teachers must work to focus their schools on instructional improvements (Stewart, 2013). Observations are critical in moving administrators and their schools in this direction, as they provide a "primary point of contact for the school leader and classroom teaching and learning"

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(Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindquist, 2015, p. 65). It is important for teachers to perceive that those in charge "are knowledgeable about what is going on and in a position to observe what is going on" (Schlechty, 2005, p. 139). Instructional leaders can build upon this perception by participating in formative classroom observations and providing appropriate constructive feedback that encourages teachers to reflect upon their instructional practices and improve instruction.

Feedback. Ovando (2005) defines feedback as "relevant information provided to those engaged in the teaching-learning process regarding their performance so that they may introduce modifications, correct errors or engage in professional development that will lead to enhanced teaching and learning" (p. 173). This definition provides a solid foundation for the focus of this study as it pertains to providing constructive feedback for teachers after formative classroom observations.

Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) note that the type of feedback given to teachers is extremely important if it is expected to improve instructional practices. If the feedback merely notes that a particular skill set was present it will have little impact on the improvement of instructional practices. Rather, classroom observation feedback should be constructive in nature and should be used for improvement of practice, rather than for evaluation purposes (Ovando, 2005; Pajak, 2001). Formative feedback is used to provide educators with "ongoing guidance for improving practice and student outcomes" (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2012) and should be seen as such by both teachers and administrators.

Roussin and Zimmerman (2014) argue the educator's ability to "receive and apply feedback is the cornerstone in any system for improving teaching performance" (p. 37).

Additionally, their research indicates that the feedback given to teachers must be thoughtful and constructive and given in a trusting environment (Malu, 2015; Ovando, 1994, 2005; Roussin & Zimmerman 2014). Administrators must be mindful that the purpose for providing feedback is to improve professional practices and thus improve student outcomes.

"When done well, the process of supervision can be instrumental in producing incremental gains in teacher expertise, which can produce incremental gains in student achievement" (Marazano, et al., 2011, p. 3). The classroom observation process has the potential to greatly improve the development of teacher practices (Ramano Jr., 2014) and thus should be implemented in a thoughtful, careful manner.

Reflection and Professional Growth

Reflective practice is considered not only a core standard for educators, but also a responsibility (McCullagh, 2012; Bousted, 2011). Learning based upon reflection can be supported by a theory put forth by Uhlenbeck, Verloop and Beiaard (2002) who note that "learners who actively construct knowledge by interpreting events on the basis of existing knowledge, beliefs and dispositions" can be applied to the concept of teachers as learners (p. 243). Husu (2008) argues that reflection is not a process that comes naturally to teachers, but rather, is one that must be supported by others in the field.

Vygotsky's social cultural theory of the Zone of Proximal Development is rooted in the idea that the learner, usually a child, grows from the interaction with someone in a more significant position, such as a parent or teacher (1978, 1995). Shabani (2016) argues that Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development may be applied to the adults in the school setting in order to gain professional growth, and as such,

providing follow-up support systems is critical "in sustaining the effectiveness of teacher education" (p. 9).

Purpose Statement

The overall goal of the research question is to examine if the utilization of a structured observational tool focusing on detailed constructive feedback impacts the teachers' reflective process as it pertains to their instructional practices.

Research Question

In what ways will the utilization of a formative constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during or in conjunction with a classroom observation affect the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices?

Action Research Methodology

Action research challenges the assumptions that educators make and serves as a catalyst for classroom or school reform. "Action research helps to develop teachers and administrators with professional attitudes, who embrace action, progress, and form rather than stability and mediocrity" (Mills, 2007, p. v). Mills explains that the goal of action research is for educators to develop reflective practice to effect positive changes in the school environment to ultimately improve student outcomes. Unlike traditional research, action research cannot be generalized to other populations than the one studied but rather allows the educator conducting the research to test his/her ideas about education, about one's own teaching and then to take action within that particular setting (Mertler, 2014; Mills, 2007). Mertler warns that action research is not to be used as a conclusive study, as the results are neither right nor wrong, but rather allow the educator to identify strengths and limitations.

"Good teaching has always involved the systematic examination of the instructional process and its effects on student learning" (Mertler, 2014, p. 21). This action research study will examine the ways in which the utilization of a formative observation tool that will provide teacher-participants with detailed feedback after administrators conduct formative classroom observations will affect the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices. Dewey (1933) and Kolb (1984) note that the cycle of learning consists of essential components that include concrete experiences, reflection, formation of concepts and generalizations and then testing those concepts in new situations. Teachers must reflect on their practice in order to determine its impact on the student learning and then make the necessary changes to meet the needs of all of their students (McGlinn, 2003).

As the new principal of Lincoln Middle School, labeled by the school district as a turn-around school in February of 2017, I have been tasked with the responsibility of improving instructional practices in order to improve student success. I work directly with 30 teachers, the instructional coach, the Literacy specialist and the assistant principal to provide our students with the best possible education by providing teachers with professional development and through the use of formative classroom observations. In doing so, I strive to ensure that teachers are praised for their areas of strength and provided with support for areas in need of improvement. The school of study also lists teacher quality as a goal for improvement on their school renewal plan.

The focus of this study will be on increasing the teacher reflection process through the utilization of a formative classroom observation tool used by the school level administrators. As action research is often seen as a cyclical process, it is to be

understood that action research projects often do not have a clear end (Mertler, 2014). The outcomes of this study may lead to further examination within this school setting. Mertler suggests that the initial study will include four stages: planning, acting, developing and reflecting. These stages are then broken down into nine general steps that will assist in conducting the action research project.

Stage one involves the planning process. This stage includes identifying and limiting the topic of study, gathering information about the identified research problem, reflecting upon the information, reviewing related literature and then developing the research plan to be used (Mertler, 2014).

Stage two is labeled as the acting stage. During the acting stage, the plan that was developed in stage one will be implemented in full. During this time, data will be gathered and analyzed (Mertler, 2014).

During stage three, the developing stage, an action plan will be developed based upon the interpretation and analysis of the data gathered during the implementation of the plan. The development of the plan is "the ultimate goal of any action research study – it is the action part of action research" (Mertler, p. 43). This plan includes the proposed strategies for solving the original problem.

Stage four is a crucial part of action research as it focuses on the reflection portion of action research. During this stage, the educator-researcher reviews the plan, the effectiveness of the plan and makes any final decisions on future implementations (Mertler, 2014).

Action research allows for practical application and does not often reflect the traditional research findings on instructional practices (Johnson, 2008 as cited in Mertler,

2014). By using action research for this study, I will be able to focus on the particular

needs of Lincoln Middle School, allowing me the opportunity to better understand the

classroom observation process and its impact on the teacher reflection process for these

particular teachers.

Summary and Conclusion

The problem of practice for my study focuses on the lack of constructive feedback

provided to the teachers at Lincoln Middle School and their inability to use the

information that has been provided to assist in their reflective practices. My research will

study the impact the utilization of a detailed formative classroom observation tool will

have on the reflective practices of teachers by answering the following question: In what

ways will the utilization of a formative constructive feedback tool used by school level

administrators during a classroom observation affect the teachers' reflective process

about their instructional practices? "Reflection is an essential element in learning, as an

experience in itself does not automatically lead to the formation of new ideas" (McGlinn,

2003, p. 143). Reflective practice has the ability to transform teaching and the learning

process (Parson and Stephenson 2005; Van Soeost and Bohle 2005; Johansson, Sandberg

and Vuorinen 2007; Blevis et al. 2013).

Glossary of Key Terms

The following key terms important to the study are provided:

Action Research*:* A research method conducted by educators within a particular school to gather information that will improve the teaching and learning process within the studied population (Mertler, 2014). This type of research is done by educators for themselves and is not considered to be generalizable to a greater population.

Formative Evaluation*:* A term used to describe the teacher evaluation process that focuses on teacher development and improving the delivery of the curriculum. This type of evaluation process focuses on the process of teaching and is used to determine the need for adjustment, modification or additional study (Ovanda, 1994).

Instructional Leadership*: Instructional leadership* is defined by Spillane, Hallet, and Diamond (2003) as "an influence relationship that motivates, enables, and supports teachers' efforts to learn and change their instructional practices" (p. 1).

Reflective Practice*:* Reflective practice refers to the process teachers use to give serious thought to "their practice, think about its impact on student learning, and implement changes to meet the needs of their students" (McGlinn, 2003, p. 143).

Summative Evaluation*:* A term used to describe the evaluation process that allows evaluators to make judgments on the overall performance of a teacher. The summative evaluation process focuses on the overall success of teaching and learning as it pertains to a particular teacher (Ovanda, 1994).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter explores relevant information supporting the purpose of the proposed problem of practice for this Dissertation-in-Practice (DiP) along with a theoretical and historical framework. Specifically, this chapter highlights the impact instructional leaders can have on the instructional process, the classroom observation process and the teacher's reflective practice. The literature explored in this chapter includes information collected from books and peer-reviewed articles around the following topics: (a) instructional leadership, (b) formative evaluation (c) observational feedback and reflective teaching, and (d) action research studies on classroom observations. These topics are all essential in order to fully understand the classroom observation and feedback process in the school setting.

Statement of the Problem

This action research study considers the impact of the utilization of a formative classroom observation tool on the teacher's reflective process as it pertains to instructional practices. Upstate School District (pseudonym) where Lincoln Middle School (pseudonym) is located does not currently have a required formative observation tool in place for administrators to use when visiting classrooms. The school currently uses a tool that is merely a checklist and provides little to no feedback to the teachers after the observation has occurred. The tool does not focus on professional development, reflection or student outcomes.

Each year public school teachers across South Carolina complete an online survey administered by the South Carolina Department of Education. The results of this survey are then reported to each school district by school. The Lincoln Middle School results show that, over a five year period (2011-2016), only 49% of the teachers believe that their administrators provide them with effective instructional leadership. Additionally, only 53% of these same teachers believe that the focus of teacher evaluation at their school is on instructional improvement. With this in mind, the following problem of practice was developed: Teachers at Lincoln Middle School do not believe that the teacher evaluation process focuses on instructional improvement, and, therefore, rarely use the feedback provided by administrators to reflect upon and improve their teaching practices.

Study Rationale

Providing teachers with quality classroom observation feedback is a necessary function of instructional leaders and is of profound importance in improving teacher performance and impacting student achievement. Reed and Bergemann (2001) note that "effective observation is a process of selective watching" (p. 15). Therefore, the tool being used to provide feedback should reflect the selective watching conducted by the administrator or instructional leader and should provide detailed information for the teachers to reflect upon.

Purpose Statement

The overall purpose of the research study is to examine if the utilization of a structured observational tool focusing on detailed constructive feedback has an impact upon the teachers' reflective process as it pertains to their instructional practices.

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Research Question

To examine the potential impact of the implementation of a formative constructive feedback tool, I propose the following research question:

1. How will a formative, constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during a classroom observation affect the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices?

Importance of Literature Review

An in-depth review of the literature allows for an historical and theoretical framework for this Dissertation-in-Practice action research study and allows for a clarification of the goals of the study and the possibility of developing new strategies for the investigation (Hendricks, 2009). Reviewing the literature already available allows the researcher to narrow the focus and plan of a study (Hendricks, 2009; Mertler, 2014). Additionally, the review of primary and secondary sources allows for "the action research to connect existing theory and research to actual classroom practice" (Johnson, 2008, as cited by Mertler, 2014).

An examination of past research and current literature allows for a better understanding of the research that has already been conducted and serves as a framework for the current study (Butin, 2010).

Action Research Methodology

Inquiry, experimentation and action research should be a part of a professional's routine (Sagor, 2000). Action research is "a system of inquiry that teachers, administrators, and school support personnel can use to study, change, and improve their work with children and schools" (Hendricks, 2009, p. 10). It is through action research

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that educators can develop reflective practice to create positive changes in their classroom or school environment. It is important to note that action research, unlike traditional research, does not allow for the generalization of the data to other populations (Mertler, 2014; Mills, 2007).

Organizations must provide the teachers with the time, necessary support and professional development activities to encourage action research as a method of school improvement (Calhoun, 2002). Hendricks notes that "with this support, action research becomes the guiding force behind professional development, allowing practitioners to study their own practices and take charge of developing their professional work as educators" (2009, p. 11).

The action research process of reflect-act-evaluate allows educators to study problems that directly connect to their own classrooms or school settings to improve student success. "Reflecting on practice to select an area to study, connecting theory to action through a review of related literature, planning and implementing the project, gathering information, making sense of collected information, and writing the final action research report" are all necessary components of the action research process (Hendricks, 2009, p. 13). By using action research for this study, I will be able to focus on the evaluative needs of Lincoln Middle School (pseudonym), allowing me the opportunity to understand better their classroom observation process and the impact the feedback has on the reflection process of the teachers involved in this study.

The focus of this action research study will be on increasing the teacher reflection process through the utilization of a formative classroom observation tool used by school level administrators. This action research study will take on the participatory action

research design allowing for the investigation of a realistic situation that will allow for the influence of change (Hendricks, 2009). In this case, the study will critically examine the unproductive ways of working to transform the practice of classroom observations and reflective teaching. Qualitative data gathered throughout this study will allow for the development of a new constructive feedback tool to be used during formative classroom observations. Once the tool has been designed and implemented and teachers receive feedback from their administrators, additional data will be gathered to determine its impact.

Initial data will be gathered through online anonymous questionnaires that will provide baseline data from past observation experiences and teachers' use of the feedback provided. Teachers will also be asked questions to determine which types of information they find most helpful in observational feedback. Additionally, the assistant principal and instructional coach will be interviewed about their thoughts of what the observational tool should include. The information gathered from the teacher questionnaire and the administrative interviews will be compiled, along with best practices from research, to develop the observational tool.

After the instrument has been administered and teachers have had the opportunity to receive feedback, the teacher-participants will participate in a group discussion. The information gathered from this follow-up discussion will be combined with information from follow-up interviews with the assistant principal and instructional coach and will be used to develop a further action plan for the school. Mertler (2014) notes that the development of an action plan allows for continued improvement.

Theoretical Framework

Instructional leadership was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The impact of an instructional leader on student achievement is only second to the impact of the classroom teacher (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In order to discuss instructional leadership, one must understand what is meant by the term. "We must not confuse leadership with status" (Gardner, 1990, p. 18). Instructional leaders are charged "with the improvement of teaching practice" and "must understand and be able to explicate what good practice looks like to lead and guide professional development, target and align resources, and engage in ongoing problem solving and long-range capacity building" (Fink & Markholt, 2011, p.328). Therefore, one cannot assume that all principals are instructional leaders of the school merely because they carry the title of principal. Rather, instructional leaders are "intent on improving teaching practice" (Fink & Markholt, 2011, p. 12). Fink and Markholt describe leadership as the "nexus for instructional improvement" (p.129) noting that it is the job of the instructional leader to nurture a culture that encourages conversations about student learning and instructional practices in a respectful manner.

"The successful supervisor must demonstrate the capacity to lead others. The effective instructional supervisor must not only possess leadership skills but also be able to nurture leadership in others" (Oliva & Pawlas, 2004, p. 406). According to Oliva and Pawlas, instructional leadership is at the forefront of all change in a school system, for the instructional leader has the ability to influence all teachers to make changes in the educational system. It is through observation and formative evaluation that instructional leaders are able to influence teachers by encouraging them to evaluate themselves.

The Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington, College of Education published a study on the four dimensions of instructional leadership (2015). This instructional leadership framework includes five core beliefs in the definition of instructional leadership. (1) Instructional leadership is "learning-focused, strengths-based and measured by improvement in instructional practices and in the quality of student learning" (p. 1). (2) Instructional leadership "must reside with a team of instructional leaders of which the principal serves as the leader of leaders" (p.1). (3) Instructional leadership "requires a culture of public practice and reflective practice" (p.1). (4) Instructional leadership "must address the cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic and learning diversity of the school community" (p.1). (5) Instructional leadership "is grounded in the relentless pursuit of equity and the use of data as levers to eliminate the achievement gap" (p.1).

Instructional leaders that follow this framework will focus on the improvement of instructional practices through creating a shared vision of effective instruction, providing observation and feedback to determine an action plan for instructional growth and will support teachers' professional growth through ongoing feedback, the development of professional learning communities and professional development (Center for Educational Leadership, 2015).

Jerald's (2012) model for providing teachers with accurate feedback reinforces the need for removing the observational checklists of the past and replacing them with tools that allow for identifying teachers' strengths and providing teachers with opportunities for growth. Quality observational tools will allow for the collection of both qualitative/descriptive data gathering, as well as, quantitative. The feedback provided

from such a tool will ask teachers probing questions that will prompt them to reflect upon the instructional choices they are making for their students. Such feedback, Jerald notes, is considered a key resource for fostering deliberate practice amongst teachers.

The University of Virginia published an undated booklet by Stuhlman, Hamre, Downer and Pianta titled *Why Should We Use Classroom Observation?* This booklet serves as a model for conducting classroom observations. This model ascertains that "observations help link quality improvement resources to positive outcomes for teachers and students" (p. 2). The model links four key areas that directly impact teacher effectiveness: teacher education, professional development, curricular resources, and evaluation and feedback. See Figure 2.1.
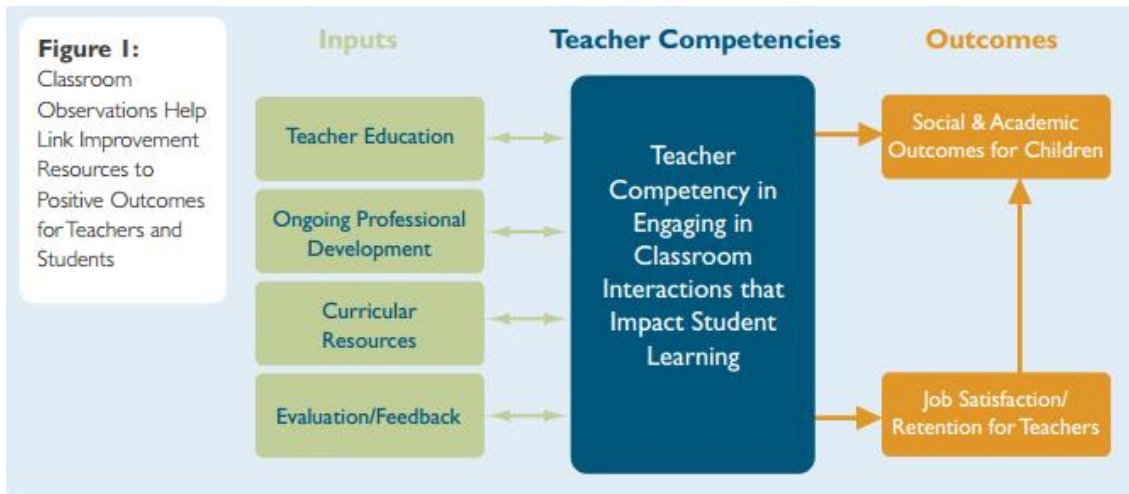

Figure 2.1 Quality Improvement Linked to Teacher Effectiveness

Note. From "Why should we use classroom observation, by M. W. Stulhman, B. K. Hamre, J. T. Downer and R. C. Pianta, (undated). Copyright by University of Virginia. Reprinted with permission.

Embracing the logic of this framework, educational leaders need to take an active

role in defining, assessing, and supporting those classroom interactions and

teacher practices that impact desired outcomes. Observation is an essential piece

of this work of aligning inputs and student and teacher outcomes. (Stuhlma, et. al,

undated, p. 3).

Instructional leaders that are actively involved in classroom instruction by

providing teachers with observations and detailed feedback can positively impact student

achievement by developing a culture of learning that encourages teachers to reflect upon

their instructional practices to grow professionally.

The School Administration Manager Project (2009) found that administrators'

time was often occupied by management type responsibilities rather than instructional

responsibilities. The project noted that even when principals managed to complete

classroom observations, very little time was dedicated to providing feedback to teachers.

The study found that in many cases teachers were receiving little to no feedback from

their school administrators. If the overall goal of education is to increase levels of student

learning, then there must be a focus on improving professional practice to have a positive

impact on student learning (Hall & Simeral, 2015).

Historical Context

Originally, the role of principal developed to provide for the coordination of

operation of the school (Lewis and Leps, 1946). A teacher was assigned the title of

principal teacher and would assume the duties of administration and discipline as needed.

However, in 1838, the first principals were named by the school board in Cincinnati

(Lewis and Leps, 1946). As one can imagine, as the role of the school has continued to

advance so has the role of the principal. The term instructional leadership began to take hold in the mid-20th century as the impact principals had on curriculum and student achievement began to be clarified (Hallinger and Wang, 2015).

Though it can be easy to observe a leader in action and see instructional leadership at work, it can be quite difficult to define (Zepeda, 2007). "Leadership that focuses on instruction has a strong purpose and an equally strong commitment to student learning" (Zepeda, 2007, p. 3). The Council of Chief State School Officers published their latest standards for educational leaders in 2008. These standards known as the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders (ISLLC) are used by states to prepare future principals and to evaluate current leaders. Standard 2 notes that "an educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional development." This standard is the foundation for principals to serve as instructional leaders in their schools and to provide teachers with formative classroom observations to improve teaching practice and impact student achievement. "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 7).

Principals who are effective instructional leaders frequently visit the classrooms in their schools to observe instruction and provide feedback (Cotton, 2003). "Great school leaders create nurturing school environments in which accomplished teaching can flourish and grow" (Darling-Hammon, 2003, p. 13). Since what occurs in the classroom has the greatest direct impact on student achievement, instructional leadership in the

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classroom setting is imperative (Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston, 2011). "Those in positions of authority have to prove themselves, to show they care, to demonstrate that they know what they're doing. When people trust leaders, they'll follow them" (Thomas-El, 2006).

School administrators who are seen as instructional leaders in their school understand the necessity of building capacity for change. Building capacity within a school:

> involves policies, strategies, resources and actions designed to increase people's collective power to move the system forward. Building capacity involves developing new knowledge, skills, and competencies; new resources and new shared identity and motivation to work together for greater change. (Fullan, 2005, p. 54)

"It is essential that principals possess tools for engaging staff members in productive conversations about the improvement of teaching and learning" (Kachur, Stout & Edwards, 2010).

Fullan (2002) discusses the need to share knowledge for the school organization to continue to grow. "Sharing one's knowledge with others is the key to continual growth for all" (Fullan, 2002, p. 18). Therefore, it is the role of the principal, the instructional leader, to encourage the teachers in the building to continually refine their craft of teaching. The principal "is the lead learner in the school and models lifelong learning by sharing what he or she has read lately, engaging in and encouraging action research, and implementing inquiry groups among the staff" (Fullan, 2002, p. 18).

Principals/ Instructional leaders must take the reins in defining the school,

initiating viable learning cultures, establishing the necessary in-roads in

community, parents and student communications. Leaders must realize their role

as being the linchpin in the molding of young scholars (Williams & Williams,

2015, p. 108).

While the sharing of knowledge is important, it is equally important to foster a

climate in which teachers are comfortable working with administrators and their peers to

grow and develop. Administrators must work to build the knowledge of their teachers,

allow the teachers time to improve their skills, while also developing a work environment

that focuses on building positive relationships between administrators and teachers, as

well as, teacher to teacher relationships (Ford & Ware, 2016). Additionally, Ford and

Ware argue that you must focus on all three of these areas in order to produce the most

positive effects for teacher learning.

School administrators have a great impact on the level of teacher commitment and

performance when they place the needs of their followers at the forefront, support team

work within the organization and increase the self-confidence of their employees

(Turkmen & Gul, 2017). Teachers feel empowered when they believe their principal sees

value in them. This empowerment often leads the teacher to focus on improving their

instructional skills (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Evaluation. The United States has a complex history in supervision and

evaluation of teachers (Hazi & Arredondo Rucinski, 2005, 2006, 2009). Though evidence

of teacher evaluation is available from as early as 1920 (Hazi & Arredondo Rucinski,

2009), teacher evaluation became a requirement as a means of improving teacher quality

after the publication of A Nation at Risk (The National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983). No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) increased this focus even further as it became a method of ensuring that teachers were considered highly qualified (Goldrick, 2002). Additional reports were released by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, and the National Governor's Association along with many others in the late 1980s showcasing a need for additional educational reform (Bjork, 1993). "Although proposals emerging from each of these successive waves of reform reports and legislative initiatives placed new and often contradictory demands on school administrators, the importance of instructional leadership was both consistent and clear" (Bjork, 1993, p. 248). School administrators were now expected to take a greater role in classroom instruction and student learning.

School districts spend approximately eighty percent of their budget on staff salaries each school year (Zepeda, 2007). Therefore, it makes sense that school districts would focus on evaluation of these staff members, and since the largest number of staff members at individual schools consists of teachers, teacher evaluation would therefore, be an important task.

Supervision, professional development, and evaluation are the basic building blocks that effective schools use to construct the foundation of a learning organization. Therefore, if consistent growth is to occur on an individual or organizational basis, then time and effort must be appropriated for work involved in connecting the dots between and among supervision, professional development and evaluation. (Zepeda, 2007, p. 26)

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Much debate exists over evaluation. For many teachers, it can be seen as a negative interaction in which administration is merely looking for fault (Peterson & Comeau, 1990; Danielson, 2010). However, "when done well, the process of supervision can be instrumental in producing incremental gains in teacher expertise, which can produce incremental gains in student achievement" (Marzano, Frontier & Livingston, 2011, p. 3). Kachur, Stout and Edwards (2010) make a definitive point that classroom walkthrough observations when used appropriately are used to evaluate instruction and curricular practices. They are not used to evaluate people.

Embretson, Ferber and Langager (1984) discuss a difference between supervision and evaluation. Supervision focuses on the growth and development of teachers and on improving the instructional practice. However, the authors argue that evaluation is in place to measure staff members against a level of performance to ensure the efficiency of the organization is met and to assess the performance of individual members of the organization. Fredrich (1984) also noted the difference between supervision and evaluation and notes that supervision should take on the function of supporting and improving teaching in a formative manner.

Ovando (1994) distinguishes three types of evaluations, each varying due to purpose: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Diagnostic evaluation exists to "determine the presence, or absence, of knowledge, experiences, skills and values" (p. 4). Formative evaluation is used "to determine the need for adjustment, modification, or additional study" (p.4); summative evaluation is used "to determine the overall success of teaching and learning" (p.4). For the purposes of this study, classroom observations will be used as formative evaluation.

It is important to note the differences in summative and formative evaluations. That is, summative evaluations lead to a final judgment on teacher performance in the classroom and their other professional practices (Zepeda, 2007). Formative evaluation, however, is meant as an ongoing practice that allows for developing a teacher's practice through the assistance of other professionals, including their administrators (Glatthorn, 1990; Glickman, 1990; Zepeda, 2007). "Supervision for the sake of evaluation does not support teacher growth and development" (Zepeda, 2007, p. 59).

Formative evaluations, often referred to as informal classroom observations or classroom walkthroughs, allow administrators and teachers to learn from one another and allow for the development of what Michael Fullan refers to as a culture for learning. "Developing a culture for learning involves a set of strategies designed for people to learn from each other (the knowledge dimension) and become collectively committed to improvement (the affective dimension)" (Fullan, 2005, p. 55). Schools that have well developed cultures of learning seek to develop teachers' knowledge and skills to create new learning experiences for their students. Kachur, et al. (2010) also note that school cultures that have a foundation of trust and professional confidence allow for informal observations, announced or unannounced, to provide necessary information to begin conversations about how to improve teaching and learning.

Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) "claim that we should embed more of the process of acquiring new knowledge in the actual doing of the task and less in formal training programs that are frequently ineffective" (p. 27 as cited by Fullan, 2005). Embedding this learning process into the teacher's classroom activity allows for a more authentic experience that is more likely to be carried over into the teacher's day to day practices.

Formative observations allow for teachers to be provided with feedback so that they may make modifications and adjustments to their teaching to increase student achievement (Fullan, 2005; Marzano, et.al, 2011; Ovando, 1999). Additionally, when conducted effectively, formative evaluations provide educators with an opportunity to learn and grow as professionals (Kachur, et al., 2010). Zepeda (2009) notes that classroom observations provide three main functions: adding relevance for teacher learning, providing feedback, and facilitating the transfer of new skills into practice.

Classroom observations as a formative evaluation allow instructional leaders the opportunity to view the instructional program, but also provide the perfect setting to encourage and support teachers and to help those teachers grow in their professional practices.

> Observing teachers in action is the primary way of assessing teaching. Through
> formal and informal classroom observations, principals gain insights into
> classroom practices: instructional strategies, learning activities (including
> performance assessments), the taught curriculum, and the types of teacher and
> student interactions that evolve throughout the course of instruction. Effective
> classroom observations support the overall instructional program and the teachers
> who deliver it. (Zepeda, 2009, p. 15).

Oliva and Pawlas (2004) note "Supervisors effect changes in instruction as they help teachers evaluate themselves. The supervisor must master a variety of techniques for getting teachers to look at their own behavior" (p. 474). Though instructional leaders evaluate his/her teachers, their main role in doing this should be to help the teachers evaluate their own practices. "Changes in behavior, whether in instructional skills or in

personal and professional attributes, can come about only if the teacher sees the need for change and agrees to try to improve" (p. 475).

Observational Feedback and Reflective Teaching. Philosopher and educator, John Dewey argued that one reflects to serve a purpose and that the guiding principal of reflection was to solve a "perplexity" (1921). Bruner (1960) stated that "reflection is central to all learning" (p. 13). Without reflection, teachers are not able to solve the perplexity of how to improve their teaching practices.

When informal observations are conducted as part of a formative evaluation process, principals can provide teachers with focused feedback (Zepeda, 2009). This feedback can then enable the teacher to reflect on how strategies are currently being implemented and to explore how their instructional practices could be improved. Additionally, this feedback can affirm the positive work the teachers are doing in their classrooms to help students learn; this affirmation also encourages teachers to keep the excitement in their classrooms moving forward to continued student success. "By observing teachers work in their classrooms, principals can exert informed effort and energy to assist teachers beyond formally scheduled observations" (Zepeda, 2009, p. 18).

Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) argue that walkthrough observations are in place to allow teachers to closely examine their teaching practices and to enable them to be thoughtful, critical thinkers that consistently focus on improving their teaching practices. Observational tools, when used properly, allow for the creation of a professional, collaborative learning community that is encouraged to reflect upon teaching practices.

"Research has found that faculty in successful schools always question existing instructional practice and do not blame lack of student achievement on external causes" (Glickman, 2002, p. 5). Teachers that are encouraged to reflect upon their practices, to explore better ways of teaching and to look for others for guidance are focused on student achievement and success. There is a strong link between teaching quality and student success (Hord, 2009). Teaching quality can only improve through professional learning and thoughtful conversations about teachers, their colleagues, and their administrators.

"Turning information into actionable knowledge is a social process. Thus, developing learning cultures is crucial. Good policies and ideas take off in learning cultures, but they go nowhere in cultures of isolation" (Fullan, 2005, p. 56). By using classroom observation tools to provide feedback to teachers, administrators are using the tool in a manner that allows for the creation of collaborative professional learning communities where teachers are encouraged to reflect upon ways to improve their teaching to improve student learning (Kuchar, et al., 2010).

Treslan (2006) notes that teachers want to feel empowered. One way in which administrators can work to empower their teachers to be transformational leaders in their schools is through classroom observation feedback. Teachers who are seen as transformational leaders embrace "participatory decision making, reflection, and self-awareness" (p. 59).

"Change knowledge is not about developing the greatest number of innovations, but rather about achieving new patterns of coherence that enable people to focus more deeply on how strategies for effective learning interconnect" (Fullan, 2005, p. 57). Oliva and Pawlas (2004) note the primary role in evaluation and classroom observation should

be helping teachers work through the process of self evaluation. "Changes in behavior, whether in instructional skills or in personal and professional attributes, can come about only if the teacher sees the need for change and agrees to try to improve" (Oliva & Pawlas, 2004, p. 475). Feedback provided by classroom observations enables reflective teachers to focus on strategies that will improve their professional practices and reach far more students.

Instructional Leadership and Social Justice It is projected that by 2035 children of color will comprise the largest portion of students in public education classrooms and by the year 2050, nearly 57% of all students will be in this population (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Our school systems and our teachers must be ready to meet the ever-changing needs of our students. Instructional leaders not only can affect curriculum and instruction, they also have the ability to affect social injustices in the classroom setting. "In order to achieve social justice, there needs to be a leveling of the playing field so that equitable practices provide all people with an equal chance for success" (Jacobs, 2006, p. 24). The demographics of our country, and thus our schools, are changing daily. Teachers are often unprepared to meet the needs of the ever-changing student population.

> A variety of internal deficits such as lack of motivation, caring, or intelligence are often named as the reason for achievement disparities, rather than looking at how factors related to curriculum, pedagogy, relationships with students, and classroom environment influence achievement (Jacobs, 2014, p. 2).

> It is the role of all instructional leaders to ensure that all students are engaged intellectually, socially and emotionally (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Classroom

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observations allow administrators to understand the culture and climate of each classroom and to provide feedback in a manner that encourages reflective practice on the part of the teacher. Bowers and Flinders (1991) note supervisors who are culturally responsive allow teachers to have another vantage point and allow for reflective practice by recognizing how their own language and practices influence the learning environment they are providing for their students. "Moving from theory to practice also requires the courage to create schools that look very different from those we have now" (Kugelmass, 2000, as cited by Kaur, 2012, p. 485). Instructional leaders have the opportunity to help teachers move from theory to practice as it applies to creating equity for all students.

Previous Action Research Studies on Constructive Feedback and Formative Evaluations   Ovando (2005) conducted an action research study with 27 aspiring principals that currently served in the roles of teachers, instructional coaches, assistant principals and assistants to the superintendent. The study focused on the training provided to aspiring instructional leaders as it related to providing constructive feedback after observing in the classroom setting. Ovando's findings imply that instructional leaders must have a solid knowledge foundation and a system for providing the feedback in a professional manner for it to beneficial to teachers. Additionally, Ovando recommends linking this feedback to the teachers' professional development to maximize results.

A study conducted by Taylor (2013) examined the impact of applying a systematic observational tool for formative classroom observations. A researcher developed observational tool was used to conduct classroom observations in an urban school district. The researcher gathered data through surveys and focus group

discussions. The study concluded that teachers value receiving immediate and specific feedback that can be used to develop best practices and improve classroom instruction. Taylor notes that principal support is a critical factor in the success of the implementation and is necessary to maintain effective communication with the teacher.

Stewart (2013) examined the influence of feedback on the professional growth of teachers at two high schools in southern California. Of high importance in the results of the study is that the effectiveness of the feedback directly relates to the observational tool being used by the administrator. Additionally, findings support the theory that administrators must be knowledgeable in the language of teaching and must provide the feedback in a trusting setting in order for improvement to be made.

Conclusion

Instructional leaders who frequently visit the classrooms, observe teaching and learning, and provide quality detailed feedback to those teachers are nurturing the adult learning that takes place in the school setting.

> A resounding finding in literature of the accountability movement is that teacher quality improves student learning. If this premise is true, then the assessment of teaching in classrooms needs to become the first step toward improving instruction and assisting teachers to examine their practices. Assisting teachers begins at the place where instruction occurs – in the classroom. Principals and other school leaders are urged to remember that, like students, teachers need opportunities to grow, develop, and learn. (Zepeda, 2009, p. 1)

Teachers need to know that the administrators are serving as instructional leaders that are committed to supporting their professional development in a supportive, nurturing manner. Formative classroom observations allow teachers to receive feedback that will enable them to reflect upon their instructional practices in a manner that will foster continuous improvement. The review of the literature confirms that teachers not only need to be observed while teaching, they need to receive detailed quantitative and qualitative feedback that highlights their professional strengths and areas for growth. When handled effectively, the formative observation process can have a powerful impact on a teacher's professional growth and consequently on student achievement.

Chapter Three
Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology used to carry out this research study. The purpose of this action research study, the problem of practice and the specific methodology are included. Additionally, the setting and participants are described. The chapter also includes information on the role of the researcher, ethical considerations and data collection.

Purpose of the Study The purpose of this action research study is to determine the impact the utilization of a formative observation tool would have on the teachers' reflective practices. This study will be conducted to determine if the utilization of the tool will positively impact the teachers' reflective practices, thus improving student success.

Action research is often used as an impetus for school improvement as the process can often lead to improving instruction and student learning by empowering individual teachers that then empower others around them (Mertler, 2014). Unlike traditional forms of research, action research differs in that there is "less concern for universality of finds, and more value is placed on the relevance of the findings to the research and the local collaborators" (Riel, 2016). Additionally, action research tends to be cyclical and nature, rather than linear, and therefore does not have a clear end to the study. Rather, it requires the researcher to design further actions for future implementation in which the cycles (plan, act, develop, reflect) will be repeated (Mertler, 2014).

Statement of the Problem of Practice The planning process includes identifying and limiting a topic of study, gathering information about the identified problem of practice, reflecting upon the information, reviewing the related literature and developing the research plan (Mertler, 2014). The participant-researcher began this research study by identifying the problem of practice to be addressed. In doing so, the participant-researcher reviewed data gathered by annual state surveys administered to teachers, examined the current formative classroom observation tool being used by the administrators at Lincoln Middle School, and reviewed the literature on instructional leadership and formative classroom observations.

During the literature review process, the participant-researcher focused on instructional leadership and its impact on the classroom and student success. During this literature review, it was discovered that dynamic schools exhibit several characteristics (Rallis & Goldring, 2000). These characteristics include one that is pertinent to this study. Dynamic schools have instructional leaders who focus on teaching and learning. Additionally, research of the history of the evaluation process, along with a review of No Child Left Behind, confirmed the necessity for teacher evaluation and classroom observation to be used in a manner that assists in teacher development. "The leadership of a principal is crucial for school effectiveness, second only to the role of the classroom teacher and the quality of the curriculum (Militello, Rallis, & Goldring, 2009).

> Inquiry-minded, action-oriented principals look inside the school and classroom where instruction occurs; they question the practices, their origins, and their impact on student learning. For them, accountability means engaging in ongoing, recurring cycles of action and evaluation that provide feedback to link

performance with results (Militello et al, 2009, p. 27).

Current instructional leadership practices, as they pertain to classroom observations and the feedback provided to teachers following the observations at Lincoln Middle School are failing to provide the necessary detailed information that may assist in their reflection process that will aid in their development of professional practices as teachers.

Research Question

The information gathered then allowed me to formulate a research question that would provide the focus of the study: How will a formative, constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during classroom observations affect the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices?

Role of the Researcher

As the principal of Lincoln Middle School, I will act as a full participant in the research study. In this role, I will work directly with the teachers in a professional capacity while collecting data for the study. Acting as a full participant allows the researcher to simultaneously serve in his/her normal fully functioning role in the school community, while also serving the role of the researcher (Glesne, 2006; Mertler, 2014).

The role of full participant will allow me to understand further this area of research focus (Mills, 2007) and to have a firsthand experience with the teachers and leadership team to gather a better understanding of the actions of the participants' work with their behaviors and experiences (Mertler, 2014). Research conducted by an *insider* or full participant can offer many potential benefits to the organization. Herr and Anderson (2015) note that communities often move from isolated individuals to a more

collaborative community engaged in learning and change that can often transform the institution.

Action Research Validity

The term research often brings to mind scientists in a stark research facility, far removed from the research that is taking place in the real world (Mertler, 2014). However, action research could not be further from this mindset. Riel (2016) explains action research as focusing on understanding the interaction system within a social context, in this case a school setting. Though action research may sound as if it is simply self-study, it goes far beyond this because it looks in depth at the actions, outcomes, goals and assumptions that are taking place in a complex school setting. "The action research begins with a theory of action focused on the intentional introduction of change into a social system with assumptions about the outcome" (Riel, 2016). Educators often look toward the vast amount of traditional research available to them to improve practices within their school or classroom only to find that it is not helpful to them (Anderson, 2002). Mertler (2014) suggests that because traditional research often imposes abstract findings on schools, there is an increased need for classroom-based or school-based action research.

Though action research differs from traditional research, there are still ways in which the educator conducting the action research can ensure the validity of the research (Hendricks, 2009). Hendricks offers steps in which the educator-researcher can work to increase the validity of the research. The steps that will be used to ensure validity in my action research project will include utilizing peer debriefing, recording data accurately, employing member checks, and providing a detailed description of the setting and study.

Research Context

Setting Lincoln Middle School (pseudonym) is one of five middle schools in the upstate South Carolina school district of which I am employed. I currently serve as the principal of the school and work closely with teachers and parents to develop the school renewal plan, in addition to working with the assistant principal, instructional coach, literacy specialist and at-risk administrator in assisting teachers who may need additional assistance in instruction, classroom management, or conflict management. I have been in the field of education for 20 years and have served as an elementary and middle school teacher and an elementary and middle school instructional assistant principal, a district level director of planning and development and have just finished my first year of this principalship.

The school district serves approximately 16,500 students in fourteen elementary schools, five middle schools and five high schools in a rural setting. Additionally, the district operates an award-winning Career and Technology Center, an Adult Education Center, and an Opportunity Alternative Program. According to the district's database system, PowerSchool, the majority of the students are classified as white (80%); 7% of students report their ethnicity as African American, 7% report as Hispanic Latino, and another 5% report as being of two or more races. According to the South Carolina State Report Card (2017), 56.7% of the district's students live in poverty. Slightly more than 12% of students are receiving services for a noted disability, while 19.3% of students are served through the gifted and talented program. The district is currently in its second year of implementation of a one-to-one technology program that provides tablets to sixth and seventh graders and chrome books to eighth graders at two middle schools and chrome

books to the other three middle schools and the five high schools with a goal of transforming classroom instruction to prepare students for their futures. The district holds the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate at the forefront of its strategic planning and strives to prepare every student to be college and career reading before graduation. Understanding the district from which Lincoln Middle School is associated allows for a greater understanding of the context of the research study so as not to generalize the context or population (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

This action research study took place at Lincoln Middle School, one of five middle schools in the district. This middle serves approximately 550 students. The student population, according to the school's database system, PowerSchool, closely mirrors that of the district with 84% of students reporting their ethnicity as white, 3% as report as African American, 7% as Hispanic Latino, 1% as Asian and 5% as being of two or more races. According to the South Carolina State Report Card (2017), 68% of students attending this school live in poverty. Twenty percent of the students served by this school are receiving special education services and another 18% are receiving services through the gifted and talented program. Lincoln Middle School has nineteen teachers that serve students in the core subjects of math, Englishl/language arts, social studies, and science in grades six through eight. Another five teachers serve students through elective courses. Five special education teachers are also a part of the faculty to either teach students in one of two learning disabled self-contained classrooms or to assist as a resource to the core teachers. The school has two full time administrators, one principal and one assistant principal, one instructional coach, one literacy specialist and one full time guidance counselor.

Participants This study will include four teachers with three or more years of teaching experience. Each of these teachers will have already previously gone through a summative evaluation process dictated by the State of South Carolina. Therefore, all classroom observations conducted by the school level administrators will be formative observations and will focus on instruction for the improvement of teacher development. Teachers will represent three of the core curriculum areas (mathematics, English/language arts, and science) and one teacher will represent the exploratory courses (art, band, music, etc.). Each of these teachers has experienced classroom observations with the tool that administrators at Lincoln Middle School had used in the past.

Research Design and Rationale

The development of the research question then led to the development of the action research plan. During this stage, I determined how the study would be structured to answer tellingly the research question: How will a formative, constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during a classroom observation affect the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices?

Multiple types of action research exist, and each type of action research is conducted with goals and purposes. This action research study will take on the participatory action research design. The participatory action research design allows for the investigation of a realistic situation to influence change (Hendricks, 2009). This type of action research is considered to be suited best for this study as it allows for a critical examination of the unproductive ways of working in an attempt to transform practice.

Educational researchers often use both qualitative and quantitative data to investigate educational problems (Hendricks, 2009). For this study, the participant-

researcher will focus on the collection of qualitative data. Qualitative data will allow for a greater understanding of the phenomena occurring during the observation and feedback process currently taking place at Lincoln Middle School. Information gathered from the data will be used to develop a new constructive feedback tool that can be used. Once the tool has been implemented and teachers have had the opportunity to receive the feedback from their administrators, additional qualitative data will be gathered to determine its impact. Unlike traditional research, action research rarely has a set end, but instead encourages educators to plant, act, observe, reflect and then begin again with a new plan (Hendricks 2009, Mertler 2014, Mills 2007).

Participating teachers will be administered an online anonymous questionnaire that will provide baseline data on their past experiences of observation and their use of the feedback provided from these observations. Additional information will be gathered to determine what the teachers believe should be included in the feedback process for it to be beneficial in the reflective process. Online questionnaires will be used as an alternative to interviews to provide the participants with anonymity and to increase their comfort level in answering the questions.

The assistant principal and instructional coach will be interviewed about their thoughts of what a classroom observation tool should include. The information gathered from the teacher questionnaire, combined with the information received during the school leadership team interviews will be used, along with research on best practices, to develop a classroom observational tool that can be used during formative classroom observations. Research will also play a role in the development of this tool to incorporate established best practices in the field of instructional leadership.

Once the tool is developed, the administrators will use it during formative classroom observations that take place in the teacher-participant's classrooms. The teachers will receive a blank copy of the instrument before the observation and will then be given a form with the related feedback after the observation takes place. Each teacher participating in the study will be observed at least once with this observational tool.

After all observations have been completed, teacher-participants will participate in a group discussion. The information gathered in this discussion will allow for the understanding of the impact that the tool had on the teachers' reflective processes. Additionally, the leadership team will participate in a follow up interview to discuss their perceptions and thoughts on the instrument. Mertler (2014) notes that the data gathered during the research project should allow the researcher to develop an action plan that will allow for the continuation of improvement or to determine any necessary changes that must take place. After the data have been collected, an action plan will be developed regarding the instrument and determine whether or not to recommend a continuation of its use.

Ethical Considerations

The consideration of ethical guidelines is an important factor when developing a research plan and must be considered before, during, and after all research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Mertler, 2014; Mills, 2007). Research studies must be built on a foundation of trust between the educator-researcher and the participants in the study (Mills, 2007). It is necessary for me, as the educator-researcher, to trust the data being provided by the participants, but also for the participants in the study to trust my ability to handle the data in a professional and ethical manner.

For this study, an informed consent from each participant, administrator and teacher will be obtained. The informed consent will provide the participants with a full description of the research project, including the involvement required of the teacher-participants and administrator-participants. Additionally, the informed consent will explain the participants' optional participation and their ability to remove themselves from the study. I will guarantee that data linked to individual participants will be kept confidential and will provide the participants information on how to obtain a summary of the findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015; Mertler, 2014). Since data will not be gathered on students during this study, it will not be necessary for parental consent forms to be distributed (Mertler, 2014).

Confidentiality will be of an utmost importance in this study, as data will be collected from a small sampling of teachers. The pre-questionnaire instrument will be distributed in an online anonymous format to teacher-participants and may, in some cases, reflect negative perceptions. As confidentiality is "intended to protect research informants from stress, embarrassment, or unwanted publicity" and is meant to "protect participants in situations where the information they reveal to a researcher can be used against them by others" (Mertler, 2014, p. 109) it will be important for the information gathered not to be able to be linked to individual participants. With this in mind, participants will be given pseudonyms if the educator-researcher finds it necessary to report an individual response when gathering qualitative data through the individual interview process. "An action researcher's ability to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants and their data is a vitally important component of the action research process and of any action research project" (Mertler, 2014).

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Conclusion

  Research shows that principals' leadership has the capacity to influence teaching and learning (Leithwood, Seashoore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2005; Militello, Rallis & Goldring, 2009). Additionally, the role of the principal has changed from that of a manager of the school to that of an instructional leader, one that identifies learning needs for students, connects best practices to curriculum and instruction and facilitates teachers' learning (Millitello et al., 2009). It is with this in mind that this action research study will be conducted in an effort to determine the possible impact the utilization of a formative constructive feedback tool will have on the teachers' reflective process as it relates to instructional practices.

Chapter Four: Findings and Interpretation of Results

Introduction

        This chapter details the action research design, as well as, the findings of this research study. The primary data sources for this study included an anonymous pre/post observation online questionnaire completed by the participating teachers, school leadership team interview notes, classroom observations, follow up interviews and the follow up group discussion.. The remainder of this chapter will describe the research design, the data collection and analysis, and the development of the structured observational tool.

        Purpose Statement The overall goal of the conducted research was to specifically examine if the utilization of a structured observational tool focusing on detailed constructive feedback would impact the teachers' reflective process as it pertains to their instructional practices. The current observational tool used at this school is merely a checklist and provides little to no pedagogic feedback to the teachers being observed. The tool does not have a focus on professional development, reflection or student outcomes.

        This study was conducted to determine if the use of a structured observational tool focusing on providing constructive feedback would allow the teachers a greater opportunity for reflective practice in hopes of improving student success.

        Research Question In what ways will the utilization of a formative constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during or in conjunction with a

classroom observation impact the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices?
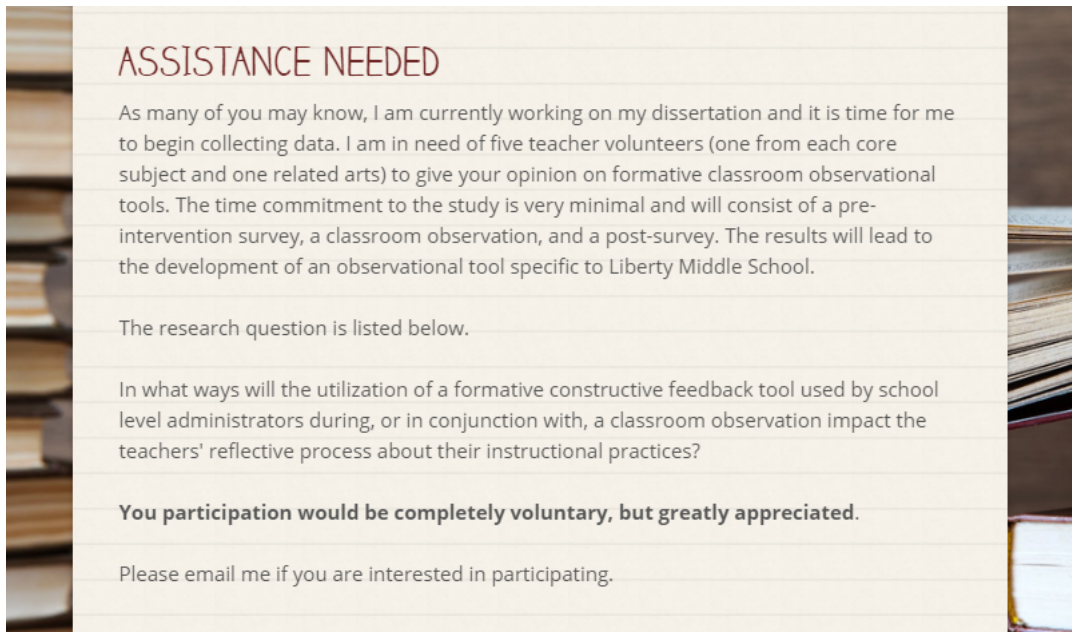
Additional Background Information

As a first year principal of Lincoln Middle School, it was important to work with the teachers to begin to build a strong trust relationship. Before the start of the 2017-2018 school year, I, arranged "speed-dating" sessions with each of the school's employees. Each employee spent thirty minutes with me expressing all of their concerns, worries, and excitements during this time frame. I did not provide them with prompts for this conversation. Rather, I allowed them to discuss with me anything that they felt I needed to know. Oftentimes, they shared about their professional background, their personal lives, and their concerns about the future of Lincoln Middle School, and in many cases their concerns about whether or not they wanted to continue in the field of education.

In addition to these sessions, the faculty and their families were invited to my home for a gathering, teachers were invited to the school during the summer to participate in a fun decorating day which allowed everyone to work together to prepare the building for the upcoming school year. During this time, I worked side by side with our teachers moving furniture, hanging posters and even painting walls. On the first day of school, I visited every classroom to check in to see if anyone was in need of anything. Also, during the first two weeks of school, I visited each classroom to do a brief 10 to 15 minute observation. At the end of each of these visits, I would handwrite a note to the teacher telling them how much I enjoyed visiting their classroom. (These notes now hang on the walls behind the teachers' desks in many classrooms.)

Throughout the school year, I would volunteer to teach model lessons in their classrooms, would often cover classes when we were short substitutes, and met with each grade level and the related arts department during one of their planning times every other Friday. All of these activities were done to help develop a strong working relationship between the administration and the teachers.

Research Design

Sample Size Lincoln Middle School employees twenty-five full-time certified teachers in grades six through eight. Each of these twenty-five teachers was invited to participate in this study on a voluntary basis. As part of the weekly faculty newsletter from the principal, teachers received the following request for participation.

ASSISTANCE NEEDED

As many of you may know, I am currently working on my dissertation and it is time for me to begin collecting data. I am in need of five teacher volunteers (one from each core subject and one related arts) to give your opinion on formative classroom observational tools. The time commitment to the study is very minimal and will consist of a pre-intervention survey, a classroom observation, and a post-survey. The results will lead to the development of an observational tool specific to Liberty Middle School.

The research question is listed below.

In what ways will the utilization of a formative constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during, or in conjunction with, a classroom observation impact the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices?

You participation would be completely voluntary, but greatly appreciated.

Please email me if you are interested in participating.

Four teachers showed a strong interest in serving as teacher participants for this study. The four teachers represent the curriculum areas of science, mathematics, English/language arts and a related arts course.

Data Collection Tool An anonymous online questionnaire was administered to

the four participants in this study. The first four questions provided the researcher with

descriptive background information of the participants, including information on the

years they have been teaching, degrees, certifications and endorsements held, and the

number of principals they have worked under. This information provides important

background information on the teachers to allow the researcher a better understanding of

their professional background. Table 4.1 summarizes the participant responses to the

following questions:

1. Demographic information.

2. How many years have you been teaching?

3. What degrees, certifications, endorsements or credentials do you currently

   hold?

4. How many principals have you worked for during your time in education?

Table 4.1

Teacher Participant Demographic Information

Teacher Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Degrees/Certifications/ Credentials	#Principals
1	Female	23	BA, MS, EdD	5
2	Female	17	BS, GT, PLTW	6
3	Female	10	BS, MAT	6
4	Female	20	BS, MS, GT	7

Questions 5 through 14 allow the researcher to have more detailed information from each teacher participant's perspective as it relates to the teacher participants' reflective practice, observational experiences and experience with instructional leadership. These questions were designed to relate directly to the research question while allowing the teacher participant to reflect upon their own experiences during their professional career.

5. In what ways would you like to improve your instructional practices?

6. In your opinion, how important is it for the principal of a school to be an instructional leader to his/her teachers?

7. When considering the past five years of your teaching career, how have the instructional leaders provided you with support in order to improve instruction and student success?

8. When considering the past five years of your teaching career, how have areas of weakness or strength been addressed with you?

9. When considering the entire length of your career, what role has your principal played in your professional growth?

10. Over the past five years, which observational tool(s) /hashave been used in your classroom during an observation from your principal or assistant principal?

11. Please note which observational tool, if any, provided you with the necessary information to reflect upon your teaching practice.

12. When considering the past five years of your teaching career, how many times per year were you observed by your principal and/or assistant principal?

13. In what ways, if any, have you improved or changed your instructional practices based on observational feedback provided by your principal or assistant principal?

14. When thinking about a structured observational tool that focuses on detailed constructive feedback, what types of information or feedback would you like to receive in order to impact your reflective process on your instructional practices?

Findings of the Study

This chapter presents the results from the qualitative data gathered from pre-questionnaires, leadership team discussions, classroom observations of the four teachers using the new tool and the follow up discussion with the participants. These accumulated data was used to address the posed research question: In what ways will the utilization of a formative constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during or in conjunction with a classroom observation impact the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices?

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire Results. Four teacher participants, one from each of the following content areas: English, mathematics, science and related arts (Gateway to Technology), completed an anonymous online pre-intervention questionnaire. Table 1 in this chapter represents the results of the first four demographic questions. Questions five through fourteen, directly related to the teacher participants' individual experiences during the course of their career. Additionally, certain questions allowed for teacher participants to express their own thoughts, feelings and concerns as

they related to the research topic of classroom observations, reflective practice, instructional leadership and improving instructional practices.

Question 5: "In what ways would you like to improve your instructional practices?" Participants expressed interest in improving their own energy level while working with students, learning about new technologies and programs to use within their lessons, creating more interactive and engaging lessons, finding ways to better motivate students, improving at reaching lower level students and becoming more consistent with all students.

Question 6: "In your opinion, how important is it for the principal of a school to be an instructional leader to his/her teachers?" Three of the four participants expressed it was their belief that it is extremely important for principals to serve as instructional leaders to his/her teachers. One participant noted that she felt "neutral" about the principal's role as the instructional leader.

Question 7: "When considering the past five years of your teaching career, how have the instructional leaders provided you with support in order to improve instruction and student success? Please explain." While answers varied from respondent to respondent, each of the four mentioned professional development as part of their answers. Additionally, two of the respondents discussed instructional leaders that have assisted teachers with data collection and understanding. Interestingly, only one respondent referenced classroom observations as having been used to provide support for the important of instruction and student success.

Respondent 1:

Much professional development has been provided. In school PD.

Respondent 2:

        Multiple professional developments that not only showed me ideas about how to

improve student success, but opportunities to actually implement these ideas;

being there in the classroom with me, offering ideas, praise and criticism to make

me a better teacher; and having common planning time with other science

teachers to see what they are doing and to plan together. It was great seeing my

subject taught through another pair of eyes. Having that time to collaborate really

helped me get out of the mindset of doing things the same every year.

Respondent 3:

        Of my 3 schools, I only had one instructional leader which I felt I learned from.

This school/IC had us focusing on data and using that data to inform our decisions

about our instructional practices. We didn't just talk about it in PD but it was part

of the school culture. I still use what I learned there today. I find most PDs to be

content related to what is covered in my Master's program, therefore a bit

repetitive. Also, most of what is covered in PD is a check mark to let the

district/state know we covered the material as asked but then the material is never

used.

Respondent 4:

        Things that have been a help to me are having test scores pulled, emphasizing

who our bubble students are, providing online tools/programs to remediate and/or

challenge individual students, providing professional development opportunities

above and beyond the regular district sessions.

Question 8: "When considering the past five years of your teaching career, how have areas of weakness or strength been addressed with you? Please explain." While most of the respondents mentioned both strengths and weaknesses in their responses, it was obvious that more time had been spent on addressing weaknesses than on addressing areas of strengths. Interestingly, the responses to this question took on a more negative tone than responses to previous questions had.

Respondent 1:

Instructional strategies presented, modeled, and then I implemented them.

Respondent 2:

Weakness – addressing standards while teaching, not having updated objectives listed on the board for students to see. (I really don't' see how this affected my teaching, but none the less, they were listed as weaknesses.)

Strengths – having engaging lessons, students were motivated and on task.

Respondent 3:

In education, although my observations were good on paper and I passed adept with a perforce score, I have never had an administrator talk to me about my strengths.

My first administrator would conveniently forget giving permission to do something with curriculum and then pull me in to yell at me when a parent complained because my class wasn't doing exactly what the other ELA classes were. When I tried to have an adult, professional conversation with her to make our relationship better, she threw an ink pen at me and said she was going to have to "call me out." I felt like I was dealing with a middle school student.

My second administrator never came out of his office unless he was filming the hallways to catch us not doing something we were supposed to be doing and then he would show the video in the faculty meeting as an example to other teachers as to what not to do. If someone complained about you or said something negative about, he wouldn't ask you about it, you would just receive a very long and nasty email from him with some kind of mandate (like email me all of your assessments from now on.) However, when I left that school to come to this school he was sure to tell me in an email how disappointed he was in me because he had built the entire next year's schedule around me continuing to run his alternative program. (Who knew he thought the program was working or that I was a teacher he wanted to keep!)

My third administrator was a sweet, kind soul who would hide from conflict. I came to the school and was put on a team with three older women who would constantly argue, slam doors, agree to something the team wanted and then go and do the opposite, etc. If anyone talked to this administrator he would listen and agree as if to sooth you but nothing ever changed.

My fourth administrator was moved to the school against his wishes and was mad at having to be there, but assured us he would make our school great. I think he was a nice person but very closed and hard to get to know. I was never comfortable calling him by his first name, which I found strange. My only source of feedback from him came my first year with him. I had four ELA classes. 27 in my first class, about 25 in my middle two classes, and 9 in my last class.

However, all year long when a new student came, they were given the exact same schedule and always put in my first class. With our attendance, there were days when I only had 4 students in my last group and couldn't even do group activities. After about 2 weeks of working sick as a dog, the attendance clerk brought me yet another new student to my first class. I told her I didn't even have a desk for this student and she needed to go back to the guidance counselor and get this schedule changed. I brought the student into the room and continued on. I felt bad about having that conversation in front of the student so the next morning I took that student into the hallway and apologized for saying that in front of her and assured her it was not about her and that I was happy to have her. That day during planning I went to the guidance counselor's office to talk about a different student. The attendance clerk must have thought I was there to complain and called the administrator. The next thing I know, he comes in the guidance counselor's office, slams the door, gets within an inch of my face and begins yelling at me. I stepped back, put my hand in his face, and stopped him and explained what was going on with being sick and scheduling. That was the extent of my feedback for the 3 years that I worked for him. I continued to have a positive relationship with him, but didn't go out of my way to seek him out for anything.

During my ten years of teaching, the best way I have gotten feedback was the year I was required to keep a notebook collecting artifacts of the 10 dimensions of adept. We had to turn this notebook in to our assigned admin at Christmas and at the end of the year to be graded. That counted as our formal

observations. While it was a lot of work, I loved this. It allowed me to not only

build a portfolio, but also alerted me if I wasn't performing in one of the

dimensions. For example, if I couldn't produce evidence of positive parent

contact I knew that area needed my attention as I moved throughout the semester.

This also alleviated having admin come in the room and watch me teach as if I

was under a microscope. Never in business did a boss come sit in your office and

watch you work. They don't have time as they had their own jobs.

Respondent 4:

Both strengths and weaknesses have been mentioned in brief meetings

with the observer. It often seems like more of a task to complete rather than a

session in which genuine concerns for needed improvements and or current

successes are discussed. Some observations have taken place in which little

feedback beyond the checklist was shared.

Question 9: "When considering the entire length of your career, what role has

your principal played in your professional growth? Please explain." The respondents

that gave favorable answers in this area, each addressed the ideas of support and

encouragement. Sadly, many of the answers focused more on how the idea of how

administrators addressed weaknesses and how that left the respondents with a poor

perception of themselves.

Respondent 1:

Being supportive and encouraging has always motivated me to try harder. I'm

willing to try new things! But, if there's no support then it really can't happen to

a degree you'd like.

Respondent 2:

I have had several types of principals during my years of teaching. I have had a principal be a bully and make me really consider not teaching. I have had a principal caught up in scandals that reflected poorly on my view of administration. I have had principals who not only supported me as teacher, but as a mom/person outside of school. I have also had a principal who has ignored what I did and didn't seem like he cared. After all of these principals, I can honestly say, they have all taught me what I want to be towards my students. I took how my principals made me feel as a teacher and applied it towards my students. I looked at that principal who bullied me and made me question my decision to teach and realized that if I acted that way towards my students I could possibly turn them away from their education. Not what I want to do. My principal who was caught up in scandal taught me to make sure that I am a positive influence in my student's life. They will look up to me and make decisions based upon how I act. The principals who supported me outside of the classroom have shown me to look at my students outside of my classroom and to see them as individuals. Lastly, the principal who ignored me has taught me to see all of my students.

Respondent 3:

Honestly, I feel very little. I learned a great deal when I established and ran the alternative program, but I volunteered for that. Most of my principals have been folks you learned to avoid. It is heartbreaking as this was never the case in business. My bosses in business were folks I considered friends. We traveled

together (while for business) it was always fun. We worked hard, played hard, and had tons of fun while accomplishing much. The education environment has not been this way unfortunately. Sometimes I get down on myself and begin to think I am the problem. But then I compare my experience and success in the business arena with the education arena and realize while I may not always respond appropriately to unfair and time wasting practices in education, I have just had some really sucky administrators. We need to get back to focusing on educating students not performing for legislators.

Respondent 4:

I would say that some of the principals I have worked with have been very good at encouraging me in my professional growth. The principals who took a genuine interest in me as not just a professional educator, but also as a person, influenced my growth tremendously. Seeing how passionate a principal is about the student body, about education, about community, about growing professionally themselves, about family and faith among other things puts forth such a positive persona that the desire to improve oneself just comes naturally – at least to some. Being that positive role model puts the principal in a very influential position. Throughout my years of teaching, when the principal ceased in helping me grow professionally, it was time to move on. Everything rises and falls on leadership (John C. Maxwell).

Question 10: "Over the past five years, which observational tool(s) have been used in your classroom during an observation from your principal or assistant principal?" All four respondents noted that they had been observed with a simple checklist during the

past five years. Two of the four respondents also noted that they had been observed with a formative observational tool during the past five years.

Question 11: "Please note which observational tool, if any, provided you with the necessary information to reflect upon and improve your teaching practices." The two respondents that noted that they had been observed with formative observational tools believed that the information provided to them assisted with their reflection processes. However, none of the respondents believed that the simple checklist provided them with the necessary information to reflect upon and improve their teaching practices.

Question 12: "When considering the past five years of your teaching career, how many times per year were you observed by your principal and/or assistant principal?" Two of the four respondents stated that they have been observed an average of three to four times a year over the past five years, while two responded as being observed only once or twice a year on average.

Question 13: "In what ways, if any, have you improved or changed your instructional practices based on observational feedback provided by your principal or assistant principal?" The teachers' responses to this question were brief. While one respondent could mention one specific tool that could be used, others deferred back to the checklist and its inability to provide the feedback needed to truly improve instructional practices.

Respondent 1:

I'm always open to positive criticism. I focus on what areas I need improvement, seek advice, and try to improve. Example: cooperative grouping, assessments…

Respondent 2:

I've learned to play the game in some respect. Sometimes, it feels that principals

have specific checklists to look for when they come into my room. I make sure

that I have all the necessary items/lists/words around my room when they come

in. Do I necessarily utilize those key items daily in my classroom? No, but I play

the game when I am being observed. To me, I look at how I am teaching in my

class and how my students are responding. The feedback I get on those are the

ones that I focus on the most. Am I ignoring a particular student? Do I stand in

one place? Am I allowing adequate time to answer questions, and so on?

Respondent 3:

There was very little feedback given for those observations other than an emailed

check list and a few written comments. However, I naturally reflect and adjust as

I teach. The biggest thing for me is to be able to get timely feedback on how the

students are doing or did so I can adjust quickly. If the majority don't do well on

a test then I know the test was bad or I need to reteach. I dream of summer

feedback from state tests so I can adjust before another year is gone.

Observations just don't do a lot for me. Maybe I was not feeling well, maybe the

students were off, etc. It's just a snapshot of a much longer project.

Respondent 4:

Using a random name generator to call on students is one thing I recall a principal

encouraging me to use. It does help keep the students on their toes! Mostly what

I have changed are things that are on the "checklist" of what the observers will be

looking for – like standards being posted, essential questions being included, I

CAN statements, use of technology, and so on.

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Question 14: "When thinking about a structured observational tool that focuses on detailed constructive feedback, what types of information or feedback would you like to receive in order to impact your reflective process on your instructional practices? Please be as specific as possible." The respondents eagerly provided detailed information in their response to this question. A common theme of encouraging positive feedback and reinforcement played throughout all of the responses. It was also noted that in order for the feedback to be beneficial, it would need to be specific to the teacher and/or situation rather than general statements.

Respondent 1:

> I am like a child. I like to hear about the good job I did, then provide me info on areas I could change things up. I aim to do my best, but I'm definitely not perfect. I welcome new ideas to keep students engaged and learning. This goes back to support. If I need help in an area, I'm willing to attend trainings, get help, or try something different.

Respondent 2:

> I would like more details. Not just good job or I noticed you did this. I would like to have a sit down meeting with my administrator and specifically look at what I did well and what I didn't do well. From this meeting, I would like to fill out a form together that comes up with a plan of what I will do to improve and what my administrator will do to help me improve. I think that this is where observations fall flat. There never seems time to meet one on one, away from the students, to sit down and really look at what needs to be improved on and a specific why it needs to be.

Respondent 3:

Again, I loved the adept notebook. This forced teachers to constantly be aware of all the dimensions all year long. It was self-reflection and self-correction at its finest. And it saved the admins a great deal of time sitting in teachers' rooms. Don't get me wrong. Anyone is welcome in my room anytime. But I don't feel that one snapshot is going to alter or advance my teaching practices very much. You can tell how a teacher is doing by talking to her students, looking at how her students grow, and by popping in for a check. I just don't think formal observations do anything other than stress the teachers out and create a great deal of work for them that does not impact the students.

Respondent 4:

I met one of my favorite teachers while taking my masters courses. She always responded to our work with a positive comment, but then she posed a question or two to make us reflect on our answer and extend our thinking. She challenged us to go beyond just the ordinary and she expected us to respond to her inquiries. That being said, some sincere positive comments to offer encouragement focusing on strengths would be great. For areas of weakness, perhaps some thought provoking questions targeting the specific concerns would be more beneficial than mere comments or suggestions for corrective measures. Having these questions to mull over would certainly cause one to reflect on his/her instructional practices – especially if there was going to be a conference following the time of reflection. As discussion unfolds during that conference, perhaps the teacher will be able to "advise" themselves and if not, the observer

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could at that time provide feedback offering corrective measures for the areas of concern while at the same time encouraging professional growth.

Leadership Team Discussion Results

In addition to receiving information from the teachers involved in this study, the school's leadership team met to discuss their thoughts on what should be included in the development of the formative observational tool. This meeting included the principal, the assistant principal and the instructional coach. While their thoughts often went back to the requirements of the South Carolina 4.0 Rubric for Teacher Evaluation (see Appendix C), there was also a great deal of discussion on school level needs and how the tool could be used to address weaknesses in those areas or to reinforce those areas when they are seen as strengths amongst certain teachers.

The discussion began with a focus on the need for teacher reflection and how that impacts their professional growth. The assistant principal noted that going through the reflective thought process through the use of feedback is helpful: "just being able to unpack what you did, it just helps you understand exactly what you did and it helps you really see what it is." While the instructional coach agreed with this, she also discussed how important it is for teachers to receive feedback from another adult in the building. "Teachers are often on an island because they are the only adult in the room. When they get to have another adult come into the room and then have a conversation about the lessons, it's nice to look at what another adult thinks, since they are usually only around students."

In discussing the development of the new formative observational tool the leadership team determined the tool should be, in some way, tied back to the state

evaluation rubric so that teachers are receiving some feedback that will help them adapt to the evaluation tool. Additionally, it was agreed that the formative observational tool should include an area for feedback on the school level focus items: building rapport with students and student engagement.

The idea of ratings, checklists and pre- and post- conferences were also discussed amongst the leadership time. It was determined that checklists and number ratings focus more on compliance than on growth. While pre- and post-conferences are often beneficial and allow for more in-depth discussions about the observations, they are time consuming and often impractical to do when considering the numerous duties of both teachers and administrators.

The assistant principal noted, "In my short experience with using numbers and ratings, that's been the least beneficial part of the conversation. I have intentionally waited until the end of the discussion to share where the teacher landed as far as the rubric and whatever the criteria was. It's been more about a collaborative conversation, asking questions that drive thinking to be something that is a positive reflection that is really, one that really kind of is beneficial for the teacher…to me, the numbers are more of the evaluation side not the growth side."

Classroom Observation Tool

Using the information gathered from the teacher survey and the leadership team discussion a formative observational tool was developed and implemented in the observations of the four participants of this research study. The observational tool included an area for the logistics of the observation (teacher, date, time, lesson focus) and areas for detailed feedback with the following headings: Outstanding Practices, Areas to

Note, Evidence of Student Engagement, Evidence of Strongest Area on State Rubric, Evidence of Area to Strengthen on State Rubric, Evidence of Rapport/Relationship Building, and Notes from Observer (See Appendix B for complete observational tool).

Each teacher participating in the study was observed once with this tool and received a copy of the completed tool before the observer left her classroom. Within hours of receiving their feedback, two of the four teachers emailed the observer with their thoughts on the feedback that was provided and how they planned to make changes within their classroom. Once all four of the teachers had been observed and received their feedback, the teachers then participated in a discussion with the principal.

Post-Intervention Discussion

In order to develop an understanding of the impact the new observational tool had on the reflective and instructional practices of the teachers, a follow up discussion was held with the four participants of this study. There was an overall theme of distaste for checklists and a preference for the type of feedback they received with the new observational tool. Additionally, each of the participants noted that they had never received this type of feedback from an observation in the past.

As the original feedback from the teachers was collected in an anonymous online format, there was no way to match the respondents of each answer to the respondents' answers in the discussion. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, the respondents will be listed as A, B, C, and D for the discussion response rather than as 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Question 1: "Do you find the new structured observational tool focusing on detailed constructive feedback to be a better model for providing teachers with information for the teacher's reflective process?" The respondents all eagerly responded

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with distaste for checklists and compared the new form to the type of feedback received from a checklist. Respondent A and D best summarized their thoughts

Respondent A:

> I like this model. One, just the way that the categories are worded. It is very positive minded. I don't look at it and think, "Well I didn't get a check right there, but I know I did that." You know what I am saying? So, I'm really more focused on the positive feedback. Even where it says areas to note, it's put in a more positive light. So these are just some things to think about. It was easy to read through it quickly and know immediately what went well and what I need to focus on.

Respondent D:

> I felt like when reading this, you paid attention to my lesson and were not just focusing on the key parts that you knew you had to check off of a list. You put down things that I did. You quoted me. To me, that's more personal than a checklist.

These responses led to a follow up question that had not been planned as part of the discussion: "Have you ever received written feedback in this manner before?" All four teachers replied that they had not. One mentioned that she had received one or two sentences with the checklist, but had never had specific feedback given before. Others agreed that the checklist always made them focus on what they had not done, whereas the feedback received with the new observational tool also gave them the opportunity to reflect on what they had done well.

Question 2: "What is the benefit of the new structured observational tool?" The teachers felt the use of the new observational tool allowed for greater reflection, less angst from teachers during the observation process, and a focus on best practices and student learning. Respondent B noted, "This tool lets me be me. It lets me do my job instead of worrying about a checklist." Participant A stated, "This tool is about the art of teaching."

Question 3: "Did the feedback provided by your administrator through the new structured observational tool improve your reflective practice? If yes, how? If not, please explain." Overall, the teachers all felt that the feedback was beneficial and helped to focus their reflections on both areas of strength and weakness, as opposed to a checklist that only had them focusing on what they had "missed." Respondent D noted that it was mentioned in her feedback that she didn't wander far from the front of the classroom. "I never, it never crossed my mind. When you point it out, I thought, I don't venture far from my area. On the previous observation forms, that has never come up. It never would have been mentioned, and now it is something that I am working on."

Question 4: "Did the use of the new structured observational tool impact your instructional practices in any way? If yes, how? If not, please explain." They all noted that the tool did cause them to be more reflective on their teaching. However because of the time of year that it was implemented and that it had only been used once, it had not yet had a large impact on their instructional practices. Respondent D did note that she has joined a forum with teachers across the country, and since receiving her feedback, she has posted on that forum to get some additional ideas for implementing digital interactive notebooks.

Question 5: "What changes, if any, would you recommend making to the structured observational tool?" The teachers responded quite positively to the new tool and did not recommend changes to the tool. They did, however, recommend that it be used for all observations beginning in the 2018-2019 school year in order to benefit the entire faculty. The teachers then moved the discussion to what they appreciated most about the new tool.

Respondent A:

      I also feel like it is a bit of a relationship builder. If my principal gives me a checklist, it's one thing. But, when my principal has observed me and given me this feedback, "Oh she noted that and that, and now she noted this and this." It helps build that relationship.

Respondent B:

      Value is so important, and I think the other checklist that we had, it made us feel not valued because we were just doing a checklist. This makes it feel like, "you are worth something."

Respondent C:

This helps us grow in our individuality.

Respondent D:

You made something that is very sterile personal.

Interpretation of the Results

The teachers involved in this study served as a representative of the faculty of Lincoln Middle School. As such, the evidence from the questionnaires and group discussion showed that this sample of teachers were eager to receive feedback in a

manner that was focused and specific and did not depend on a checklist or rating system. The teachers expressed an appreciation for receiving the detailed feedback on both strengths and areas that would require more focus from them. Furthermore, the teachers and the leadership team appreciated the tie in to the South Carolina 4.0 Rubric for Teacher Evaluation (see Appendix C), as well as, the connection to the school focus areas of relationship building and student engagement. Perhaps most beneficial during a time when teachers are being hit from every direction by the mandates of the system, the teachers reported the tool led them to feel as if they were valued individuals.

Conclusion

This research study relied upon information and beliefs shared from four veteran teachers at Lincoln Middle School, along with feedback from the school's instructional leadership team. In summary, teachers felt the use of the new structured observational tool was beneficial to the reflection process. While ultimately, a pre- and post-observation conference are ideal, it is virtually impossible to do this on a frequent basis with all staff members. With this in mind, teachers and the instructional leadership team agreed the use of the new tool serves as a valid substitute for these discussions, especially when the feedback is sent just before the observer leaves the classroom setting. Additionally, it was agreed by all that the feedback that was received facilitates discussions amongst the teachers and the observers, as well as between teachers, leading to a strong professional learning community within the school setting which will ultimately impact student learning. The teachers felt the new tool lead them to feel more valued as a professional and allowed for a greater relationship between the observing administrator and the teacher being observed.

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Chapter Five: Summary and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter serves as a summary of the findings of this research study. The focus of the study, overview and summary of the study will be included. Additionally, the major discussion points of the study, implications of the findings and suggestion for future research will be presented.

Focus of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to determine the impact that the utilization of a formative observation tool would have on the teachers' reflective practices. The study was conducted to determine if the utilization of the tool would positively impact the teachers' reflective practices, in turn improving student success.

Overview of the Study

School level administrators are no longer considered managers of the building, but are tasked with becoming instructional leaders able to work with teachers to focus on specific instructional improvements needed in their schools (Stewart, 2013). This task is often daunting for many, but can be made less so through classroom observations as they serve as the intersection of teaching and learning for school administrators (Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindquist, 2015). If one considers teachers to be learners in this scenario, then appropriate feedback must be provided as a result of these classroom observations (Spears, 1953). In order for professional growth to take place within a school setting, the learner, in this case the teacher, must have interaction with others, be provided with

feedback that can lead to reflection and have follow-up support systems in place (Husu, 2008; Shabani, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978; 1995).

Research by Ryan and Deci (2000) highlights the importance of creating an environment of supportive conditions in order to foster intrinsic motivation for improvement. Their work suggests "social environments can facilitate or forestall intrinisic motivation by supporting versus thwarting people's innate psychological needs" (p. 71). This is of particular importance in a setting such as Lincoln Middle School where teachers report having negative thoughts with the past school culture and climate and the perceived lack of feedback and support from administration. Ryan and Deci's research suggests that organizational members, teachers in this case, long to feel valued and to have a sense of belonging. Creating such an environment for teachers will allow them the opportunity and comfort to place themselves in the roles of student so that they may learn and grow in their craft.

As the newly assigned principal at Lincoln Middle School, labeled a turn-around school by the school district, I was tasked with the responsibility of improving instructional practices in order to improve student success. Results from the teacher surveys that are administered by the South Carolina Department of Education each year showed that forty-seven percent of the teachers at Lincoln Middle School did not view the administrators as instructional leaders. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers believe that the teacher evaluation process focuses on instructional improvement.

Using the data listed above, the following problem of practice was developed: Too many teachers at Lincoln Middle School do not believe that the teacher evaluation process focuses on instructional improvement, and therefore, rarely use the feedback

provided by administrators to reflect upon and improve their teaching practices. With this in mind, a research question was developed: In what ways will the utilization of a formative constructive feedback tool used by school level administrators during or in conjunction with a classroom observation impact the teachers' reflective process about their instructional practices.

Summary of the Study

The research for this study was conducted during the second semester of the school year in order to allow time to build strong trusting relationships with the teachers. Before the school year began, I invited all faculty and staff to participate in "speed dating" sessions that allowed them thirty minutes to share anything that they wanted about themselves and/or their concerns. During the school year, I conducted short drop in observations with follow up conversations, left the teachers encouraging notes when I visited their rooms and attended both department and grade level meetings to continue to build relationships with the teachers and establish a feeling of trust between myself, as their principal, and the teachers. It was my hope that through these activities the teachers would begin to see me as an instructional leader with a vested interest in helping them. In February, an invitation was extended to all teachers asking for volunteers to participate in this study. Four teachers volunteered to participate in the project. All four teachers involved were female veteran teachers and represented the areas of English/language arts, mathematics, science and related arts.

Participants were asked to answer an anonymous questionnaire that allowed them to share their past experiences with classroom observations and the feedback they have received from their administrators. Using this information, along with information from

a discussion with the assistant principal and the instructional coach, a new formative

observation tool was developed. Teachers participating in the study were then observed

using the new formative constructive feedback tool. Immediately following the

observation, the teacher received a completed copy of the tool with specific feedback

regarding their lesson and instructional practices. Teachers then participated in a

discussion group allowing them to share their thoughts and opinions on the new tool,

along with providing recommendations for any changes that should be made or for

moving forward with the use of the observational tool throughout the school.

Discussion of Major Points of the Study

  'Observation' and 'evaluation' are often seen as synonymous. Teachers often

perceive classroom observations to be synonymous with the term evaluation. Many

times, teachers then perceive both to have negative requirements (Peterson & Comeau,

1990; Danielson, 2010). When asked to respond on the questionnaire to feedback

received from classroom observations, teachers in this study always referred to the

evaluation process. During the post-discussion, I made a concerted effort to define the

formative classroom observations and to create the separation from a formal teacher

evaluation system. The teachers agreed that they saw these to be synonymous because

they have not had frequent observations that have provided them with thoughtful

feedback.

  In order to improve this perception, it is imperative for principals to strive to

change this mindset by providing formative feedback to educators in a constructive

nature to be used for improvement of practice and not for evaluation purposes (Ovando,

2005; Pajak, 2001). Effective principals do not merely evaluate teachers, rather, they

visit classrooms frequently to observe instruction and provide feedback (Cotton, 2003). Classroom observations should be viewed as a tool to focus on teacher growth and development, whereas, evaluation should be used to measure teachers against a specific level of performance (Embretson, Ferber and Langager, 1984).

The observation tool should be more than a checklist. What occurs in the classroom setting has the greatest impact on student learning (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). As such, principals must engage their faculty in productive conversations focused on improving teaching and learning (Kachur, Stout & Edwards, 2010) which cannot be done by simply providing teachers with a checklist. Teachers participating in this research study frequently noted their negative perceptions of the use of a checklist, often referring to it as a way for administrators to point out what they were doing wrong in their classrooms.

Checklists are not able to provide teachers with the necessary information needed to reflect upon their instructional practices in a manner that may improve student achievement. Dewey (1921) discusses the importance of reflection in order to solve a perplexity, while Bruner (1960) notes "reflection is central to all learning" (p. 13). Therefore, it is imperative for administrators to provide teachers with the necessary information needed to guide their reflection towards improving instructional practices. Additionally, the observational tool used during classroom observations should be used to affirm the positive work that teachers are doing as well.

Feedback should be detailed and specific. Reflective practice has the ability to transform teaching practices and, thus, impact student learning (Belvis, Pineda, Armengol and Moreno, 2013; Parson and Stephenson, 2005; Van Soest and Bohle, 2005; Johansson,

Sandberg and Vuorinen 2007). Participants in this research study were unable to note

specific areas that had been addressed as weaknesses or strengths by previous

administrators as it pertained to their individual teaching. Their comments were vague

and often landed in the area of specific items that were not witnessed during the

observation, such as "not having updated objectives listed on the board for students to

see" or "students were motivated and on task". During the follow up discussion, teachers

mentioned that if feedback had been received in the past, it often came in the form of

canned phrases and was rarely specific to the lessons that had been observed. In contrast,

the participants spoke positively about the new observation tool due to its allowance for

specifics. "It felt like when reading this, you paid attention to my lesson and not just

focusing on the key parts that you knew you had to check off. You put down things that I

did. You quoted me," respondent D noted.

Furthermore, Ovando (2005) and Pajak (2001) argue feedback from classroom

observations must be constructive in nature in order to be used for improvement of

practice. The provision of detailed and teacher specific feedback allows the basis for

individual coaching that will lead to professional growth (Huff, Preston and Goldring,

2013). Without specific feedback, teachers are unable to move from their current state of

instruction to a state of improved instruction.

**Trusting relationships between administrators and teachers are necessary for

professional growth.** Previous research suggests there are four key components

involved in the observation process that may lead to teachers' professional growth:

instructional improvement practice, purpose of observation, professional trust, and

reflective thinking (Ginsberg, 2003; Card, 2006; Ramano, Jr., 2014). Teachers must be

able to trust the administrator conducting the observation and believe that frank

discussions may take place about the observation if improvement is to be expected

(Ramano, Jr., 2014). Additionally, Ramano, Jr (2014) notes "If teachers believe that

observers will be overly critical of their performance, teachers are unlikely to go beyond

their comfort level during a lesson, especially if they perceive that little margin for error

exists" (p. 140).   Others note when school cultures are built on a foundation of trust and

professional confidence there is an allowance for informal observations to provide

information to begin conversations that will move teachers towards improving their

teaching (Kachur, et al., 2010).

Participants in this study gave many examples in their responses to the

questionnaire indicating lack of trust with previous administrators. Responses included

examples of angry outbursts and lack of feedback after observations. In each of these

cases, the respondents indicated in some fashion information received from these

administrators was not valued or used towards reflection.

However, during the post discussion, respondents noted information received

from the formative observational tool left them feeling valued and able to be individuals.

Perhaps most telling was the statement made by respondent A: "I also feel like it is a bit

of a relationship builder. If my principal gives me a checklist, it's one thing, but if my

principal has observed and I see she noted that and that, and now she noted this and this,

it helps build that relationship." The relationship between the teacher and the principal,

along with the culture of learning, is important to the effectiveness of developing teacher

practices and thus should be fostered (Taylor, 2013). Though not investigated by this

study, one must wonder how impactful the strategies employed to build trust

relationships were on the teachers' overall perceptions and willingness to accept the feedback provided during the observations.

Ryan and Deci (2000), briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, developed the Self-Determination Theory identifying three essential areas of need for creating optimal conditions for growth: the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. According to this theory, all three of these areas must be met in order to foster a climate in which organizational members may thrive and grow. Just as teachers need to motivate students to perform, administrators must work towards motivating teachers to perform and grow. Ryan and Deci note the importance in providing "effectance-promoting feedback, and freedom from demeaning evaluations" as it pertains to increasing intrinsic motivation (p.70).

Though not the initial focus of this study, this unexpected outcome does reiterate the impact, positive or negative, administrators may have on teachers. Administrators who continuously work towards building a strong professional relationship built on trust and place the needs of their followers at the forefront of the team have a greater impact on teacher commitment, self-confidence and performance, ultimately leading to improvement of instructional skills (Fullan, 2002; Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Ford & Ware, 2016; Turkmen & Gul, 2017). These strategies, combined with providing detailed feedback as it relates to instructional activities, continue to build capacity within the school as productive conversations about the improvement of teaching and learning take place more frequently (Fullan, 2005; Kachur, Stout & Edwards, 2010).

Action Plan: Implications of the Findings

Teacher participants' responses on both the online questionnaire and during post-discussion provided for a greater understanding as to why administrators of the past were not seen as instructional leaders within this school and in the other schools in which the teachers have worked. The data collection affirmed the need for a change in the classroom observational tool and a greater need for providing more structured and detailed feedback to the individual teachers being observed.

The teacher participants noted the feedback they received with the new tool not only allowed them to be more reflective on their teaching practices, but also left them feeling valued as an educator. Teachers expressed a greater understanding for the process and a desire to be observed more frequently with this tool. Feedback provided with the new tool was viewed to be relevant to their professional growth and stimulated conversations not only between the teacher and the observing administrator but teacher to teacher conversation.

Teachers indicated a positive response towards the wording of the tool and felt that, in general, it was much more respectful than a checklist, as it considered the individual skills of each teacher. All participants agreed the tool should be used with all teachers in the school in order to work towards growing a stronger professional learning community.

Suggestions for Future Research

This project was conducted through an action research lens. As action research is not intended to be generalized to a greater population, this should be considered by future researchers in this area. While this research study has provided greater insight into the

observational practices at Lincoln Middle School, information gathered through this study should not be the sole consideration for implementing this tool or for making significant changes to classroom observations in another school setting without first gathering information on the particular school culture.

Based on the results of this research study, the following recommendations are made for future research:

- It is recommended that future research be conducted to determine the impact of the trust relationship between the administration and the teachers as it directly relates to the classroom observation practices in a school setting.
- It is recommended that instructional leaders further research the amount and frequency of feedback a teacher must receive in order to positively influence teacher reflection and student learning.

This study allowed the researcher to have a greater understanding of the impact of the formative observational tool at one school sight. While many of the concepts of this study may be replicated at other schools, one must be reminded that this study does not have generalized implications to all school settings. Each school has its own unique individuals and needs and those must be considered before implementing new methods of classroom observations.

Conclusion

This study allowed the researcher to have a greater understanding of the impact of the formative observational tool at one school sight. While many of the concepts of this study may be replicated at other schools, one must be reminded that this study does not have generalized implications to all school settings.

The ultimate goal for this research project was to examine the utilization of a structured observational tool focusing on detailed constructive feedback and its impact upon the teachers' reflective process as it pertains to their instructional practices. The following conclusions were made based upon the research and data collected for this project.

- Time should be invested in helping both teachers and administrators to understand the differences between evaluation and observation.

- Teachers benefit from receiving detailed and specific feedback as it relates to their instructional practices, and providing such feedback improves a teachers' ability to reflect upon their instruction.

- Providing detailed and specific feedback in a culture that is developed around the ideas of trust and growth is not only beneficial to the teachers' instructional practices and student learning, but also to teacher morale.

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APPENDIX A – COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

From: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning <cas-tl1@virginia.edu>
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Subject: Re: Request to Use Material

 Hi Lisa,

I apologize for the delayed response. The authors of the paper have communicated back to me and approved the use of this graphic for your dissertation.

Best of luck,

Kathy

From: "CASSIDY, LISA C"
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Subject: Request to Use Material

Good afternoon,

I am an Ed.D. student in the University of South Carolina's Curriculum and Instruction program. I am currently working on my dissertation and am writing to request permission to use Figure 1 - Quality Improvement Linked to Teacher Effectiveness from the source cited below.

Stulhman, M. W., Hamre, B.K., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C.

(undated). *Why should we use classroom observation?* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia.

Thank you for this consideration.

APPENDIX B – FORMATIVE OBSERVATIONAL TOOL

Teacher Name: **Date:**

Observation Start Time: **End Time:**

Standard:

Lesson Focus:

Essential Question:

Outstanding Practices:

Areas to Note:

Evidence of Student Engagement:

Evidence of Strongest Area on Rubric:

Evidence of Area to Strengthen on Rubric:

Evidence of Rapport/Relationship Building:

Notes from Observer:

APPENDIX C – SOUTH CAROLINA 4.0 RUBRIC FOR TEACHER EVALUATION

INSTRUCTION			
Exemplary (4)	**Proficient (3)**	**Needs Improvement (2)**	**Unsatisfactory (1)**
• All learning objectives and state content standards are explicitly communicated. • Sub-objectives are aligned and logically sequenced to the lesson's major objective. • Learning objectives are: (a) consistently connected to what students have previously learned, (b) know from life experiences, and (c) integrated with other disciplines. • Expectations for each student's performance are clear, demanding, and high. • State standards are displayed, referenced throughout the lesson with explanations. • There is evidence that most students demonstrate mastery of the objective.	• Most learning objectives and state content standards are communicated. • Sub-objectives are mostly aligned to the lesson's major objective. • Learning objectives are connected to what students have previously learned. • Expectations for student performance are clear, demanding and high. • State standards are displayed and referenced in the lesson. • There is evidence that most students demonstrate mastery of the objective.	• Some learning objectives and state content standards are communicated. • Sub-objectives are sometimes aligned to the lesson's major objective. • Learning objectives are not clearly connected to what students have previously learned. • Expectations for student performance are clear. • State standards are appropriately displayed • There is evidence that some of the students demonstrate mastery of the objective.	• Learning objectives and state content standards are not communicated. • Sub-objectives are rarely aligned to the lesson's major objective. • Learning objectives are rarely connected to what students have previously learned. • Expectations for student performance are vague. • State standards are not appropriately displayed. • There is evidence that few students demonstrate mastery of the objective.
• The teacher consistently and explicitly organizes the content so that it is personally meaningful, relevant and intellectually engaging to all students. • The teacher consistently develops learning experiences where inquiry, curiosity and exploration are valued. • The teacher consistently reinforces and rewards effort.	• The teacher often organizes the content so that it is personally meaningful, relevant and intellectually engaging to most students. • The teacher often develops learning experiences where inquiry, curiosity and exploration are valued. • The teacher regularly reinforces and rewards effort.	• The teacher sometimes organizes the content so that it is personally meaningful, relevant and engaging to some students. • The teacher sometimes develops learning experiences where inquiry, curiosity and exploration are valued. • The teacher sometimes reinforces and rewards effort.	• The teacher rarely organizes the content so that it is personally meaningful, relevant and engaging to students. • The teacher rarely develops learning experiences where inquiry, curiosity and exploration are valued. • The teacher rarely reinforces and rewards effort.
Presentation of content always includes: • visuals that establish: the purpose of the lesson, preview the organization of the lesson, and include reflective internal summaries of the lesson. • Explicit examples, illustrations, analogies, and labels for new concepts and ideas. • modeling by the teacher to demonstrate his or her performance expectations throughout the lesson. • concise communication. • logical sequencing and segmenting. • all essential information. • no irrelevant, confusing, or non- essential information.	Presentation of content most of the time includes: • visuals that establish the purpose of the lesson, preview the organization of the lesson, and include reflective internal summaries of the lesson. • examples, illustrations, analogies, and labels for new concepts and ideas. • modeling by the teacher to demonstrate his or her performance expectations. • concise communication. • logical sequencing and segmenting. • all essential information. • no irrelevant, confusing, or non- essential information.	Presentation of content sometimes includes: • visuals that establish the purpose of the lesson, preview the organization of the lesson, and include internal summaries of the lesson • examples, illustrations, analogies, and labels for new concepts and ideas. • modeling by the teacher to demonstrate his or her performance expectations. • concise communication. • logical sequencing and segmenting. • all essential information • no irrelevant, confusing, or non- essential information.	Presentation of content rarely includes: • visuals that establish the purpose of the lesson, preview the organization of the lesson, and include internal summaries of the lesson. • examples, illustrations, analogies, and labels for new concepts and ideas. • modeling by the teacher to demonstrate his or her performance expectations. • concise communication. • logical sequencing and segmenting. • all essential information. • no irrelevant, confusing, or non- essential information.

INSTRUCTION (Continued)

	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)

Questioning	Teacher questions are varied and high quality providing a consistently balanced mix of question types:
	  o knowledge and comprehension,
	  o application and analysis, and
	  o creation and evaluation.
	• Questions are consistently purposeful and coherent.
	• A high frequency of questions is asked.
	• Questions are consistently sequenced with attention to the instructional goals.
	• Questions regularly require active responses (e.g., whole class signaling, choral responses, written and shared responses, or group and individual answers).
	• Wait time (3-5 seconds) is consistently provided.
	• The teacher calls on volunteers and non-volunteers, and a balance of students based on ability and sex.
	• Students generate higher order questions that lead to further inquiry and self-directed learning.
		Teacher questions are varied and high quality providing a balanced mix of question types:
		  o knowledge and comprehension,
		  o application and analysis, and
		  o creation and evaluation.
		• Questions are usually purposeful and coherent.
		• A moderate frequency of questions asked.
		• Questions are often sequenced with attention to the instructional goals.
		• Questions sometimes require active responses (e.g., whole class signaling, choral responses, or group and individual answers).
		• Wait time is often provided.
		• The teacher calls on volunteers and non-volunteers, and a balance of students based on ability and sex.
		• Students generate questions that lead to further inquiry and self-directed learning.
			Teacher questions are varied and high quality providing for some, but not all, question types:
			  o knowledge and comprehension,
			  o application and analysis, and
			  o creation and evaluation.
			• Questions are sometimes purposeful and coherent.
			• A moderate frequency of questions asked.
			• Questions are sometimes sequenced with attention to the instructional goals.
			• Questions sometimes require active responses (e.g., whole class signaling, choral responses, or group and individual answers).
			• Wait time is sometimes provided.
			• The teacher calls on volunteers and non-volunteers, and a balance of students based on ability and sex.
				Teacher questions are inconsistent in quality and include few question types:
				  o knowledge and comprehension,
				  o application and analysis, and
				  o creation and evaluation.
				• Questions are random and lack coherence.
				• A low frequency of questions is asked.
				• Questions are rarely sequenced with attention to the instructional goals.
				• Questions rarely require active responses (e.g., whole class signaling, choral responses, or group and individual answers).
				• Wait time is inconsistently provided.
				• The teacher mostly calls on volunteers and high ability students.

Academic Feedback	• Oral and written feedback is consistently academically focused, frequent, and high quality. • Feedback is frequently given during guided practice and homework review. • The teacher circulates to prompt student thinking, assess each student's progress, and provide individual feedback. • Feedback from students is consistently used to monitor and adjust instruction. • Teacher engages students in giving specific and high quality feedback to one another.	• Oral and written feedback is mostly academically focused, frequent, and mostly high quality. • Feedback is often given during guided practice and homework review. • The teacher circulates regularly during instructional activities to support engagement, and monitor student work. • Feedback from students is regularly used to monitor and adjust instruction. • Teacher engages students in giving feedback to one another.	• Oral and written feedback is sometimes academically focused, frequent, and mostly high quality. • Feedback is sometimes given during guided practice and homework review. • The teacher circulates sometimes during instructional activities to support engagement, and monitor student work. • Feedback from students is sometimes used to monitor and adjust instruction.	• The quality and timeliness of feedback is inconsistent. • Feedback is rarely given during guided practice and homework review. • The teacher circulates during instructional activities, but monitors mostly behavior. • Feedback from students is rarely used to monitor or adjust instruction.

INSTRUCTION (Continued)			
Exemplary (4)	**Proficient (3)**	**Needs Improvement (2)**	**Unsatisfactory (1)**
• The instructional grouping arrangements (either whole class, small groups, pairs, individual; hetero- or homogenous ability) consistently maximize student understanding and learning efficiency. • All students in groups know their roles, responsibilities, and group work expectations. • All students participating in groups are held accountable for group work and individual work. • Instructional group composition is varied (e.g., race, gender, ability, and age) to best accomplish the goals of the lesson. • Instructional groups facilitate opportunities for students to set goals, reflect on, and evaluate their learning.	• The instructional grouping arrangements (either whole class, small groups, pairs, individual; hetero- or homogenous ability) adequately enhance student understanding and learning efficiency. • Most students in groups know their roles, responsibilities, and group work expectations. • Most students participating in groups are held accountable for group work and individual work. • Instructional group composition is varied (e.g., race, gender, ability, and age) to most of the time, accomplish the goals of the lesson.	• The instructional grouping arrangements (either whole class, small groups, pairs, individual; hetero-or homogenous ability) sometime enhance student understanding and learning efficiency. • Some students in groups know their roles, responsibilities, and group work expectations. • Some students participating in groups are held accountable for group work and individual work. • Instructional group composition is varied (e.g., race, gender, ability, and age) to sometime, accomplish the goals of the lesson.	• The instructional grouping arrangements (either whole class, small groups, pairs, individual; hetero-or homogenous ability) inhibit student understanding and learning efficiency. • Few students in groups know their roles, responsibilities, and group work expectations. • Few students participating in groups are held accountable for group work and individual work. • Instructional group composition remains unchanged irrespective of the learning, and instructional goals of a lesson.
• Teacher displays extensive content knowledge of all the subjects she or he teaches. • Teacher consistently implements a variety of subject-specific instructional strategies to enhance student content knowledge. • The teacher consistently highlights key concepts and ideas, and uses them as bases to connect other powerful ideas. • Limited content is taught in sufficient depth to allow for the development of understanding.	• Teacher displays accurate content knowledge of all the subjects he or she teaches. • Teacher regularly implements subject- specific instructional strategies to enhance student content knowledge. • The teacher regularly highlights key concepts and ideas, and uses them as bases to connect other powerful ideas.	• Teacher displays adequate content knowledge of all the subjects he or she teaches. • Teacher sometimes implements subject-specific instructional strategies to enhance student content knowledge. • The teacher sometimes highlights key concepts and ideas, and uses them as bases to connect other powerful ideas.	• Teacher displays under-developed content knowledge in several subject areas. • Teacher rarely implements subject- specific instructional strategies to enhance student content knowledge. • Teacher does not understand key concepts and ideas in the discipline, and therefore presents content in an unconnected way.
• Teacher practices display understanding of each student's anticipated learning difficulties. • Teacher practices consistently incorporate student interests and cultural heritage. • Teacher consistently provides differentiated instructional methods and content to ensure children have the opportunity to master what is being taught.	• Teacher practices display understanding of most student anticipated learning difficulties. • Teacher practices regularly incorporate student interests and cultural heritage. • Teacher regularly provides differentiated instructional methods and content to ensure children have the opportunity to master what is being taught.	• Teacher practices display understanding of some student anticipated learning difficulties. • Teacher practices sometimes incorporate student interests and cultural heritage. • Teacher sometimes provides differentiated instructional methods and content to ensure children have the opportunity to master what is being taught.	• Teacher practices demonstrate minimal knowledge of students anticipated learning difficulties. • Teacher practices rarely incorporate student interests or cultural heritage. • Teacher practices demonstrate little differentiation of instructional methods or content.

INSTRUCTION (Continued)			
Exemplary (4)	**Proficient (3)**	**Needs Improvement (2)**	**Unsatisfactory (1)**

Thinking[11]

Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
The teacher thoroughly teaches three types of thinking: • analytical thinking where students analyze, compare and contrast, and evaluate and explain information. • practical thinking where students use, apply, and implement what they learn in real-life scenarios. • creative thinking where students create, design, imagine and suppose. • research-based thinking where students explore and review a variety of ideas, models, and solutions to problems. The teacher consistently provides opportunities where students: • generate a variety of ideas and alternatives. • analyze problems from multiple perspectives and viewpoints. • monitor their thinking to insure that they understand what they are learning, are attending to critical information, and are aware of the learning strategies that they are using and why.	The teacher thoroughly teaches two types of thinking: • analytical thinking where students analyze, compare and contrast, and evaluate and explain information. • practical thinking where students use, apply, and implement what they learn in real-life scenarios. • creative thinking where students create, design, imagine and suppose. • research-based thinking where students explore and review a variety of ideas, models, and solutions to problems. The teacher regularly provides opportunities where students: • generate a variety of ideas and alternatives. • analyze problems from multiple perspectives and viewpoints.	The teacher attempts to teach one of the following types of thinking: • analytical thinking where students analyze, compare and contrast, and evaluate and explain information. • practical thinking where students use, apply, and implement what they learn in real-life scenarios. • creative thinking where students create, design, imagine and suppose. • research-based thinking where students explore and review a variety of ideas, models, and solutions to problems. The teacher sometimes provides opportunities where students: • generate a variety of ideas and alternatives. • analyze problems from multiple perspectives and viewpoints.	The teacher implements no learning experiences that thoroughly teach any type of thinking. The teacher provides few opportunities where students: • generate a variety of ideas and alternatives. • analyze problems from multiple perspectives and viewpoints.

Problem Solving[12]

Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
The teacher implements activities that teach and reinforce 3 or more of the following problem solving types: • Abstraction • Categorization • Drawing Conclusions/Justifying Solutions • Predicting Outcomes • Observing and Experimenting • Improving Solutions • Identifying Relevant/Irrelevant Information • Generating Ideas • Creating and Designing	The teacher implements activities that teach and reinforce 2 of the following problem solving types: • Abstraction • Categorization • Drawing Conclusions/Justifying Solution • Predicting Outcomes • Observing and Experimenting • Improving Solutions • Identifying Relevant/Irrelevant Information • Generating Ideas • Creating and Designing	The teacher implements activities that teach and reinforce 1 of the following problem solving types: • Abstraction • Categorization • Drawing Conclusions/Justifying Solution • Predicting Outcomes • Observing and Experimenting • Improving Solutions • Identifying Relevant/Irrelevant Information • Generating Ideas • Creating and Designing	The teacher implements no activities that teach and reinforce any of the following problem solving types: • Abstraction • Categorization • Drawing Conclusions/Justifying Solution • Predicting Outcomes • Observing and Experimenting • Improving Solutions • Identifying Relevant/Irrelevant Information • Generating Ideas • Creating and Designing

Description of Qualifying Measure

Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
Consistent Evidence of Student Centered Learning/Student Ownership of Learning- Teacher Facilitates the Learning.	Some Evidence of Student Centered Learning/ Student Ownership of Learning- Teacher Facilitates the Learning.	Moving Towards Student Centered Learning/Student Ownership of Learning- Consistent Reliance on Teacher Direction.	Heavy emphasis on Teacher Direction- Minimal Evidence of Student Ownership of Learning.

PLANNING			
Exemplary (4)	**Proficient (3)**	**Needs Improvement (2)**	**Unsatisfactory (1)**

Instructional plans include:
• measurable and explicit goals aligned to state content standards.
• activities, materials, and assessments that:
  ○ are aligned to state standards.
  ○ are sequenced from basic to complex.
  ○ build on prior student knowledge, are relevant to students' lives, and integrate other disciplines.
  ○ provide appropriate time for student work, student reflection, and lesson and unit closure.
• evidence that plan is appropriate for the age, knowledge, and interests of all learners.
• evidence that the plan provides regular opportunities to accommodate individual student needs.
	Instructional plans include:
	• goals aligned to state content standards.
	• activities, materials, and assessments that:
	  ○ are aligned to state standards.
	  ○ are sequenced from basic to complex.
	  ○ build on prior student knowledge.
	  ○ provide appropriate time for student work, and lesson and unit closure.
	• evidence that plan is appropriate for the age, knowledge, and interests of most learners.
	• evidence that the plan provides some opportunities to accommodate individual student needs.
		Instructional plans include:
		• some goals aligned to state content standards.
		• activities, materials, and assessments that:
		  ○ are sometimes aligned to state standards.
		  ○ are sometimes sequenced from basic to complex.
		  ○ Sometimes build on prior student knowledge.
		  ○ Sometimes provide appropriate time for student work, and lesson and unit closure.
		• Some evidence that plan is appropriate for the age, knowledge, and interests of most learners.
		• evidence that the plan provides some opportunities to accommodate individual student needs.
			Instructional plans include:
			• few goals aligned to state content standards.
			• activities, materials, and assessments that:
			  ○ are rarely aligned to state standards.
			  ○ are rarely logically sequenced.
			  ○ rarely build on prior student knowledge.
			  ○ inconsistently provide time for student work, and lesson and unit closure.
			• little evidence that the plan is appropriate for the age, knowledge, or interests of the learners.
			• little evidence that the plan provides some opportunities to accommodate individual student needs.

Assignments require students to: • organize, interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information rather than reproduce it. • draw conclusions, make generalizations, and produce arguments that are supported through extended writing. • connect what they are learning to experiences, observations, feelings, or situations significant in their daily lives both inside and outside of school.	Assignments require students to: • interpret and analyze information rather than reproduce it. • draw conclusions and support them through writing. • connect what they are learning to prior learning and some life experiences.	Assignments require students to: • interpret information rather than reproduce it. • Sometimes draw conclusions and support them through writing. • Sometimes connect what they are learning to prior learning	Assignments require students to: • mostly reproduce information. • rarely draw conclusions and support them through writing. • rarely connect what they are learning to prior learning or life experiences.
Assessment Plans: • are consistently aligned with state content standards. • have clear appropriate measurement criteria. • measure student performance in more than three ways (e.g., in the form of a project, experiment, presentation, essay, short answer, or multiple choice test. • require extended written tasks. • are portfolio-based with clear illustrations of student progress toward state content standards. • include descriptions of how assessment results will be used to inform future instruction.	Assessment Plans: • are aligned with state content standards. • have clear measurement criteria. • measure student performance in more than two ways (e.g., in the form of a project, experiment, presentation, essay, short answer, or multiple choice test). • require written tasks. • include performance checks throughout the school year.	Assessment Plans: • are sometimes aligned with state content standards. • have measurement criteria. • measure student performance in more than one way (e.g., in the form of a project, experiment, presentation, essay, short answer, or multiple choice test). • require limited written tasks. • include performance checks but may not be monitored consistently.	Assessment Plans: • are rarely aligned with state content standards. • have ambiguous measurement criteria. • measure student performance in less than two ways (e.g., in the form of a project, experiment, presentation, essay, short answer, or multiple choice test). • include performance checks, although the purpose of these checks is not clear.
Consistent Evidence of Student Centered Learning/Student Ownership of Learning- Teacher Facilitates the Learning.	Some Evidence of Student Centered Learning/ Student Ownership of Learning- Teacher Facilitates the Learning.	Moving Towards Student Centered Learning/Student Ownership of Learning- Consistent Reliance on Teacher Direction.	Heavy emphasis on Teacher Direction- Minimal Evidence of Student Ownership of Learning.

ENVIRONMENT			
Exemplary (4)	**Proficient (3)**	**Needs Improvement (2)**	**Unsatisfactory (1)**
Expectations[15]			
• Teacher sets high and demanding academic expectations for every student. • Teacher encourages students to learn from mistakes. • Teacher creates learning opportunities where all students can experience success. • Students take initiative and follow through with their own work. • Teacher optimizes instructional time, teaches more material, and demands better performance from every student.	• Teacher sets high and demanding academic expectations for every student. • Teacher encourages students to learn from mistakes. • Teacher creates learning opportunities where most students can experience success. • Students complete their work according to teacher expectations.	• Teacher sets high and demanding academic expectations for most students. • Teacher encourages students to learn from mistakes. • Teacher creates learning opportunities where some students can experience success. • Teacher expectations for student work are not clear for all students.	• Teacher expectations are not sufficiently high for every student. • Teacher creates an environment where mistakes and failure are not viewed as learning experiences. • Students demonstrate little or no pride in the quality of their work.
Managing Student Behavior[17]			
• Students are consistently well-behaved, and on task. • Teacher and students establish clear rules and expectations for learning and behavior. • The teacher consistently uses techniques such as intrinsic motivation, social approval, contingent activities, and consequences to maintain appropriate student behavior. • The teacher overlooks inconsequential behavior. • The teacher deals with students who have caused disruptions rather than the entire class. • The teacher attends to disruptions quickly, firmly and consistently with no interruption to instruction.	• Students are mostly well-behaved, and on task, some minor learning disruptions may occur. • Teacher establishes rules for learning and behavior. • The teacher uses several techniques such as intrinsic motivation, social approval, contingent activities, and consequences to maintain appropriate student behavior. • The teacher overlooks most inconsequential behavior, but other times addresses it stopping the lesson. • The teacher attends to disruptions firmly and consistently with minimal interruption to instruction.	• Student behavior is inconsistent with several students off task, minor learning disruptions are frequent. • Teacher establishes rules for learning and behavior. • The teacher uses some techniques such as intrinsic motivation, social approval, contingent activities, and consequences to maintain appropriate student behavior. • The teacher overlooks some inconsequential behavior, but other times addresses it stopping the lesson. • The teacher inconsistently deals with students who have caused disruptions, and frequently addresses the entire class.	• Students are not well-behaved and are often off-task. • Teacher establishes few rules for learning and behavior. • The teacher uses few techniques to maintain appropriate student behavior. • The teacher does not distinguish between inconsequential behavior and inappropriate behavior. • Disruptions frequently interrupt instruction.
Environment[18]			
The classroom • welcomes all members and guests. • is organized and understandable to all students and encourages student collaboration. • supplies, equipment, and resources are easily and readily accessible for all students. • displays student work that frequently changes. • is consistently arranged to promote individual and group learning.	The classroom • welcomes most members and guests. • is organized and understandable to most students. • supplies, equipment, and resources are accessible for most students. • displays student work. • is arranged to promote individual and group learning.	The classroom • welcomes some members and guests. • is organized and understandable to some students. • supplies, equipment, and resources are accessible. • displayed student work is not updated regularly. • is sometimes arranged to promote individual and group learning.	The classroom • is somewhat cold and uninviting. • is not well organized and understandable to students. • supplies, equipment, and resources are difficult to access. • does not display student work. • is not arranged to promote group learning.

ENVIRONMENT (Continued)

	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
Respectful Culture[19]	• Teacher-student interactions demonstrate caring and respect for one another. • Students exhibit caring and respect for one another. • Teacher seeks out, and is receptive to the interests and opinions of all students. • Positive relationships and interdependence characterize the classroom.	• Teacher-student interactions are mostly friendly, but may reflect occasional inconsistencies. • Students exhibit respect for the teacher, and are often polite to each other. • Teacher is often receptive to the interests and opinions of students.	• Teacher-student interactions are sometimes friendly, but may reflect occasional inconsistencies, favoritism, or disregard for students' cultures. • Students exhibit respect for the teacher, and are generally polite to each other. • Teacher is sometimes receptive to the interests and opinions of students.	• Teacher-student interactions are sometimes authoritarian, negative, or inappropriate. • Students exhibit disrespect for the teacher. • Student interaction is characterized by conflict, sarcasm, or put-downs. • Teacher is not receptive to interests and opinions of students.
Description of Class Wide Behavior	• Consistent Evidence of Student Centered Learning/Student Ownership of Learning- Teacher Facilitates the Learning.	• Some Evidence of Student Centered Learning/ Student Ownership of Learning- Teacher Facilitates the Learning.	• Moving Towards Student Centered Learning/Student Ownership of Learning- Consistent Reliance on Teacher Direction.	• Heavy Emphasis on Teacher Direction- Minimal Evidence of Student Ownership of Learning.

»Professionalism

	Performance Standard	Exemplary 4	Proficient 3	Needs Improvement 2	Unsatisfactory 1
Growing and Developing Professionally[20]	1. The educator is prompt, prepared, and participates in professional development meetings, bringing student artifacts (student work) when requested.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	2. The educator appropriately attempts to implement new learning in the classroom following presentation in professional development meetings.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	3. The educator develops and works on a yearly plan for new learning based on analyses of school improvement plans and new goals, self-assessment, and input from the teacher leader and principal observations.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	4. The educator selects specific activities, content knowledge, or pedagogical skills to enhance and improve his/her proficiency.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Reflecting on Teaching[21]	5. The educator makes thoughtful and accurate assessments of his/her lessons' effectiveness as evidenced by the self-reflection after each observation.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	6. The educator offers specific actions to improve his/her teaching.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	7. The educator accepts responsibilities contributing to school improvement.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	8. The educator utilizes student achievement data to address strengths and weaknesses of students and guide instructional decisions.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Community Involvement[22]	9. The educator actively supports school activities and events.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
School Responsibilities[23]	10. The educator accepts leadership responsibilities and/or assists in peers contributing to a safe and orderly school environment.	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely

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