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A Case Study of School Leaders' Understanding and Practice in Providing Feedback During the Teacher Observation Process

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A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL LEADERS' UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE IN PROVIDING FEEDBACK DURING THE TEACHER OBSERVATION PROCESS

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation work to my two children, Katrina and Jared, who serve as my continuous motivation to pursue my dreams. I want them to believe that every opportunity is available to them and that they deserve access to those opportunities. I want to demonstrate to them that perseverance, determination, and hard work is how dreams become realities.

I also want to dedicate this work to all the students, teachers, and school leaders I have had the pleasure to work with on my professional journey thus far. This research is grounded firmly in a belief that every child can learn, and that teaching and learning is truly the heart of education. It should be every educator's reason for heading into the classroom, the school, the office, or onto the campus each and every day.

Finally I would like to dedicate my work to the family of educators that raised me. So many have touched my life, and I thank every teacher and professor who inspired me, encouraged me, challenged me, and mentored me.

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ABSTRACT

New teacher evaluation reforms in the state of New Jersey and across the country have put an increased emphasis on the role of classroom observations as a method to improve teacher practice. School leaders are expected to facilitate the observation process and provide meaningful feedback that leads to teacher engagement in professional learning that results in instructional improvement and increased student achievement. To meet state mandates for increased number of classroom observations for all teachers and adoption of state-approved evaluation tools, such as the Danielson Framework, districts have increased the work demands of administrators. Yet there has been little guidance provided regarding the professional development of school administrators to enhance their ability to facilitate instructional improvement, despite research showing the direct and indirect impact instructional leadership can have on classroom instruction and student achievement.

This qualitative case study explored the perceptions and understanding of five secondary administrators of their feedback giving practice during the classroom observation process. Specifically, the study describes how administrators feel they employ the characteristics of charismatic leadership, active leadership supervision, and leadership content knowledge to provide feedback to secondary mathematics teachers. An initial theoretical framework of feedback giving informed both the data collection methods used and the initial analysis of data. In the first phase of the study, key word and

phrase analysis from questionnaire responses were used to describe ways in which leaders fulfilled their instructional role and to describe how leaders situated feedback giving within this role. In the second phase, data was collected about administrator's perception of their feedback giving and their actual feedback giving practices through debriefing sessions after co-observations with the participant researcher, review of the corresponding written observation reports, and a focus group interview. Findings were organized and compared by participant and then by described practices that fell under each leadership characteristic framed in the feedback giving model. Three major findings emerged from this action research study. First, leaders demonstrated an integrated and differentially applied use of charismatic leadership, active leadership supervision, and leadership content knowledge in their feedback giving. Second, leaders perceived the feedback process in two distinct parts, feedback formulation and feedback delivery, and utilized the three leadership characteristics differently during each part. Finally, the third aspect of feedback giving was the feedback source, the individual school leader. Each leader differed in their reported self-efficacy and reliance on each of the leadership characteristics during their feedback giving in an individualized effort to make their feedback as meaningful and effective as possible. Based on these findings, the model of feedback giving was revised to reflect the integrated employment of the three leadership characteristics in feedback giving and the three distinct components of feedback giving where these leadership characteristics can be employed. The findings and revised models have implications for understanding how school leaders conceptualize their feedback giving practice and in the design of professional development that seeks to improve feedback giving. Professional learning for leaders should develop skills and the capability

to use approaches that fall within both charismatic leadership and active leadership supervision. Additionally professional learning should improve leadership content knowledge in different content areas, as well as an understanding of how general instructional practices are best applied within different content areas. Finally, this action research study recommends that professional learning for the secondary leadership team include opportunities for administrators to model and practice the integrated application of these leadership skills across both the formulation and delivery phases of feedback giving, and in collaborative group sessions. Professional learning within leader communities will result in both improved individual leader capacity but also in a more calibrated feedback giving practice organizationally so that teachers will receive more consistent, higher quality feedback across the teacher evaluation process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Teacher Evaluation

In the ongoing cycle of educational reform, the last five years have seen many changes in national policy and in the state of New Jersey, specifically. In 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were presented as a set of national standards in math and English Language Arts. The CCSS defined the K-12 progression of knowledge and skills (practices) students needed to be college and career ready by high school graduation, such as the ability to understand informational text, the use of evidence in argumentation, and modeling and reasoning in mathematics (Achieve, 2013).

In 2013, the Next Generation Science Standards were released as a set of national K-12 science standards that identified both science content knowledge and science and engineering practices that every student should know and be able to engage in. Along with these standards has come the rollout of new technology-delivered state assessments of CCSS learning, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and the enactment of new teacher evaluation policies (Dietel, 2011; Hull 2013). Many states, such as New Jersey, Illinois, and Ohio, have adopted value-added models of teacher evaluation that tie teacher performance to student performance on these new high-stakes tests (Callahan & Sadeghi,

2015; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015; Sporte & Jiang, 2016). The move to value-added models of teacher evaluation has sparked debate over the efficacy of these models as true measures of individual teacher effectiveness in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011, 2012). The standards and the aligned assessments have raised the bar of what all students should know and how all students must demonstrate that learning. At the same time, the way teacher performance is evaluated has significantly changed. New teacher evaluation systems now include multiple measures, including classroom observation models based on professional teaching standards, such as the Danielson Framework, and measures that link teachers to individual student achievement outcomes (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2011).

At the state level, the Teacher Evaluation and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act (TEACHNJ) was passed in 2012, and funded by a $38 million award from the Obama-era Race to the Top (RTTT) federal competition (NJDOE, 2015a). Race to the Top (RTTT) awarded funds to states who revamped state educational policy to include adoption of new curriculum standards, reform of teacher evaluation and tenure processes, and the use of technology-enhanced standardized testing (NJDOE, 2015c). As part of TEACHNJ legislation, a value-added model of educator evaluation, AchieveNJ, was to be implemented by all districts. AchieveNJ tied teacher performance to individual student outcomes in two ways. First, all teachers developed student growth objectives (SGO) that measured student growth in an area of targeted instruction. The SGO required the use of preliminary student data to determine an area of instructional focus, and teachers then identified multiple instructional strategies they would use to deliver

instruction and established student performance targets for a post-instruction assessment, such as "80% of students will score at least a 8 out of 10 on the argumentation rubric to assess ability to develop a written argument that includes a claim, evidence, and rationale" (NJDOE, 2015a). Second, teachers of math and English Language Arts in grades three through eight also received student growth percentiles (SGP) scores based on student performance on the new state assessment, PARCC (NJDOE, 2015a).

A third component of the evaluation system consisted of a teacher practice score based on two to three classroom observations. Observations would be performed using a state-approved classroom observation tool, such as the Charlotte Danielson: Framework for Teaching or the Stronge Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Performance System (NJDOE, 2015a). Approved observation tools were rubric-based with four rating levels: highly effective, effective, partially effective, and ineffective (NJDOE, 2015a, 2015c).

As an example of a rubric-based observation tool, the Danielson Framework defines four domains of teacher practice: 1) planning and preparation; 2) classroom environment; 3) instruction; and 4) professional responsibilities. Each domain is then broken down into component practices. Teacher practice can be rated from highly effective to ineffective by comparing evidence from observed instruction to standard descriptions at each rating level. For instance, within Instruction (Domain Three) there are five interrelated components of teaching that can be observed: a) communicating with students; b) using questioning and discussion techniques; c) engaging students in learning; d) using assessment in instruction; and e) demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness (Danielson, 2007).

While there was always a requirement for both tenured and non-tenured teachers to be formally observed, former state policy did not dictate a number of observations to be done per year, and the quality and rigor of observation tools used varied widely among districts. In practice, many New Jersey tenured teachers reported not being observed at all or only being observed once by a principal, supervisor, or other administrator during the school year prior to the 2013-2014 implementation of ACHIEVE NJ (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015). This former evaluation practice in New Jersey mirrored trends nationwide that were characterized by classroom observations that were

> short and infrequent (most are based on two or fewer classroom observations, each 60 minutes or less), conducted by administrators without extensive training, and influenced by powerful cultural forces – in particular, an expectation among teachers that they will be among the vast majority rated as top performers (Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D., 2009, p. 6).

Under ACHIEVE NJ, the current teacher evaluation policy for New Jersey, the two measures that tie teacher performance to student performance determine up to 45% of the annual summative teacher evaluation score. The other 55% is based on the teacher practice score from classroom observations. The teacher practice score accounts for 85% of the summative evaluation rating for teachers in non-state tested content areas (NJDOE, 2015).

The ACHIEVE NJ requirement that all teachers, regardless of tenure status, be observed in the classroom three times a year using a standards-based observation tool was a major shift for most teachers and administrators in the state of New Jersey. One of the more popularly chosen rubric-based observation tools in New Jersey was the

Danielson Framework for Teaching, adapted from *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Danielson, 2007). Along with the use of more rigorous observation tools that aligned to professional teaching standards (The Danielson Group, 2014), came an expectation that school leaders would engage in pre- and post-conferences with teachers to provide feedback for growth to improve instruction as part of their observation practice (NJDOE, 2015). Charlotte Danielson, herself, has repeatedly emphasized the need for teacher evaluation to be used as a tool for instructional improvement, and not just accountability (Danielson, 2007, 2014; Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Yet multiple studies of new teacher evaluation system implementation (Danielson, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015) have documented a need to train school leaders in facilitating instructional improvement through the use of classroom observation tools as part of a successful implementation.

Despite an expectation for increased administrator engagement in feedback giving and research (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 2010; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2008) establishing a connection between the instructional leadership actions of school leaders and improved student outcomes, ACHIEVE NJ provided little to no additional funding to train administrators in providing instructional feedback and no specific directive for districts to provide professional development beyond the initial training on use of new evaluation tools and an annual calibration on evidence collection (NJDOE, 2015).

In contrast to the recommendations that teacher evaluation (TE) systems be used primarily as a formative instructional improvement tool (Danielson, 2007; Stronge and Tucker, 2003), the ways in which TE has been implemented continue to be problematic at the state, district and school levels. States have used it as an accountability measure, and the most recent TE reforms have tied classroom observation to student performance on high-stakes tests with value-added models (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011). The linking of these two measures has created increased pressure on school leaders to give effective ratings to all teachers. It undermines the use of classroom observation and feedback giving to initiate authentic co-reflection on teaching practice between the school leader and teachers (Danielson, 2007, 2014; Stronge & Tucker, 2003).

Districts have come to rely on TE, and specifically ratings given for classroom observations, as the primary tool for making retention and placement decisions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011). There has been a failure to operationalize TE across multiple organizational structures, including as part of professional development and new teacher induction (Odden, 2012; Sinnema & Robinson, 2007).

At the school level, school leaders struggle to dedicate the time and effort needed to serve as instructional leaders and engage in meaningful feedback conversations with teachers. The time to serve in the instructional leader role competes with building management responsibilities (Sinnema & Robinson, 2007). Another barrier emerges at the secondary level as high school and middle school leaders contend with providing instructional feedback to teachers in content-specific areas where they themselves do not hold content expertise (Lochmiller, 2016; Rigby, Larbi-Cherif, Rosenquist, Sharpe,

Cobb, & Smith, 2017). Lochmiller (2016) found that math and science teachers tended to ignore administrator feedback because they perceived it lacked an understanding of the nuanced pedagogical choices they made in teaching content-based ideas. Rigby et al. (2017) found that while secondary administrators have begun to devote more time to the observation process, their feedback remains content-neutral and superficial, focused on basic instructional practices of student expectation setting and classroom management. Teachers perceived administrators more as compliance monitors instead of instructional change agents. Siskin (1991) established that distinct department-based subcultures exist that create barriers to providing feedback that teachers would willingly accept and act upon. School leaders engaging in the classroom observation process often expressed a reluctance to commit fully to the teacher evaluation process due to lack of time, lack of training, and a lack of belief that full investment in the process would lead to student performance improvement (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). This lack of full leader engagement was reflected in negative teacher perceptions of evaluator performance in leading the observation process. Callahan and Sadeghi (2015) found that reporting teachers felt the value of being observed had diminished despite being observed more often. Analysis of teacher comments revealed that several teachers felt administrators were more focused on getting the observations done in real-time than on teacher-centered observations, and the study found no significant change or negative effect in teacher change actions taken based on feedback given in several areas of instructional practice.

1.2 Problem of Practice

The Urban Rim School District (URSD) adopted the Danielson Framework for Teaching as its state-approved evaluation tool at the start of the 2015-2016 school year.

The year prior central office leadership encouraged administrators to use the Framework rubric and language during pre- and post- observation conferences to offer verbal feedback even though the old evaluation tool was still in use. By the end of the first year of adoption the central office administration began to articulate the move to the Danielson Framework as an opportunity to use the tool to improve instructional practice through feedback interactions and the use of observation data to identify professional development needs. However, this represented a shift in leadership expectations from past practice using the old evaluation tool.

In the first year, all current administrators received 12 hours of in-person training in the use of the tool from the Danielson Group, followed by 20 hours of online training to complete the Danielson certification course through Teachscape. The focus of this training was primarily on the collection and classification of observation evidence into the rubric components of Domain 2: Classroom Environment and Domain 3: Instruction, and not on the leadership practice of feedback giving.

While the Danielson Framework includes 22 components of teacher practice across the four domains, Danielson identifies the instructional domain, and specifically the component of student engagement (3c) as the heart of the framework, and describes the other components as necessary for cognitive student engagement to occur (Danielson, 2007; Griffin, 2013). In the second year of Danielson adoption (2016-2017), the district leadership identified this domain as the greatest area of need for instructional improvement across all schools, and specifically at the secondary level based on review of first year observation data from formal observations and walkthroughs.

The Danielson Framework provides a descriptive rubric ranging from highly effective to ineffective by which evaluators can collect specific evidence of both teacher and student actions in teaching and learning and compare to the rubric component descriptions (elements) to determine teacher practice ratings in each component, and to formulate and organize feedback.

The former observation tool, in contrast, was a yes/no checklist of mostly procedural teacher actions that were disconnected from any observable student indicators of learning or cognitive engagement (see Appendix A, Figure A.2). The checklist did not provide evaluators with a rating rubric or any descriptive guidance on what constituted effective or ineffective practice for each measure. Inherent in each checklist measure was an assumption that certain teacher actions, such as having a lesson plan aligned to Common Core standards available, would necessarily result in student learning, without having to observe any specific evidence of student learning (Sinnema & Robinson, 2007). Further, the decision to rate *yes* or *no* for many of the measures was subjective and dependent on each administrator's own interpretation and understanding of effective teacher practice. Additionally, the written observation report template did not specifically require feedback. Using the former evaluation tool, almost all of the secondary teachers received observation scores in the highly effective range.

During a district leadership meeting at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year the superintendent shared commentary from a state audit of the district's teacher evaluation system using the former tool. The report stated that the percentage of highly effective teacher ratings (score of 3.7 or higher on a 4-point scale) was too high, with 97% of teachers receiving a highly effective rating. The state audit reported the high level

of teacher effectiveness ratings did not correlate with the below state average standardized testing scores for students across the district. This was particularly the case for high school math courses, where 67%, 68%, and 75% of students were non-proficient on the 2014-2015 Algebra II, Algebra I, and Geometry PARCC tests, respectively (NJ School Performance Report, 2014).

Despite this discrepancy between teacher evaluation ratings and student achievement scores, using the former tool, there was little incentive or direction for administrators to provide feedback for instructional improvement or prompting for teachers to reflect on their practice. The lack of a requirement to observe specific instances of teachers facilitating cognitive student engagement in order to obtain an effective rating severely limited the need for administrators to critically observe teacher practice and provide meaningful and substantive feedback in areas like questioning strategies, the use of instructional grouping, or the use of formative assessment to differentiate instruction. It also limited any discussion of equity-oriented instruction, such as increasing engagement through the use of culturally-relevant texts in a predominantly minority school or the use scaffolding lessons to engage learners at all ability levels in higher-order cognitive tasks. (Haberman, 1991; Howard, 2010; Rousseau & Tate, 2003; Tomlinson, 2015).

The shift to the Danielson Framework provided administrators with student engagement indicators based on evidence of student actions, not just teacher actions. Additionally it provided descriptive distinctions between partially effective, effective, and highly effective teacher practice in multiple instructional areas (components) by which evaluators can compare and rate observed teacher practice. Despite the use of a

more rigorous observation tool, by the end of the second year of Danielson adoption central office leadership shared teacher union concerns that there was a lack of consistency and frequency in both written and verbal feedback being provided to teachers who were also trying to adjust to the new instructional expectations set forth in the Danielson Framework. At the same time, the central office leadership re-iterated to evaluating school leaders, including principals, assistant principals, and content area supervisors, an emphasis on the use of the new tool to drive instructional improvement for underperforming individual and groups of teachers (by content area, grade level, or building) as evidenced by local and state student data.

In line with national trends, the new requirements for teacher evaluation are shifting the major work of URSD school leaders toward increased instructional leadership (Robinson, 2010; Spina, Buckley, & Puchner, 2014). The implementation of the new evaluation system has increased the number of observations required for both tenured and non-tenured teachers and transitioned administrators from using a binary checklist of teacher actions to a four-level rating system based on rubrics of research-based practices of teacher effectiveness. Additionally, administrators are expected to lead pre- and post-conferences to provide feedback for instructional improvement.

There are eight administrators responsible for evaluating secondary math teachers in URSD, two principals, four assistant principals, and a STEM and special education supervisor. Six of them chose to participate in this observational case study. Throughout this study, I will refer to them using the terms school leader and administrator interchangeably. Implementation of the new teacher evaluation system has created an increased responsibility on all these administrators to complete more classroom

observations, as well as to conduct more pre- and post- observation conferences with teachers. Using the Danielson Framework, administrators are expected to document evidence of teacher practices observed in five *power* components selected by the district, including component 3c: Engaging students in learning. Additionally, the district expectation is that administrators will provide written feedback to teachers within the observation report, and use this feedback as a discussion starting point during post-observation conferences. Many administrators have expressed mixed feelings about the need and workload burden of switching to the new evaluation tool. These feelings mirror those expressed by school administrators in studies done in other states implementing new teacher evaluation systems under the RTTT requirements (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). Leaders without a positive sense of their ability to provide feedback and engage in conversations about instructional improvement in ways that effect teacher change will look to comply with the accountability requirements of TE without fully engaging in the instructional improvement process.

This action research study will focus on only one of the factors identified in the Chicago study for successful implementation of a new teacher evaluation system – school leader capacity to provide targeted instructional guidance or feedback. Specifically the school leader's understanding and practice in providing feedback in year three of the new evaluation implementation for the Urban Rim School district will be explored.

1.3 Research Purpose

As the Urban Rim School District (URSD) enters its third full year using the Danielson Framework this study, in a broad sense, explores the evolving instructional leadership practices of eight administrators in the middle school and high school of

URSD. The study specifically examines the perception these administrators have about their feedback giving practices, their ability to provide instructional feedback, and their beliefs about what leadership characteristics are required to provide feedback that functions as an instructional leadership method to improve teaching practice.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are school leaders' perceptions of their feedback giving practice to motivate professional learning and instructional improvement?
2. What leadership characteristics do leaders identify as important in the feedback giving process?

1.5 Methodology and Significance of Study

This study is action research using a qualitative observational case study method to explore administrator perceptions about their capacity to provide instructional feedback. The decision to explore the perceptions held about observation and feedback practices of administrators in my district through action research is rooted in my own pragmatic worldview of educational improvement in general. Creswell (2009) uses a definition of worldview as the "basic set of beliefs that guide action" (p. 6) to emphasize how one's own belief, area of expertise, and past research experiences help to determine not only the research topic, but the methods that are chosen to explore that topic. My identified problem of practice (PoP) arose from initial observations and identification of potential implementation challenges that my district, and almost all New Jersey districts, would face in transitioning to a reformed evaluation system. In thinking about the research approach I would pursue, I wanted the findings to provide some aspect of insight

into the challenges that district administrators, including myself, might encounter in fulfilling the role of instructional leader and then develop a local plan to develop that capacity and support leaders in the role. Research pointing to the positive impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes provides a rationale for this work. Studies have shown that school leaders can have direct effects on student outcomes through interaction with teachers concerning instruction. "Principals can influence student learning directly by conducting regular classroom visits, providing constructive feedback to teachers, and maintaining ongoing communications with teachers about instructional issues (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 2010; Nettles & Herrington, 2007)" (Zhaohui, Wolff, Kilmer, & Yager, 2017, p.121). Studying leadership capacity to provide feedback to teachers to improve instructional practices would be a first step in improving the teaching and learning in the district. Strong leadership could result in a stronger professional learning culture and improved teacher practice, and better outcomes for all learners. Thus the action research to critically examine the practices and perceptions of administrators as a first step in improving instructional leadership practice could be "facilitated in such a way as to promote more systemic types of improvements" (Mertler, 2014, p. 23).

1.6 Summary

School leaders are tasked with providing instructional leadership that leads to effective teacher practice and improved student outcomes. The current body of literature concerning instructional leadership has identified leadership variables and some specific leadership practices, such as providing instructional feedback and engaging teachers in feedback interactions, needed to change teacher practice. However, little has been researched about the actual capacity of leaders to engage in these practices. This case

study will take a first look at the practice of school leaders in one district to carry out feedback giving during the observation process. Developing an understanding of perceived capability in providing feedback, and then later comparing it to actual practices as evidenced in written observations and teacher surveys is needed to design a targeted professional learning plan for school leaders that will improve this instructional leadership function in each leader.

1.7 Dissertation Overview

This introductory chapter has served to present the problem of practice, research question, and purpose of this study, while providing background context to the issue of teacher evaluation in the Urban Rim School District. This chapter has also presented an overview of the action research design and its potential benefit to address the problem of practice in a way that leads to improved outcomes within the district. Chapter two will provide a review of the relevant research literature and a theoretical framework for feedback giving upon which the case study will be designed. Chapter three will outline the research design methods that will be used to collect data from participants. Chapter four will present an analysis of findings from these methods. The final chapter will draw conclusions about leadership needs and present an improvement action plan to address those needs, as well as recommendations for future research.

1.8 Glossary of Key Terms

Coflection: a social learning process within professional learning experiences that involve interactions between educators that are necessary to challenge teacher attitudes and biases that underlie inequitable practices in the classroom.

Observation practice: the ability of classroom observers to identify instructional practices that facilitate student learning, and to provide feedback to the teacher on ways to improve their instructional practice.

Observation (Teacher Practice) Tool: the instrument used by an evaluator to measure and rate teacher practice during a classroom observation. In the Urban Rim School District, the prior observation tool was a checklist, and the new evaluation tool is the Danielson Framework- a rubric-based tool with a four-level rating scale.

School Administrator/School Leader: Person who holds any school administrator certification that allows for formal supervision and evaluation of teacher performance, including principals, assistant principals, and curriculum and instruction supervisors. Throughout this work, the term school leader will be limited to and used synonymously with the term school administrator. In broader contexts, the term school leader can include other educators who take on leadership responsibilities within a school or district, such as instructional coaches or teacher leaders.

Student Engagement: The level at which a student demonstrates behaviors that signify and facilitate cognitive learning.

Teacher Evaluation: The way in which the job performance of a teacher or group of teachers is evaluated. May be evaluated using a single measure or multiple measures. ACHIEVE NJ is the state teacher evaluation system that includes multiple measures of teacher performance, including evaluating teacher practice through classroom observations using a state-approved observation tool.

Teacher Practice (Instructional Practice): The set of behaviors a teacher engages in during the planning, preparation, delivery, and reflection of instruction.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a theoretical basis for instructional leadership and its connection to improving instructional practice. It will present a framework for feedback giving with a discussion of proposed leadership characteristics needed to effectively perform this instructional leadership function. The subsequent literature review will serve to contextualize and describe the evolution of instructional leadership and teacher performance evaluation. The review of literature will also discuss relevant studies that have identified connections between instructional leadership, teacher practice and professional learning, and student outcomes.

2.1 A Framework for Feedback Giving

In the Urban Rim School District the observation process includes two or three classroom observations that may be announced or unannounced. Post observation conferences are conducted for all observations, and pre-observation conferences are conducted for announced observations. During the observation process, feedback, when offered, is delivered through both written comments and verbally during conferencing. The opportunity to provide verbal feedback through conferencing is present both before and after the observation. Pre-observation conferences can entail feedback and questioning on the proposed lesson plan that asks the teacher to reflect on the intended

learning outcomes and the instructional strategies, learning tasks, and assessment techniques the teacher will use to progress students toward the stated outcomes. Feedback during the post-observation conference provides an opportunity to facilitate reflection on how effectively the designed lesson was delivered and whether it resulted in the desired learning outcomes. Additionally, feedback discussions could include reviewing student data to engage in instructional decision-making for future lessons and trouble-shooting classroom management or instructional issues. (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Danielson, 2007; Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979) described a conceptual framework of feedback giving and the process by which it could direct behavioral improvement within performance-oriented organizations. They framed feedback giving in the organizational setting with a social psychological orientation and as "an essential feature of the interpersonal interactions necessary for role learning and for the influence of others such as is present in the leadership function (see, e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1978; Meyer, Kay, & French, 1965)" (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979, p. 350). This framework connects to tenets of situated cognition theory and adult learning theory that require professional learning to occur within communities of learning where meaning is constructed through both problem-based experiences and social interactions such as though that occur between leader and teacher during the observation process (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Hung, Looi, & Koh, 2004).

Ilgen et al. (1979) described the nature of feedback as having three major components, the source, the feedback message, and the recipient's perception and response to feedback. The source conveys the feedback message to the recipient. The

recipient judges the usefulness, or utility, of the feedback, decides whether to accept the feedback and then how to respond to the feedback. Feedback reception is influenced by the recipient's personal characteristics, the content and quality of the feedback message, and the characteristics of the source.

While Ilgen et al. (1979) distinguished between the feedback source and the feedback message they recognized that the two elements were confounded in their influence on the recipient and his or her response to the feedback giving. Specifically, Ilgen et al. proposed that the individual source's credibility and trustworthiness, along with the power dynamics that exist within hierarchical organizations, were three important factors that could influence the recipient's perception of feedback utility and motivation to respond to the feedback. Within this literature review and pursuant study, credibility will be defined as the recipient's perception of the source's content expertise to the task of teaching and learning and their ability to evaluate the effectiveness of individual teaching practice within the observation setting. Trustworthiness will relate to the relational trust between the source and the recipient, and will include the recipient's perception of the source's intent in providing feedback. Both credibility and trustworthiness of the source, in addition to the content and quality of the actual feedback message, can influence the recipient's acceptance of the feedback. Acceptance refers to the belief that the feedback given reflects an accurate interpretation of performance (Ilgen et al., 1979). Differences in leadership content expertise, the nature of interpersonal interactions that occur to develop trust, and how a source positions his or herself within the power structure in relation to the recipient can account for varying degrees of

feedback acceptance and consequent response from teachers during the feedback process (Ilgen et al., 1979, p. 359).

Elements of the feedback message that influence its acceptance and response by the recipient include its sign (whether it is perceived as positive or negative), its consistency (how well it aligns to previously received information on performance), and the evidence provided as support for the feedback. Thus feedback, whether positive or negative, that is delivered in a consistent format, consistently focused on specific performance attributes, and provided with specific evidence of individual performance practices, should, in theory, be better accepted, and thus acted on, than inconsistent or vague feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979). Significant to this case study, Ilgen et al. (1979) highlight a specific source behavior that could influence the consistency, and thus credibility, of feedback giving as a systemic function within an organization. Providing negative feedback is an unpleasant task for the source, and one that many evaluators will avoid.

> This tendency of supervisors [school leaders] to favor positive feedback would be more pronounced when they are dealing with subordinates who are very likely to remain in the work unit, i.e. those who have performed most of their duties adequately although not excellently or those who, for some reason, cannot be dropped from the work unit even though performance has been marginal (p. 360).

This tendency to only provide critical feedback to those whose job continuance is conditional may be a critical factor in the feedback giving practice that has developed thus far among the leadership team within the Urban Rim School District. Teacher tenure in the state of New Jersey is given automatically on the first day of their fifth year in a

district. Once tenured, a teacher can only be removed for reasons of performance by undergoing tenure removal charges, a time-consuming and costly process that takes approximately three years (NJDOE, 2015c). At the start off this study sixteen of the thirty secondary math teachers had tenure, and two of the five teachers observed during co-observations had tenure.

The final two components in feedback giving consist of the recipient's perception and response to the feedback. The perception of feedback has been described above as including both the teacher's sense of the utility of the feedback and subsequent acceptance of the feedback given, as well as how both the source and the quality of the feedback message influence this perception. The response to feedback is additionally impacted by two characteristics of the recipient which can be influenced and appealed to by the source to create motivation to engage in the improvement process. These two characteristics are *expectancy* and *intrinsic motivation*. Expectancy is the belief that engaging in professional learning or improvement efforts will lead to more effective performance. Intrinsic motivation deals with a person's sense of self-competence to a task or performance. Feedback can be used to provide information to the recipient that they can then use to judge their own competence. A second aspect of intrinsic motivation deals with personal control in the performance or performance improvement. In the teacher evaluation setting this refers to the extent within the feedback giving process that the teacher feels they have free choice in undertaking improvement behaviors. With any feedback giving process that serves a formal evaluative function, there is always some loss of personal control simply because the source (evaluator) must monitor, observe, and collect evidence of performance. However, opportunities to provide the recipient choice

and control in the feedback giving and instructional improvement process exist. Allowing teacher choice in what lesson is observed, what areas of instruction they would like to receive feedback in, and choice of what professional learning activities they engage in to improve performance are all examples of such opportunities to increase the sense of personal control and thus enhance intrinsic motivation.

While the review of literature done by Ilgen et al. (1979) provided a conceptual framework for feedback giving, it also identified several gaps in the understanding of feedback giving at the time that required further research, as well as delineating specific implications for the study of feedback giving in work settings. Three deficiencies in the literature were identified that are relevant to this study. The first is that more research was needed to understand how feedback, especially negative feedback, was perceived by the recipient, and how these perceptions can be influenced. Feedback must be accurately perceived to result in intended responses, such as engaging in professional learning or change of practice. Yet feedback, especially negative feedback that is critical in re-directing behavior, is often misperceived, ignored, or dismissed by the recipient. The second gap exists in understanding the nature of how the source mediates how accurately feedback is perceived. The analysis of Ilgen et al. (1979) suggested that credibility, trustworthiness, and the source's power status influence how feedback is perceived. However, further research on source characteristics and their impact on the feedback giving pathway were identified as needs within their analysis. The analysis also suggested potential avoidance behavior of human sources of feedback when delivering negative feedback. This could include avoiding steps in the feedback giving process, written and/or verbal, or distorting the feedback message, such as downplaying the

overall importance of an ineffective practice or sandwiching negative feedback in between more positive feedback. Further research on the occurrence and nature of any avoidance behaviors by the feedback giving source would be important in understanding how feedback giving occurring in practice in the contextualized workplace setting diverges from theorized models of feedback giving.

Finally, the review by Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979) provided two implications for feedback giving in work environments that are relevant to the design of this study. First, their review suggested that feedback is often misperceived or not accepted by the recipient, even though many prior studies looking at responses to feedback assumed accurate perception and acceptance. Therefore these will not be assumptions in the design of this study. Further, this study will assume that recipient perception and acceptance is largely influenced by characteristics of the source, the school leader. Specifically, the study will explore leader understanding of how credibility, trust and their positional authority influence the feedback interaction that occurs between the school leader and the teacher. Secondly, it was proposed that the nature of the feedback message has an effect on the perceived feedback utility with a specific suggestion that more specific feedback tends to be harder to distort or reject. Therefore this study will also look at leadership practice, both individually and as a leadership team, in providing specific and consistent feedback with evidence to support it.

Tuytens and Devos (2011) adapted the conceptual framework for feedback giving proposed by Ilgen et al. (1979) by applying it to a teacher evaluation context (figure 2.1) and integrating three leadership characteristics proposed to influence the perception and response of teachers to feedback (figure 2.2). In this adapted model, the feedback source

is the school leader, and the feedback giving occurs throughout the observation process, during the pre- and post conferences and in the written observation report. Tuytens and Devos combine the teacher's perceived utility and acceptance of the feedback into one construct termed the feedback reaction. Finally, if a teacher perceives feedback as useful and accurate, thus accepting it, he/she will engage in the intended response of professional learning or reflection that leads to an actual response of improvement in teaching practice. Premised in this adapted model applied to teacher evaluation is that effective feedback giving, that which is perceived as useful and accurate, is essential to motivate teachers to engage in professional learning that leads to improved practice. In order for feedback to lead to improved instructional practice teachers must first react positively to the feedback by perceiving it as useful and accurate, and then engage in the intended response, some type of professional learning or instructional change (Danielson, 2007; Ilgen et al., 1979; Tuytens & Devos, 2011).

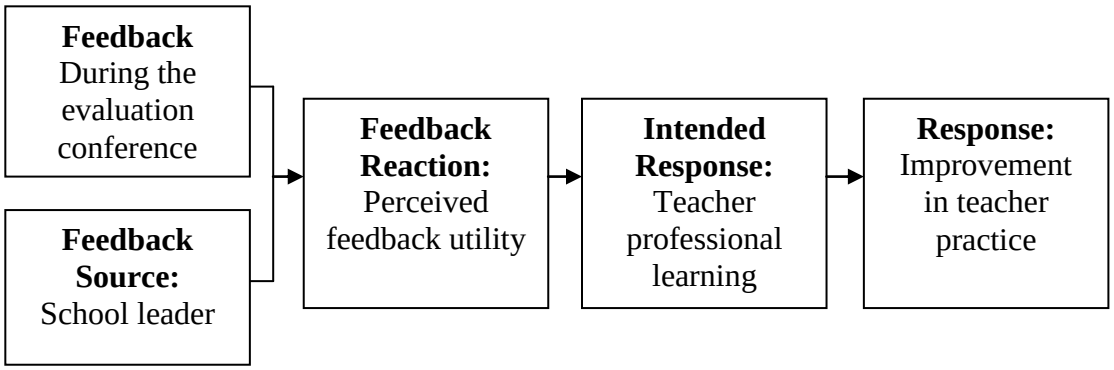

Figure 2.1 Conceptual translation of feedback theory (Ilgen et al., 1979) to teacher evaluation (Tuytens & Devos, 2011).

Also premised in this model is that the leadership characteristics of the school leader can influence teachers' perception of utility and accuracy of the feedback. After

reviewing the literature of both instructional and transformational leadership, Tuytens and Devos (2011) further revised their model to incorporate three leadership characteristics they suggested would play a role in the feedback giving of school leaders – charismatic leadership, active leadership supervision, and leadership content knowledge (figure 2.2).

In the case of most teacher evaluation models in use, the feedback source is the school leader, and not for instance, a peer teacher or outside evaluator. Therefore the characteristics of the school leader and the nature of the school leader's feedback giving are important variables in determining if feedback will lead to instructional improvement. Tuytens and Devos (2011) examined the effect of how these school leader characteristics influenced feedback perception and professional learning. The three characteristics include charismatic leadership, active leadership supervision, and leadership content knowledge, and were derived from a review of the literature on the influences of instructional leadership and transformational leadership on teaching practice and student outcomes. The review of the literature by Robinson (2010) identifying these characteristics that will be discussed later in this chapter. Tuytens and Devos directly attempted to address a research gap identified by Sinnema and Robinson (2007). Following is an overview of the research questions and findings from the 2007 study by Sinnema and Robinson most relevant to the current study, and then an examination of the Tuytens and Devos (2011) study and its findings, and a discussion of the remaining research gaps that will be addressed by this study.

Sinemma and Robinson (2007) conducted a series of empirical studies to explore if teacher evaluation policy and procedures prompted teachers to critically examine the

relationship between their teaching and student learning. At the outset of the study, they offered four possible explanations for what they identified as a weak focus within the teacher evaluation process on student learning. The explanations included teacher evaluation practice guided by a national policy that does not focus on student outcomes, a lack professional inquiry culture within schools, a leadership approach to teacher evaluation that is perfunctory and characterized by ritual compliance and an over-conformance to professional collegiality that limits critical feedback giving and reflective practice. They questioned three areas of teacher evaluation- if the evaluation tools used fostered inquiry into the impact of teaching on learning, how evaluator practices during evaluation discussion foster inquiry into the impact of teaching on learning, and whether evaluation goals focus on teachers' impact on student learning. Using a mixed methods approach across three studies involving a total of 46 elementary and middle schools, Sinnema and Robinson found that while seventy percent of teacher evaluation (TE) tools used referenced teaching in there stated intentions, only fifteen percent stated improvement of student learning as an intended goal of the tool's use. Further they found that only six percent of the performance indicators used within the tools directly or indirectly required evidence of student learning. The overwhelming majority of indicators assessed teacher actions and behaviors without an explicit connection to student learning, and included such actions as the professional dress of teachers and how neat the classroom was kept.

In the second study of the series, Sinemma and Robinson explored how evaluators used evaluation tools in their interactions with teachers and whether evaluation discussions addressed the impact of teaching on student learning. Eleven teachers in three

of the schools from the first study (total of 46 schools) were interviewed. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect responses to determine what topics had been discussed during evaluation conferences, gather teacher perceptions of how much student learning was emphasized during the evaluation discussion and to understand teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of dialogue on the impact of their teaching on student learning as part of their evaluation discussion. Significant in the design of this second study was that the principals of these three schools volunteered their school's participation in the follow up study. This case of convenience sampling could have potentially skewed or limited the range of findings if these principals' willingness to volunteer was related to having taken a more rigorous instructional leadership approach than their peers in the other schools to using teacher evaluation as tool for teacher practice improvement or having already made an explicit effort to tie teacher evaluation to student learning outcomes in their buildings. Also of contextual significance is that the teacher evaluation system included peer observation, where teachers could serve as evaluators (the feedback source) in addition to school administrators who more traditionally serve in this role.

Interview responses addressing topics discussed were sorted into four categories- student learning connected to teacher practice, student learning in general, student process or behavior, and teacher behavior (not connected to student learning). All eleven teachers indicated that evaluation conversations discussed teacher behaviors but only one teacher, serving in the evaluator role, reported a conversation where connections between teacher actions and its influence on student learning were made. Interestingly, the teacher that was evaluated by this evaluating teacher did not report that the conversation had

made this connection, and instead her response focused on the positive nature of the discussion and praise she received. Additionally, teacher and student behaviors were discussed separately without explicit connections made between teacher action and their impact on the learning of specific students or groups of students. In evaluating these findings, the authors identified that both evaluators and those evaluated held strong assumptions that certain teacher practices and types of teaching lead to positive outcomes for student learning. Therefore, if those teacher practices are observed then student learning is assumed to be occurring, and the teaching is assumed to be effective. Because these assumptions are so strongly held the authors found that it guided the feedback conversation to exclude any critical examination of these practices. An area for further examination would question whether these assumptions about effective teaching practices, so-called best practices, also limit evaluator practice to collect and analyze evidence of the student learning assumed to be associated with these best practices in addition to limiting the discussion these practices and their explicit relationship to evidence of student learning during the feedback conversation. The disagreement between the evaluator's and observed teacher's perceptions of what was discussed also indicate that even when connections between teacher practice and student learning are made, teachers may only perceive it as a positive or negative appraisal of their overall performance without it facilitating a critical examination of what was done or not done and its impact on individual or groups' student learning. This lack of critical reflection within the feedback giving could limit recognition of an explicit need to improve the teaching practice toward improving the student learning outcomes.

The third study in the series examined how overall evaluation goals (yearly summative professional goals) influenced the evaluation discussion's focus on student learning. Within this evaluation system, evaluation goals are set at the beginning of the evaluation cycle, followed by two observations mid-cycle, and an evaluation conference that occurs at the end of the cycle. Findings from a review of evaluation goals set by teachers found that less than five percent addressed student outcomes as part of the goal. Ninety percent instead focused on aspects of teacher practice not directly linked to student learning, including curriculum development and furthering content or pedagogical expertise. Of those goals that did focus on student learning outcomes (11 out of 244), the goals lacked measurable rigor to reach goal attainment. Additionally, teachers expressed that the structure of the teacher evaluation system, with evaluation discussions occurring at the end of the cycle, made the discussion feel summative only, occurring too late to serve as an opportunity to modify goals or change practice to alter learning outcomes. The three linked studies found misalignment and little emphasis on student learning across three elements of the teacher evaluation system - the evaluation tool used, the feedback discussions that occurred, and the professional goals established. Specifically significant to the current study was the fact that the evaluation tool did not support evaluators in leading feedback conversations focused on the relationship between teacher practice and student learning. The context of the current action research to explore administrator's practice in delivering feedback that leads to instructional improvement is framed within a larger school improvement goal to facilitate improved student learning outcomes. Additionally, the action research setting occurred as the district transitioned to a new evaluation tool whose author, Charlotte Danielson, espouses

its use as a tool for instructional improvement and the need for organizational systems-based supports for school leaders engaging in instructional leadership actions such as feedback giving (Danielson 2007, 2014).

Sinnema and Robinson (2007) put forward four explanations contributing to their findings. The first is the alignment of local teacher evaluation systems to national policies that allow tools that do not include student learning criteria as measures of teacher effectiveness. The recent changes to national and state teacher evaluation policies within the United States take a step toward addressing this first explanation. However, there is necessarily a lag time between the changes in policy and local teacher evaluation practice, and studies examining this realignment at the ground level indicate that districts need sustained support that addresses the political, technical, and normative (cultural) shifts required to make an organizational transition of this kind (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015; Sporte & Jiang, 2016; Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014). Sinnema and Robinson highlight some of these needed shifts in the remaining explanations for their findings. One involves the assumptive practice of knowing what good teaching looks like without looking for explicit evidence of student learning as a result of that teaching. This cultural practice within educational systems short circuits a cycle of critical reflection and inquiry by both administrators (evaluators) and teachers into what teachers are doing and how it relates and influences what students are learning. The third explanation offered calls out the technical and perfunctory compliance by both administrators and teachers to complete the different aspects of the evaluation process (goal setting, observations, observation scoring and report writing and conducting pre- and post-observation conferences). Findings demonstrated teacher attitudes that perceived teacher evaluation as lacking a

formative orientation that would motivate them to improve their practice, and instead saw it and their evaluator's feedback as summative and unconnected to their day to day practice. Researching how to shift teacher evaluation from a compliance-driven practice to an integral and connected part of administrator's daily instructional leadership practice and teachers' ongoing professional learning addresses the authors' call for more educational leadership research dedicated to the leadership of teaching and learning, and is a primary purpose of the current study. The final explanation is relevant to the political aspects of changing teacher evaluation. The move to include specific measures of student learning is in contrast to long-standing past practice where teachers are observed infrequently with tools that focus on measures not related to student learning, and where the overwhelming majority of teachers receive high ratings. The authors argue that this has created a tension within an organizational process that has been viewed by teachers, and the educational community more broadly, as a way to celebrate teachers and be a collegial event instead of a truly reflective cycle of critiquing practice and looking for evidence of student learning. The shift within teacher evaluation to the latter has led to both teachers and administrators adopting defensive behaviors that affect the quality and validity of the feedback giving on the part of school leaders, and the acceptance and response on the part of teachers.

In this 2007 study Sinnema and Robinson highlighted a developing consensus among those doing education research at the time that a stronger focus on researching the leadership of teaching and learning was needed. They proposed that if research was to contribute to and influence practice then it needed to address the tasks and responsibilities leaders were expected to perform. Performance expectations for school

leaders have shifted from operational management toward instructional leadership where administrators are being held accountable for the performance of both teachers and students within their own evaluations. This accountability has included responsibility for teacher performance ratings, student performance on state assessments, and school outcomes such as chronic absenteeism, and graduation rates (NJDOE, 2015a; Sheng, Wolff, & Cassidy, 2017). The authors also argued that existing organizational structures, such as teacher evaluation and professional development, should be re-designed to align and support the goals of instructional improvement and improved student outcomes instead of adding new roles and responsibilities on school leaders and teachers, or instituting new programs that further stretch monetary, human, and material resources. Specifically, they recommended leadership practices that "confront false epistemological assumptions about the generalizability of teaching-learning relationships and that promote teachers' situated inquiry into the impact of their teaching on their own students." (Sinnema & Robinson, 2007, p. 338). This recommendation identified a deficiency in the research literature. Research addressing both the leadership characteristics needed and the nature of leader-teacher interaction required to promote and facilitate this type of situated professional learning on the part of teachers was needed.

Two follow up studies sought to shed light on specific leadership characteristics that could result in instructional improvement and produce positive effects on student outcomes. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 studies to distinguish the effects of instructional leadership practices and transformational leadership practices on teaching and learning. They defined instructional leadership as the

"sets of leadership practices that involve planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning" (Robinson et al., 2008, p.2), and thus would involve classroom observation and feedback giving. They found instructional leadership practices to be three to four times as effective in improving student outcomes as transformational leadership practices. In a secondary meta-analysis within the same study, the authors identified five sets of effective leadership practices within the instructional leadership realm: leading through promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; establishing goals and expectations; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; strategic resourcing, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Robinson (2010) followed with a study that sought to propose a tentative model of capabilities needed to practice effective instructional leadership, while also identifying some of the methodological challenges in investigating leadership capacity. The study rationalized that moving beyond identifying effective instructional leadership characteristics to investigate leadership capacity would address three needs within the field. First, it would inform the development and use of leadership tools and routines that support leaders in their work with teachers toward instructional improvement. Second, it would inform the curriculum of educational leadership training programs, and finally, it would help develop an understanding of the variance in leadership quality and its causes in order to develop relevant professional development for practicing leaders. While there was considerable evidence that the direct and indirect actions of principals can have a positive impact on student learning outcomes, second only to the influence of teachers in the classroom (Robinson, et al., 2008), Robinson (2010) identified little research

investigating the actual capacity of school leaders to provide this leadership. Robinson premised that leader capacity to perform these essential functions involved "seamless and dynamic integration of knowledge, skills, and personal qualities" (p.3), and used feedback giving as a practical example of the integrated application of multiple leadership characteristics, including content knowledge of teaching, skill in delivering the feedback message, and the ability to build personal rapport with teacher through the leader-teacher interaction.

Robinson (2010) used an initial research strategy involving a search of the literature for studies investigating the relationships between leader capacity and the impact of leader capacity on student outcomes. However, finding very few studies meeting this criterion, the search was broadened to include studies that provided some evidence about the capability of leaders for certain aspects of instructional leadership, with a preference given to those studies that connected their findings on leadership capacity to strong theoretical arguments on instructional leadership or student outcomes. Under this broader umbrella, three studies were found that provided evidence of a three different leadership capacities. The three capacities were leadership content knowledge, problem-solving, and relational trust. The first study by Nelson and Sassi (2000) demonstrated the link between math content and math pedagogical knowledge held by leaders and how they carry out the practice of evaluating math teaching, including the routines they developed and tools used. The second study, by Leithwood and Steinback (1995), compared the problem-solving capacity, as well as leader belief and attitude about problem-solving, between two sets of principals. One set of principals was assessed as typical and the other set as expert by their performance evaluation, which included

staff assessment. The third study, by Bryk and Schneider (2002), conducted teacher surveys to assess teacher-principal relational trust and provided evidence of the link between the leader's ability to establish trust with teachers and the impact of high relational trust on both school organization outcomes and student outcomes. Using the evidence presented in the three studies, Robinson (2010) puts forth a model of effective instructional leadership that integrates all three characteristics. Within the model she suggests an interdependence between the three characteristics that while not supported by direct evidence, is framed by stating the theoretical importance of each while suggesting that leaders often employ one characteristic as a function of the other. For instance, Robinson suggests that leaders solve problem through social processes that depend on interactions with their teachers that requires relational trust rather than solving problems single-handedly through individual (self) processes. She also suggests that when possessed, leaders utilize leadership content knowledge to develop solutions for teaching and learning problems. Robinson acknowledged, however, that the evidence available at the time did not support the additive or interactive effects of the three characteristics on leadership practice or their combined impact on teaching and learning outcomes.

Robinson identified several research areas for future study. They included the need to verify the importance and role of the three leadership characteristics proposed in the model, and determine whether the characteristics identified matched characteristics derived from other methodological approaches. More studies were needed to provide additional evidence on the leadership capacities of leaders in the areas of leadership content knowledge, problem-solving, and relational trust or related leadership characteristics. Finally, more evidence was needed to link leader capacity in specific

leadership characteristics to improved outcomes in teaching and learning in order to show them as *effective* leadership practices. In pursuing these future research aims, Robinson warned against quantitative research designs that simply sought to identify a list of indicators of performance and capacity that could be checked off or not to a point of statistical significance. She instead argued for more qualitative approaches that would reveal the "integrated and holistic nature of leadership performance" (Robinson, 2010, p. 23), describing one possible method using a probalistic standards framework and case-based examples to provide evidence of capability along a continuum.

Tuytens and Devos (2011) identified feedback giving within teacher evaluation as one of the important instructional leadership practices that could lead to teachers seeking to improve their instructional practice. They sought to explore what role three leadership characteristics of the feedback source (school leader) played in feedback giving. The leadership characteristics proposed by Tuytens and Devos (2011) to play a role in feedback giving are defined as follows for this study:

1) Charismatic Leadership – a transformational leadership trait that refers to the "extent to which leaders set an example for teachers and inspire them in their daily practice" (Tuytens & Devos, 2011, p.893). The ability to initiate teacher action is determined by the amount of relational trust the leader can establish with the teacher.
2) Active Leadership Supervision – an instructional leadership trait that refers to the specific supports a leader provides to teachers for his or her teaching. The

ability to analyze, trouble shoot, and provide strategic teaching supports are related to the problem-solving capacity of school leaders.

3) Leadership Content Knowledge – an instructional leadership trait that refers to a leader's specific disciplinary content knowledge and understanding of the way the subject specific knowledge should be taught and learned (Tuytens and Devos, 2011).

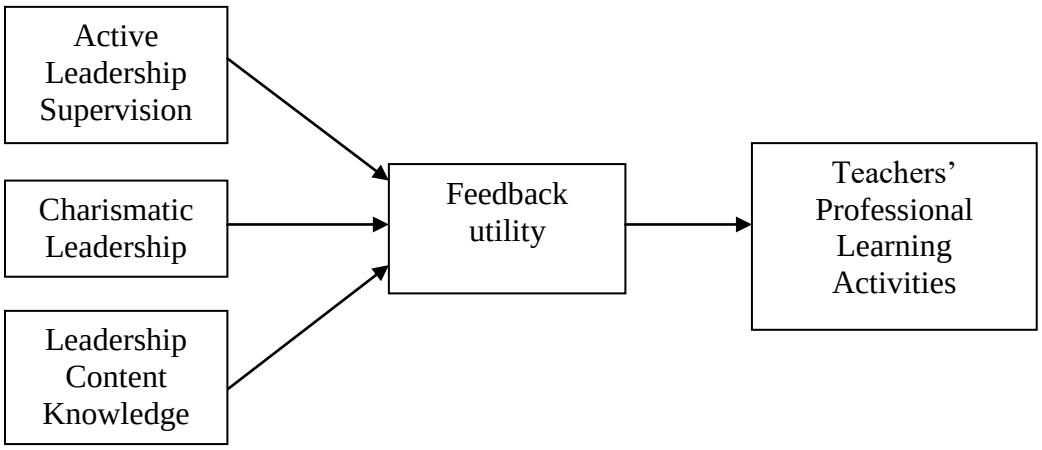

Figure 2.2 Leadership characteristics proposed to play a role in teacher evaluation. Characteristics are leadership variables derived from instructional and transformational leadership models (Tuytens & Devos, 2011).

To explore the effects of these three school leader characteristics on teacher feedback reaction and response, Tuytens and Devos (2011) used questionnaires for teacher reporting on perceptions of supervisor actions encompassing each of the leadership characteristics during feedback giving and for reporting on two types of professional learning taken as a result of the feedback giving (experimentation and reflective practice, and keeping up to date). All questions were adjusted to the context of receiving feedback

during the observation process. All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

To analyze the 414 teacher responses, an initial exploratory factor analysis was used to sort all items. This analysis established the three leadership characteristics as separate and distinct variables and the researchers incorporated them into their research model as separate variables of the feedback source (see figure 2.2). The factor analysis for items using two scales involving experimentation, reflective practice and keeping up to date sorted into only one variable for the intended response that they incorporated into the research model as teachers' professional learning activities. They then tested the mediating role of feedback perception (judgment of utility and accuracy) between feedback giving by the source and teachers' engagement in the intended response (professional learning) proposed by Ilgen et al. (1979) using regression analyses, and found that there was a mediating role, furthering strengthening their model. A mediating role of perceived feedback utility between the feedback giving and teachers' response to feedback is significant because if leaders can exert a positive influence on this perception it would lead to increased engagement in professional learning, and thus improved teaching practice. Conversely, if the leaders' feedback giving practice negatively impacts teacher perception then it is less likely that teachers will engage in professional learning as a result of feedback given. This result then centers the leadership qualities of the leader playing a role in the feedback giving, especially those that affect teacher perception, as critical to the ability of the leader to facilitate instructional improvement through the teacher evaluation process.

Results from Tuytens and Devos (2011) demonstrated that charismatic leadership, active leader supervision, and leadership content knowledge all directly influence teachers' positive perceptions of the feedback utility given to them by school leaders, and indirectly influence teacher professional learning. However, both Tuytens & Devos (2011) and Robinson et al. (2008) found that active leadership supervision has the greatest influence on teacher perception of feedback and subsequent teacher learning actions. Specifically, Robinson et al. (2008) found that the effect of instructional leadership actions (active supervision) was three to four times that of transformational leadership actions. Tuytens and Devos (2011) found that charismatic leadership and leadership content knowledge also had significant influence on teachers' perceptions of feedback and undertaking of professional learning, however, leadership content knowledge had the least impact.

Each school leader will possess varying levels of competence in each of these leadership areas, however, these results suggest that developing leader capacity in any or all of these areas, and specifically in instructional leadership, would improve their effectiveness in using teacher evaluation as a tool to improve instruction through teacher professional learning. Findings from Tuytens and Devos (2011) also suggest that teachers perceive these three leadership characteristics as interrelated. This finding supports the interdependence of leadership content knowledge, problem-solving and relational trust proposed in the Robinson (2010) model of instructional leadership. The finding suggests that teachers' perception and response to the feedback is a response to the leader as a whole, and therefore multiple combinations of these three leader characteristics could be successfully employed across a continuum of different leaders to elicit a positive

response from teachers. In other words, no one quantified combination of the leadership traits is required to effectively engage in feedback giving, but the combination of characteristics employed must be perceived as credible and accurate for teachers to have a positive reaction to the feedback. As a practical example of this, consider a common barrier from the literature, perceived reliability of feedback (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Feedback from a non-reliable source may be ignored, thus short-circuiting the feedback for growth pathway. School leaders are typically granted some basic level of creditability that is vested in the authority of their position. However that can be quickly eroded if feedback is rarely or never offered or if feedback is non-specific and superficial, or if it ignores instructional areas that teachers themselves have identified as areas in need of improvement (Khachatryan, 2015; Lochmiller, 2016; Rigby et al., 2017).

Khachatryan (2015) analyzed the written feedback of one vice-principal to four high school teachers using the Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) and explored teacher perceptions of that feedback during "think aloud" interviews with each teacher. The FIT model categorizes feedback into three tiers. The first tier of feedback is feedback regarding the individual and not the actual teaching practice, such as "you have a good handle on your classroom procedures" or "you did not connect with the students' interests". This type of self-feedback requires recipients to make a cognitive leap from feedback directed to their person and its contextual relationship to their teaching practice. In other words, the feedback is specific only to the person and not to the teaching performance, causing a teacher to have to ask "*why* did I not have a good handle on my classroom procedures?" and "*how* am I not connecting to my students' interests". They must then grapple with these questions on their own without any additional information

from the feedback given. This self-feedback addresses meta-task processes, and whether positive or negative in nature, is the least effective in leading to improved performance. It either reduces intrinsic motivation or focuses the recipient's attention on creating a defense against negative personal feedback, without communicating information that helps the teacher modify their thinking or behavior. Feedback within the second and third tier are those that address motivation or learning processes, respectively, and have more significant positive effects on improving practices. Product feedback on the outcome of a given task within the teaching performance supports teachers' increased motivation to improve upon the task. Process feedback provides detailed information, including suggested improvements, about how a task was or could be accomplished. Process feedback aids in teachers' professional learning toward improving practice.

Forty-five percent of the feedback comments were categorized as process feedback, and another 39% were considered product feedback. There was also some overlap between the second and third tiers, where 12% of feedback comments included both an evaluative statement of the outcome of an instructional task, and a description or critique of the process or steps the teacher took in completing the task. This overlapping feedback then had the potential to engage both motivational and learning processes in a proposed synergistic way. Khachatryan (2015) also highlighted feedback giving that was process-oriented *and* included a description of ineffective task processes and a suggestion to correct it. This type of feedback was given ten percent of the time. The study design included interviews where teachers reviewed feedback given to them and then shared their perceptions of the feedback types that were given and discussed their reaction to it. Analysis of interview responses revealed three emergent themes in teacher perceptions. A

majority (60%) of the feedback comments were considered to validate or affirm new and improved practices that teachers were working to implement. Another group of feedback comments prompted teacher reflection with some verbalized planning to improve teaching. A final group of feedback comments were not completely accepted where teachers raised concerns about the meaning and accuracy of the feedback given. The study however did not correlate the three types of teacher reactions to the three tiers of feedback identified in the conceptual model. This raises questions about how useful teachers found the product and process feedback, and whether the delivery of these two types of feedback proposed to enhance motivation and learning to improve practice was clear, meaningful, and accepted as accurate by teachers. All three criteria would need to be met within the feedback model proposed by Tuytens and Devos (2011) in order for teachers to engage in professional learning in response to the feedback. The findings by Khachatryan (2015) highlight the importance of current study to understand how the formulation and delivery of feedback by the school leader influences the feedback giving process and teacher engagement in professional learning.

In a more recent study Rigby, Larbi-Cherif, Rosenquist, Sharpe, Cobb, and Smith (2017) looked specifically at feedback giving to middle school math teachers to improve inquiry-oriented math instruction, where leadership content knowledge could significantly impact teacher response to the feedback. The study was conducted over four years in four large, urban school districts, all of which had espoused leadership goals to provided systems of coordinated support to improve inquiry-oriented math instruction, including the consistent provision of expectations for math instruction, conducting of classroom observations, and delivery of feedback, collectively termed administrative

press, for at least two hours per day by school administrators. The study analyzed 271 teacher cases using data from teacher interviews and surveys to address three research questions: 1) Do middle school math teachers report feedback focused on inquiry-oriented math instruction; 2) Do administrators vary the content of their feedback based on the teacher's math instruction; and 3) Is there a relationship between administrative feedback and improvement in teacher instruction? The study found that 82% of teachers reported that feedback focused on classroom management and organizations, was not content-specific. Twenty-one percent reported receiving general feedback related to math instruction, and only 1.8% reported being given feedback related to a specific issue of math instruction observed in the lesson.

In terms of the variance in feedback content based on math instruction level, the researchers categorized math instruction into a hierarchy for teachers' next steps for professional learning. The lowest level in the hierarchy was *traditional* instruction characterized by low-level conceptual tasks with single correct answers and little facilitation of student discussion or explanation. This was followed by *proceduralized* instruction, and *low-level discussion* instruction. The highest tier in the hierarchy was *ambitious* instruction characterized by cognitively demanding inquiry tasks with multiple methods to solve and facilitation of student discussion where students engaged in reasoning, justification, and connected tasks to broader mathematical concepts (Rigby et al., 2017, p. 484). Analysis found that administrators were two to four times as likely to provide more specific feedback to the teachers with practices in the top two tiers of math instruction as those in the bottom two tiers. This finding is significant when considering the espoused purpose of classroom observation and feedback giving is usually

instructional improvement, and therefore it would be assumed that teachers with less sophisticated instructional practices would receive more feedback. However, this finding is consistent with predictions made by Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979) and Tuytens and Devos (2011) of behavioral avoidance on the part of administrators when providing negative feedback.

For the final research question, overall there was no statistically relevant relationship between receiving math content-oriented feedback and movement to a higher category of math instruction in the following year's evaluation. Additionally, when qualitatively analyzing administrative factors that may have accounted for differences in the types of feedback given, such as professional development received, years of administrative experience, or prior math content background, no consistent trends were found that accounted for the lack of math-oriented feedback given generally. Also significant within the findings was teachers whose practices were in the third tier (rigorous tasks but low-level facilitation of student discussion) received the most feedback, but there was no difference in the amount of feedback given to teachers in the first, second, or fourth tier. This finding, along with the overwhelming majority of the feedback given being focused on classroom management, suggests that administrator capacity to provide content specific feedback that supports teachers in developing and maintaining rigorous instructional practices across a broad range of teacher ability is limited. Given the school district leadership goals espoused by the participating districts in this study, the findings also suggest that administrator capacity for instructional leadership that can improve instruction is not currently sufficient to meet the expectations for administrator performance expressed in national professional standards for school

leaders (NPBEA, 2015). The failing to provide specific feedback that could improve content specific instruction occurred despite administrators receiving professional development aimed at improving leadership content knowledge and that provided observation and feedback giving protocols. The findings within that historical context suggest that more intensive forms of situated learning may be needed for school leaders to develop the expected feedback giving practices that can act as levers for instructional improvement.

Rigby et al. (2017) make two recommendations from their findings. The authors suggest a two-prong approach to professional development for groups of administrators. Professional development should first seek to improve administrator content expertise in math instruction. Second it should be centered around problems of practice specific to the inquiry –based math instruction being used in the study districts and the roles administrators are expected to play in supporting the adoption of those instructional and learning practices. In this situated context, administrators would engage in modeling desired feedback giving, reflecting on their own and others' feedback giving practice, and discussing with fellow leaders approaches and challenges of practice. This first recommendation of grouped PD focused on problems of practice is rooted in situated cognition (SC) theory which argues that learning is the process of interpreting meaning from our experiences of phenomenon (Hung, Looi, & Koh, 2004). SC theory also contends that the interpretive process to establish meaning (knowledge) is located "in particular settings and involves other learners, the environment, and the meaning making activities that contribute to new knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991)" (Pella, 2011, p.109). Given the need for authentic learning environments and social interaction as a

contextualizing factor in how meaning is constructed, administrator training carried out in communities of practice could be an ideal tool and setting for administrators to develop effective feedback giving practices.

The second recommendation was for a systems-based solution using a distributed leadership approach to observation and feedback giving in the districts. Instead of trying to build administrator content expertise across multiple content areas, Rigby et al. (2017) suggest allowing administrators to focus feedback on issues of classroom management and more general instructional skills, and leveraging the use of math coaches to support teachers in improving content specific instructional practices. As a broad solution this recommendation might not be widely feasible across different districts and is reliant on a host of district-level factors including the availability of coaches in different content areas, the availability of funds to create and maintain coaching positions, and the time and training needed to shift school cultures to support models of instructional coaching (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Killion, Harrison, Bryan, & Clifton, 2012). However, this recommendation to have content experts (coaches) deliver content-specific feedback to teachers could potentially address the finding by Siskin (1991) of the existence of departmentalized subcultures as barriers that can short circuit the feedback giving process when administrators lack content expertise to provide specific feedback and when teachers disregard feedback due to a perceived lack of credibility of the feedback source (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor,1979).

Lochmiller (2016) explored how administrators differentiated their feedback based on subject area, looking specifically at administrator feedback giving for high

school math and science instruction. Lochmiller (2016) identified two factors from the literature that affected the credibility and perceived utility of administrator feedback. These factors included the frequency and quality of feedback. Too little time spent providing feedback negatively impacted teacher perception of the effectiveness of administrative observation practice. Another factor was feedback giving practice that fell short of providing a forum where evaluators and teachers can reflect and identify content and pedagogical practices that need to change can actually diminish the capacity of teachers to deliver effective instruction. Given these findings from the literature, Lochmiller framed his study within two theoretical perspectives. The first was the notion of *content as context*. The second was a conception of leadership content knowledge that assumes that effective instructional leadership cannot be completely practiced outside of specific content area knowledge. At the secondary level, teaching is practiced within distinct subcultures that affect not only affect the pedagogical practices but also influence the attitude and dispositions of teachers toward teaching and learning of that content (Siskin, 1991). Lochmiller (2016) also theorized that "such subject matter conceptualizations might also influence how teacher receive feedback from school administrators about their instruction and potentially shape their responses to administrators' feedback, particularly when the administrator does not share a similar conception of the subject they teach." (p.80). Since administrators are often tasked with evaluating all teachers under their supervision, feedback giving must be conducted within and across these subcultures to effectively impact instruction. This conceptual notion and the finding by Siskin of the existence of perceived subcultures provides both a theoretical and empirical justification for studying feedback giving in a specific content area and

leadership content knowledge as one of the characteristics that may be utilized in feedback giving practice.

Lochmiller (2016) used a multi-case, qualitative design for his study, collecting data from five US high schools across one western state. The schools had a range of racial and economic diversity within the student populations. A total of 51 participants were included in the study, including twelve administrators and 39 math and science teachers. Only three of the twelve administrators had a math or science content background. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both administrators and teachers. Administrator interviews sought to reveal administrator understanding of the content area they supervised and their awareness and understanding of any subculture that existed. They were also asked about what feedback they provided to math and science teachers and their perception of how teachers received the feedback they provided. Teacher interview protocols asked them to describe the ways in which administrators providing them feedback and specific examples of administrators providing feedback on their practice. Thematic analysis of the interview responses was conducted, focusing on comments that described feedback given or feedback that was characterized as important by either teachers or administrators. Descriptive codes were developed based on the theoretical framework used that categorized 1) administrator understanding of content area, 2) administrator approach or interaction with teachers when providing feedback, 3) how teachers perceived the administrators that provided feedback, 4) whether administrators used data in providing feedback, and 5) how data was used.

Lochmiller (2016) found that the math and science teachers perceived administrator feedback given as being generalist, focusing on basics of teaching pedagogy and classroom management, and not on the content-specific practices. Administrators expressed that effective pedagogical practice was the same across the different content areas they supervised, but also that administrator definitions of good teaching were influenced by their own classroom teaching experiences. He also found that teachers did not believe administrators could provide them feedback that would address the content-specific nuances of their instructional practice, and thus looked for feedback from their colleagues to provide this level of support. This finding is consistent with the findings of Rigby et al. (2017) discussed previously, and provides further support for their recommendation of distributed leadership models of feedback giving. Lochmiller also found that administrator use of data was used primarily to provide more descriptive observations, but was rarely used initiate detailed discussion about teacher practice and how it connected to evidence of student learning. This finding is consistent with the critique by Sinnema and Robinson (2007) that feedback giving, and teacher evaluation in general, is not utilized to discuss instructional practice centered around evidence of student learning as the measure of effective teaching.

An example of one math teacher's positive response to feedback highlighted the potential importance of leadership content knowledge in the feedback giving model proposed by Tuytens and Devos (2011). While math and science teachers described administrator feedback as too generalist to be of use to improve content area practice, when asked to give examples of helpful feedback teachers described feedback representing a generic pedagogical practices. In one example, a math teacher was

provided a recommendation to design an appropriate lesson closure task, however the feedback came from an administrator with a math background. The teacher described agreeing with the feedback and provided an example of a closure activity she could implement. This example demonstrates how leadership content knowledge can potentially affect teacher perception of any feedback given by impacting the level of credibility given to the school leader as the feedback source. Within the feedback model proposed by Tuytens and Devos (2011) leadership content knowledge could have a significant impact on teacher response to feedback, both reception to the feedback and the subsequent willingness to respond by engaging in professional learning.

Lochmiller (2016) concluded that feedback giving practice at the secondary level is "bound within distinct subject subcultures that are a product of the administrator's past experience as a classroom teacher" (p.98), and that professional identity is linked to content area expertise for both teachers and administrators. He also concludes that the findings extend the conceptual understanding of how the departmentalized nature of secondary school influences leadership practice. This study begins to operationalize effective instructional leadership, and specifically feedback giving, by looking at leader behaviors and actions, and how they differentiate or do not differentiate these behaviors by content context. Lochmiller suggested more research was needed on how administrators practice instructional leadership across the differences in content areas, and identified several limitations to his study. Limitations included limited geographic location for the case sites, a non-randomized participant pool where participating administrators were allowed to choose the teacher participants from their schools, and a

reliance on self-reporting by administrators and teachers of the feedback given without a review of the corresponding written feedback.

Several of these studies suggest that the creditability of the feedback source due to lack of content area knowledge may be a critical factor impacting feedback giving at the secondary level (Ilgen et al., 1979; Lochmiller, 2016; Rigby et al., 2017; Siskin, 1991). While it is not feasible that a leader could develop a strong content knowledge across all content areas and therefore is somewhat beyond the secondary school leader's control, having a strong working knowledge of general pedagogical strategies and best practices, and being able to clearly articulate how improvement in these areas will strengthen a teacher's practice in delivering content-specific instruction could be a critical leverage point in motivating teachers to accept and act upon provided feedback. In other words, the leader must develop trust with a teacher that the feedback they receive if acted upon will lead to better outcomes for students even if it is not content-specific. In this circumstance, charismatic leadership and active leadership supervision traits may become more important when leadership content knowledge is lacking. Leaders who may not possess strengths in one area of leadership may be able to compensate in another area to maintain a capacity to effectively lead improvement through the feedback process. While outside the scope of the current study, this same compensatory mechanism could be used by leaders who employ their charismatic and active supervision leadership to direct and facilitate teacher instructional support within a distributed leadership model as recommended by Rigby et al., (2017). A leader, for instance, may strategically use instructional coaches, outside experts or institute of culture of peer review and collaboration to provide the needed leadership content knowledge.

Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) offer one important critique of much of the work done thus far concerning teacher evaluation, feedback, and instructional improvement. Most studies done have relied on self-reported data from principals and teachers. While beyond the scope of this action research study to fully address this critique, future studies will need to use methods that qualitatively and quantitatively look at *actual* leadership actions taken during the teacher evaluation process and their effectiveness in producing instructional improvement. This would include collecting data on the amount of time devoted to classroom observation and feedback giving, a review of written feedback in observation reports, and data on the type of professional learning activities pursued by teachers following feedback giving. However since studies have shown that specific leadership actions can impact perceived feedback utility, teacher change actions, and student outcomes, there is still a need to look at the self-efficacy school leaders possess in enacting these leadership actions. This action research study will explore the understanding a small cohort of secondary school leaders have in employing charismatic leadership, active leader supervision, and leadership content knowledge as part of their practice in providing instructional feedback. The model of the feedback giving process that incorporates these three leadership characteristics as important characteristics of the feedback source will be used to address the following research questions: 1) What are the school leaders' perceptions of their feedback giving practice to motivate professional learning and instructional improvement? 2) What leadership characteristics do leaders identify as important in the feedback giving process?

2.2 The Political and Historical Context

Since the 1950s in the age of the Cold War and the launching of the Soviet satellite *Sputnik*, the American education system has been subjected to cycles of reform that have increasingly focused outcomes of education on measures of accountability- for individual students, for local districts and states, and for teachers (Spring, 2014). This initial era saw the beginning of federally-funded educational legislation, such as the National Defense Education Act that provided money to states to improve testing and institute practices that recruited and better prepared American youth in math and science fields. This included funds to train and hire teachers of math and science, and funding toward the National Science Foundation (NSF). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed that provided federal funds to local educational agencies (school districts). Title 1 funding within the ESEA provided program funding specifically for districts serving low-income student populations, thus tying ESEA to President Johnson's War on Poverty initiatives (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

In the years that have followed, legislation driving educational reforms and delineating measures of accountability have not only continued, but become increasingly influential in the local decision-making within education (Au, 2007; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012; Thomas & Brady, 2005). In 1983, a report was commissioned by the Reagan administration to examine the quality of American schooling. The report, *A Nation at Risk,* outlined several indicators of risk and provided a set of recommendations whose impact is still seen today, that included standardized achievement testing, high school graduation requirements, allotment of instructional time and length of the school day, content area focus, and guidelines for

teacher and administrator preparation and professional development (Imig & Imig, 2006; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Thomas & Brady, 2005).

The successive administrations of Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama have reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 that was originally intended to provide assistance to educationally disadvantaged student subgroups, with increasing measures for accountability that tie federal funding to schools' ability to increase achievement on standardized test scores. The Clinton administration's standards-based reform initiative, Goal 2000: Educate America Act, passed Congress in 1994, parallel to his reauthorization of ESEA, Improving America's School Act (Thomas and Brady, 2005). Goal 2000 and IASA continued the reforms present in the failed America 2000 initiative of the George W.H. Bush administration. These reforms included a move toward standards-based education for both content curriculum and *best practices* in instructional practices. It specified a primary focus on student achievement levels and providing a rigorous standards-based education for *all* students, even those subgroups of students that until then had been traditionally allowed lower expectations for performance such as limited English proficiency (LEP) students, and students with disabilities. Significantly, it proposed the use of achievement testing data as the primary accountability measure for districts to demonstrate student learning (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

No Child Left Behind. The George W. Bush administration proposed the reauthorization (and renaming) of the ESEA as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002. The passing of NCLB continued many of the reform ideas of the past decade, but significantly expanded accountability coverage from specified groups of educationally

disadvantaged students to *all* students, and effectively created a nationalized federal accountability system (Spring, 2014). NCLB linked federal funding to student achievement outcomes on standardized tests and imposed sanctions on schools not meeting defined criteria for adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP criteria included specified growth requirements for student subgroups on state achievement tests using 2001-2002 testing data as a baseline, including LEP students, racial/ethnic subgroups, and students with disabilities. It also required that ninety-five percent of students overall and in each subgroup be tested. Two additional features of NCLB was the requirement for teachers to be highly qualified in the area they taught, which included a bachelor's degree in the content area and a specific state certification, and the use of evidence-based instructional practices and interventions (Thomas & Brady, 2005). The new requirements for highly-qualified teachers and the use of *high quality* research-based instructional practices affected both the focus of teacher preparation programs and the teacher certification requirements. Many districts struggled to put a highly qualified teacher in every classroom under the new definition and the given timeline mandated by NCLB, especially in low-income and minority schools in urban and rural districts (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

Parallel to the increased accountability measures for curricular control and student achievement, was an increased demand for school leaders to account for teacher effectiveness and student learning in the classroom (Imig & Imig, 2006; NPBEA, 2008). Despite the emergence of educational leadership standards that espoused transformational and instructional leadership practices during this same time, the pressure to meet NCLB measures of adequate yearly progress led to school leadership practices that were

transactional and focused on compliance. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to lead collaborative school improvement, initiate locally-derived change processes, and create a culture of professional learning were not fostered in practicing school leaders (Danielson, 2014; Imig & Imig, 2006).

NCLB legislation changed the level and focus of accountability measures applied to both students and teachers. Demonstration of student achievement and growth were limited to a single measure of performance on state achievement tests. This has been widely criticized as an unfair and even biased measure for districts to demonstrate AYP, especially for some subgroup populations such as English language learners and learning disabled students (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Research has shown that limited-English proficiency (LEP) students require two to seven years to acquire English proficiency, yet NCLB required that LEP students be tested in English within three years. Studies have also shown that even with the use of research-based instructional strategies shown to be effective in general education populations, many students with disabilities fail to achieve grade-level performance on standardized tests and achievement gaps still persist for minority students compared to their white counterparts (Hartlep & Ellis, 2012; Howard, 2010; Thomas & Brady, 2005). Hartlep and Ellis (2012) studied one academic intervention program in particular, Response to Intervention (RtI) that was embraced by the accountability movement as a system for moving low-achieving students to grade level performance. Data from the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems from 2000 through 2006 was analyzed to determine if the use of RTI had an effect on the disproportionality of minority students given special education classification. They found that the use of RTI did not reduce the overrepresentation of

African-American students referred for special education classification due to low academic achievement, and in some states when implemented in schools have actually deepened achievement gaps by increasing the number of minority students classified into special education, especially Black and Hispanic males (Hartlep & Ellis, 2012; U.S. Dept. of Civil Rights, 2016). Hartlep and Ellis (2012) proposed that implementation of intervention programs alone will not improve outcomes for students of color, unless they are implemented within culturally and linguistically responsive frameworks that "take into account how culture mediates learning, RTI models will simply be…another deficit-based approach to sorting children, particularly children from marginalized communities*"* (p.104).

While NCLB legislation acknowledged that racial and other disparities around difference existed, the policies were written as general, difference-neutral measures of accountability that focused state and local implementation on addressing the individual learner needs within diverse student populations, rather than the larger institutional practices that create or reinforce inequities (Diem et al., 2016). The requirements for high-stakes testing, value added models of teacher evaluation, school choice, and even laws governing affirmative action or desegregation policies all addressed the more technical (instructional, programmatic, organizational) institutional practices without requiring local changes to the normative and political institutional structures (Holme et al., 2014). NCLB sanctions failed to create substantive and sustainable change in the political and normative culture in local school districts that undergirded achievement gaps for disadvantaged groups. These structures are inherently more difficult and uncomfortable to change because they require disrupting the existing culture of schools

and patterns of privilege that operate within school systems and society at large. The unwillingness to address all three structures limits the "zone of mediation" – the space in which policy decisions can be made and school practices can be changed in a politically accepted way (Holme et al., 2014). School leaders who are willing to challenge the normative culture and political power holders can begin to consider truly impactful policy decisions and instructional leadership practices that improve the quality of instruction for all students. Those unwilling to do so risk their schools, under the guise of compliance, becoming (or continuing to be) mediating institutions for operationalizing racism, classism, and other forms of bias into specific acts of discrimination, profiling, and inequity creation (Diem et al., 2016; Domina, Hanselman, Hwang, & McEachin, 2016; Holme et al., 2014; Pollack & Zirkel, 2013).

Normative change must begin at the central office level with a shift in focus from compliance to instructional issues and a commitment to provide resources, training, and support to building leaders and staff (Rigby, Larbi-Cherif, Rosenquist, Sharpe, Cobb, & Smith, 2017). Central office staff, particularly the superintendent, must be willing to "'take risks as they confront politically charged issues for the sake of building equitable learning environments that serve all children well' (Cooper, 2010, p.175)" (Holme et al., 2014, p. 61). Normative change next requires that school leaders are trained in culturally responsive leadership *and* adopt a position toward incoming students rooted in seeing cultural differences as a value in the classroom and not a deficit (Holme et al., 2014; Howard, 2010). Taking this position allows the school leader to lead, train, and supervise the shift toward teachers using culturally responsive practices that engage all students cognitively in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2015; Howard, 2010).

Race to the Top. The federal education legislation of the Obama administration, Race to the Top (RTTT), again significantly altered the educational landscape, describing a need for students to be *college and career ready* in order to compete globally (Spring, 2014). RTTT created a competitive federal grant program to distribute 4.35 billion dollars to states that met requirements to adopt curriculum standards that focused on career and college readiness, reform teacher evaluation systems that would tie teacher performance to student performance on state achievement tests, reform the process of teacher tenure, and institute a new era of technology-enhanced standardized testing (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Spring, 2014). The requirement to adopt new standards that prepared students for college and careers at a level that made America globally competitive led to the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a set of nationalized curricular standards in K-12 mathematics and English language arts (Spring, 2014). RTTT also provided funding for the development of two assessments, that would measure student performance and CCSS attainment at a level not previously achieved in paper-and-pencil, multiple choice tests (Dietel, 2011). The Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) were online, technology-enhanced assessments that met the RTTT criteria of " 'the number and types of items (e.g., performance tasks, selected responses, brief or extended constructed responses) and the distribution of item types within the component, including the extent to which the items will be varied and elicit complex student demonstrations or applications of knowledge and skills' (U.S. Department of Education, 2010)" (Dietel, 2011, p. 32).

RTTT included two criteria that significantly impacted teachers – reforming of the teacher tenure process and reforming of the teacher evaluation process - and tied both of these reform measures to student achievement on standardized tests, as well as increased classroom observation. Before RTTT reform, the requirements for non-tenured and tenured teachers to demonstrate effectiveness varied widely from state to state, and from district to district within states, and was largely controlled by local teacher unions through collective-bargaining agreements (McGuinn, 2012). RTTT changed this by requiring state-wide changes that linked teacher evaluation to student achievement and mandated the use of rigorous, rubric-based classroom observation tools with multiple observations. As part of any state's grant proposal, there could be no laws prohibiting the use of student achievement data in teacher evaluations, and many states passed new laws that required the use of student data in teacher evaluation. Additionally, many of the competing states increased the number and length of classroom observations all teachers received each year (McGuinn, 2012). In the state of New Jersey, RTTT funds were used to support the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act (TEACH NJ) in 2012. TEACH NJ defines four levels of teacher evaluation that links teacher performance to two measures of student performance. Teachers received a student growth objectives (SGO) score based on demonstrated student growth from pre-assessment to post-assessment within an instructional unit selected by the teacher. The second measure was a student growth percentile (SGP) score from state assessment data for students assigned to a teacher. Additionally, all teachers, both tenured and non-tenured, receive a teacher practice score based on three classroom observations per year using a state-approved observation tool (NJ Department of Education, 2015).

The requirements in RTTT concerning teacher performance, and specifically linking it to student performance on *new* assessments measuring *new* common curricular standards has re-sparked the long standing debate about what constitutes *effective* teaching, and whether teacher evaluation should be used primarily to make tenure and retention decisions or for the purpose of improving teacher practice. Many argue that it cannot do both (Domenech, 2015; Danielson, 2014). In discussing Diane Ravitch, a once ardent supporter of the standards movement, Michael Apple (2010) states,"…the standards movement in essence had been 'hijacked' by the testing movement. NCLB cemented this into place (Ravitch, 2010, p.30). Standards were connected to 'get-tough' policies that had extremely negative consequences for the lives of teachers." (p. 688). RTTT has incentivized states enacting teacher evaluation reform, rather than imposing sanctions as did NCLB, but many argue that the value-added models (VAM) of teacher evaluation that attempt to tie individual student data to teacher performance are flawed indicators of effective teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011; Imig & Imig, 2006). VAMs do not control for a number of influential factors that have been shown to affect student performance and are beyond the individual teacher's control, such as class size, curricular materials used, instructional time, home and socioeconomic challenges, student attendance, as well as the appropriateness of state tests to measure learning in every student.

Additionally, teacher performance measured by VAMs has been shown to vary significantly from year to year for the same teacher and when different tests of the same content are used (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011, 2012). Also, discrepancies exist in achieving a similar rating when the teacher is

measured using other models not dependent on individual student data (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011). One counter argument to VAMs is evaluation systems based solely on teacher demonstration of evidence-based instructional practices that have been shown to affect student growth and achievement, and that form the basis of widely-accepted professional teaching standards authored by groups such as the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and discipline-specific groups such as National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011; NCTM, 2011; NCTM, 2000). The power of this argument is being reflected in some states' choice to continue to use value-added models in compliance with RTT grant criteria, but weight classroom observations as the major contributor to the summative evaluation score, as seen in TEACH NJ. However, the larger argument is whether the current educational reform policies that narrowly define *effective* as a teacher's ability to produce individual student gains on standardized tests and limits the definition of a high-quality teacher to those who can demonstrate content-knowledge only during the one-time certification process (Imig & Imig, 2006) will lead to the intended outcome of globally competitive, college and career ready students.

In summary, each new administration since the 1980's has implemented its own version of educational reform in an effort to improve student outcomes, resulting in increasing levels of federally-mandated accountability measures. The impacts of these measures are present in every aspect of education and control decisions that affect all stakeholders. This study looks at one aspect of how new teacher evaluation reforms have impacted classroom observation practice as a method to improve instructional practice. In the state of New Jersey, RTTT funds were used, in part, to support the ACHIEVE NJ

teacher performance initiative. ACHIEVE NJ requires two to three classroom observations using a state-approved observation tool. This study explores administrators' perceptions of their capacity to provide instructional feedback to improve teacher practice.

2.3 Instructional Improvement through Teacher Evaluation

With respect to teacher evaluation, the major educational and psychological philosophies define and describe the critical role teachers should play in instruction and learning, as well as give support for the importance of student engagement during learning. Within the major philosophies, student engagement is most consistent with the beliefs and values of pragmatism. Pragmatism, which developed primarily in the United States in the late 1800's and early 1900's, focuses on the interaction of the individual with his or her environment, and believes that knowledge is best acquired through experience and use of the scientific method and problem-solving (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). It views the teacher role as "more exploratory than explanatory…not so much with teaching the learner what to think as with teaching the learner to critically think." (p. 36).

John Dewey is considered a pragmatist, and is the founder of the Progressive education movement of the same time period. Progressivism theorized that children learn best through hands-on experiences that help them construct new knowledge, and apply meaning to prior knowledge. In contrast to the essentialist view of teachers as authority figures and a focus on teacher-centered instruction (Imig &Imig, 2006; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012) , progressivism views teachers as facilitators in the learning process. Teachers have the responsibility of planning purposeful and progressively culminating experiences "which engage their [student's] interest and require their [student's]

reflection" (Dewey, 1916, p. 350). Dewey states that activities that will facilitate learning must meet certain requirements – appeal to student interests and require a definite learning outcome that is not a simple result of following some routine process or given directions (Dewey, 1916). Dewey defines interest not as "self-interest", where a student necessarily has a personal interest in the subject matter or perhaps in getting a good grade in a course. Dewey instead defines interest as appealing to a person's inclination to learn more, or intellectual curiosity in a continuous formation of self as an accumulation of knowledge and understanding of the world (Dewey, 1916).

Learning as a mostly cognitive engagement process is also supported by cognitive psychological theory. Cognitive psychology is concerned with the nature of learning - how structures of knowledge are developed within the mind and how reasoning and problem-solving strategies are generated during the learning process (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). Jean Piaget identified stages of cognitive development from birth to maturity, setting limits to the type of learning that could occur at the various stages. For example, a child of age seven to eleven is within the concrete operations stage, and while it could be expected that the child could use data to solve problems, s/he must have concrete objects available to manipulate or have personal past experience to draw on. In other words, students in this age group cannot engage in abstract thinking, until they mature to the formal operations stage at eleven years of age and up (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). Piaget viewed the teacher role as providing the right positive environment in which students could use their "power to construct knowledge through adaptation to the environment" (French, 2007, p. 24). Piaget theorized that this cognitive power included three cognitive processes – assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration of

experiences- that overlapped with Dewey's educational principles of situation, interaction, and continuity of learning experiences (Dewey, 1938; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012).

Lev Vygotsky, another psychologist that studied learning in children is often contrasted against Piaget in the literature. However, Vygotsky also supported student interaction with the environment, but included the larger socio-cultural institutions unique to the student's time as a critical component of engaging in the learning process (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). Today, researchers and practitioners are using this aspect of Vygotsky's theory to examine the use of technology, such as social media and interactive learning apps, as an instructional and learning tool (Prensky, 2013). Vygotsky further challenged Piagetian theory, by proposing that learning processes could precede, and even further, developmental (biological) processes. He proposed that effective teaching and peer engagement that takes place within students' "zones of proximal development" (ZoD) can enhance the learning experience and move students further in their learning process.

These educational philosophies form the foundation upon which current teaching and leadership standards are built (Danielson Group, 2014; NPBEA, 2015), and are evident in teacher evaluation models, such as the Danielson Framework. For instance, Dewey's requirement for teachers to plan purposeful and progressively culminating experiences, along with his definition of *interest,* provide the underlying foundation for the more modern definition of student engagement as a cognitive undertaking. Danielson (2007) rationalizes that student engagement is the "raison d'etre of schools; [that] it is through active engagement that students learn complex content" (p.82). Danielson states

that all other domains and components of her teaching framework are in support of student engagement. These supporting components include planning and preparation, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures, the use of questioning and discussion techniques, and the use of assessment in instruction. These components act together for the effective delivery of activities and instructional methods that result in "*intellectual involvement* with the content or active construction of understanding" (p.83). In contrast to more essentialist views of teaching and evaluation tools that relied on ritual compliance as measures of learning, Danielson in agreement with Dewey, disqualifies effective use of time, or time on task, and simple student participation in a task as effective indicators of student engagement. These types of student actions by themselves do not necessitate cognitive engagement in order to be observed (Danielson, 2007; Dewey, 1938).

Additionally, the theories of Vygotsky have two implications for student learning and the effectiveness of instructional delivery. The first is whether the instruction is engaging each student in his or her zone of proximal development (ZoD). In evaluating teaching practice, both the design of instructional groups to facilitate peer engagement and the use of instructional strategies and materials that differentiate appropriately for the range of student development are present in the Danielson rubric. The second concern that arises from Vygotsky is whether the instruction is engaging students in experiences that match the cognitive processes, such as problem-solving strategies and language use, they will require in the larger socio-cultural setting in which they belong (French, 2007).

While these philosophies described the teaching role, none, at the time, clearly defined measures or criteria for evaluating effectiveness of teachers in these roles.

Attempts at TE from the 1930's-1960's looked to create lists of teacher competencies, but lacked a comprehensive design to both evaluate teacher practice and potentially guide instructional improvement (Forzani, 2014). The formal teacher evaluation process, in that sense, is a relatively new concept that appeared as part of the educational accountability reforms of the 1990's and early twenty-first century (Hull, 2013). In 2009, as part of Race to the Top grants, many states reformed their teacher evaluation protocols to include multiple classroom observations per year, student growth (or learning) objectives, and a component that connected teachers of math and language arts to the performance of their students on standardized tests measuring the same areas (Hull, 2013). Critics of these reforms contend that teacher evaluation has become more about providing an easier process for dismissing the relatively small number of tenured teachers that are instructionally incompetent than about its original intent to provide teachers feedback for continuous development of teaching practice (Domenech, 2015). Danielson warns against evaluating teachers without first making sure that teachers *and* administrators have a clear understanding of the criteria by which teacher performance is being measured, and a clear understanding of the content and rigor required by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and how it translates into instructional practice (Danielson, 2014). Danielson stresses that this is a decision that involves all local stakeholders, including teachers, supervisors, curriculum directors, and building administrators, and that teachers should have access to system-wide supports before being evaluated (Danielson, 2014).

The question of whether teacher evaluation can measure and improve instructional practices is a critical one. When the end goal is to create the best learning environment for all students to achieve, then teacher evaluation could be a useful tool in

the cycle of continuous improvement that school leaders engage in with individual teachers and teaching staffs to initiate discourse about teaching and learning.

Research has shown that teachers who participate in performance assessments aligned to professional teaching standards show improvement in their teacher practice (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011). In a background paper for policy makers, Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, and Rothstein (2011) presented conclusions from a review of research on value-added models (VAMs) of teacher evaluation and their ability to accurately measure teacher effectiveness. They presented a research consensus that VAMs were too unreliable to use as a measure of teacher impact on a signal set of students, but also identified from the research many teaching practices such as deep understanding of content, the ability to provide scaffolds and supports for learning, and providing constant feedback on learning that VAMs were unable to measure. These teaching practices, however, have been incorporated into professional teaching standards such the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Research on the use of performance assessments fully aligned to these professional standards and that incorporate evidence of student learning revealed that teacher ratings produced from these assessments were more consistent in predicting student achievement outcomes than ratings using VAMs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011; Milanowski, Kimball, & White, 2004). However, in testing this strength of this finding, three subsequent studies have identified some additional concerns and potential criteria for the connection between teacher evaluation and instructional improvement that leads to improved student achievement to exist. Kimball, White, Milanowski, and Borman

(2004) found a positive but statistically weak correlation between teacher ratings and average student achievement of those teachers' students. Plausible explanations for this finding were provided from analysis of the research setting context. These explanations included that the district did not use the full version of the Danielson Framework as its teacher evaluation tool resulting in a potentially less rigorous assessment of teacher performance that could mask important deficiencies in instructional practice. The researchers also identified a weak situation for teacher evaluation use within the district. Ratings from teacher evaluation were rarely used to make retention or placement decisions, so leaders were less focused on using evaluation to differentiate teacher practice and encourage instructional improvement than using it as a method to improve staff morale through positive praise, thus resulting in inflated ratings (Kimball, White, Milanowski, & Borman, 2004). In a second study, Kimball and Milanowski (2009) confirmed that teacher evaluation ratings using standards-based evaluation tools such as the Danielson Framework did not show a strong relationship to student achievement outcomes if evaluation occurred in a weak situation. In their two-year study of a large school district in the western US where they quantitatively measured the correlation between teacher evaluation ratings and student achievement measures, they found an overall positive but weak correlation (0.22 in the first year and 0.19 in the second year) between teacher ratings and student outcomes. Additionally there was significant variation in the strength and direction of these correlations across the 23 principals and assistant principals in the first year, and the 57 in the second year, ranging from -0.90 to +0.90. The researchers concluded that simple interpretation of the correlation data between teacher ratings and student achievement masked significant variation in

evaluator practice. In an attempt to provide clarification they initiated a qualitative exploration of evaluator practice (will, skill, and context) that included administrator interviews from a subset of participants who had either strongly positive or strongly negative correlations. They also interviewed three randomly chosen teachers from each of these administrator's schools. They found little difference in the motivation to conduct observations and complete evaluation forms, or in the how the two groups prepared and carried out the observation practice; nor did they note in significant differences in the context of the different school settings including socio-economic status of the students, student achievement levels, or years of administrative or teaching experience within the faculties. However, both groups reported little district focus on feedback giving and training that was focused on procedural details of evaluation with little emphasis on quality or accuracy in evaluating teacher performance. When the potential interaction between will, skill, and context was considered, the researchers highlighted two examples from the low correlation group. In one case, teacher interviews revealed a problematic administrator-teacher relationship (context). This same principal also expressed negative opinions about the use of teacher evaluation system (will) and completed the least amount of in-person observations, relying instead on teacher reports of their own instruction to produce observation narratives that had little variation in the language or description of teacher performance (will and skill). In another example, the principal had a long-term working relationship with majority of her teaching staff (context). She acknowledged a reluctance to critically evaluate their instruction and expressed a pre-conceived assumption that higher instructional levels would be observed because of the experience of her staff (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009).

In both studies teacher evaluation occurred in weak situations where there was little emphasis on following a uniform evaluation process and low levels of accountability for leaders to engage in the evaluation process fully, including providing quality feedback. These findings point to a need for the combined use of a rigorous observation tool, one that is standards-based and requires evidence of student learning, with a rigorous evaluation process that requires the engagement of both teachers and school leaders in order to produce instructional improvement that leads to improved student outcomes.

Prior to 2009 and the educational reforms of the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition for federal funds, many districts used classroom observation tools that had only a binary rating of performance as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Criteria for these ratings lacked explicit alignment to professional teaching standards such as the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (Danielson Group, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011), and often did not use evidence of student learning as a measure in the rating of performance (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011). Using these observation tools, the overwhelming majority of teachers were rated as satisfactory, even in districts that had low student achievement (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2011). RTTT policy required that new teacher evaluation (TE) systems be implemented that used multiple measures including both evidence from classroom practice and student achievement data (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; McGuinn, 2012).

Many states, such as New Jersey, Ohio, and Illinois, initially responded to the RTTT initiative by designing TE systems that included value-added models (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015; Sporte & Jiang, 2016). In a background paper for policy makers, Darling-Hammond et al (2011) summarized research literature demonstrating the unreliability of using value-added models that attempt to link individual teacher effectiveness to student performance on standardized tests as the sole measure in teacher evaluation. Marzano (2014) studied differences in how well student performance on end of the year state assessments (distal measures) and end of lesson formative assessments (proximal measures) related to teacher observation ratings by calculating validity coefficients between the student learning measure and the observation score. Marzano premised that proximal measures of student learning occurred close to actual instructional behaviors that resulted in learning, and therefore could be more directly attributed to the individual teacher's practice. In the study, 79 classrooms across 50 schools in the US were video recorded for one lesson, and a single observer rated each lesson using an observational tool based on the Art and Science of Teaching instructional framework (Marzano, 2007) to produce a teacher observation score. Inter-rater consistency was establish by rescoring 10 of the 79 lessons several weeks after initial scoring with 70% to 90% agreement. The proximal measure of student learning involved the use of interactive response systems to teacher questions on the content learned in the lesson. Questions were tiered from easy to difficult ranging from factual recall, understanding of generalizations or principles based on content learned directly in the lesson, or application or inference of content learned, respectively. Data on the percentage of students correctly answering each question was immediately displayed to

both teachers and students. Growth scores using the proximal measure were determined by calculating a weighted average score across all three levels of questions asked. Validity coefficients were then computed by calculating a Pearson correlation coefficient. The average proximal measure score for each class was the criterion score and the corresponding teacher observation score was the predictor score. Using this method, the validity coefficient for overall teacher observation scores related to proximal measures was 0.75. To determine the validity coefficient using distal measures, 151 teachers from one district were observed and scored using the same method and observation tool described for the proximal measure. End of year assessments in reading, writing, and math were used as distal measures of student learning, and growth percentiles were computed as the criterion score. Validity coefficients for the end of the year reading, writing, and math growth scores were 0.17, 0.21, and 0.26 respectively. All three distal measure validity coefficients were significantly lower than that of the proximal measure at 0.75. Findings from this study provided evidence that VAMs using high stakes end of the year assessments may not truly measure individual teacher impacts on student learning. Additionally, using these models, "teachers' ratings differ substantially from *class to class* and *year to year*, as well as from one *test* to the next" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011, p. 2). One specific critique summarized by this review was that value-added models are unable to account for the broad range of factors beyond teacher instruction that impact student learning. Some of these include school-level factors, like class size, time allotment for instruction in tested areas, and availability of curricular resources, as well as student-level factors like home environment and factors that arise due to

socioeconomic disadvantages of children. These factors are not measured, nor controlled for, in value-added models (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011).

As additional states, such as Illinois and New Jersey, have revised their teacher evaluation systems to include classroom observations using an evaluation tool aligned to professional teaching standards, evidence is beginning to emerge indicating that these are more reliable indicators of teacher effectiveness than VAMs, and better formative performance tools that can be used to improve teacher practices. In a 2008 study of a TE pilot in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), an initial cohort of 44 principals in 44 schools within the district instituted multiple classroom observations, including pre- and post-observation conferences, to rate teacher performance using the rubrics from the Danielson Framework. Similar to the Urban Rim School District in the current case study, CPS had previously used a checklist observation tool of 19 classroom practices where evaluators rated teachers as either having a strength, weakness, or does not apply for each practice. No formal guidance or established rubric was provided however to describe weak or strong performance in each practice. Using this old tool, 93% of teachers were rated as superior or excellent despite two-thirds of CPS schools failing to meet state proficiency levels on student achievement assessments. CPS this initiated the development of a new TE system called the Excellence in Teaching Project (EITP) using the Danielson Framework as a more rigorous observation tool, and principals participating in year one of the pilot (Cohort 1) received 50 hours over three days of initial training on the use of the tool and expectations for classroom observation practices, followed by monthly sessions where principals brought in observation artifacts to discuss with peer principals in the pilot, and for additional half-day trainings on understanding

and use of the Danielson rubrics. Principals also received support from central office administration to adhere to observation deadlines, receive feedback on the observation practices, and have their observation ratings reviewed as a means of calibrating their practice to central office expectations for evidence collection, scoring using the rubrics, and feedback giving. In the second year of the study, 48 additional schools were added to the pilot (Cohort 2), but with significantly less training and support for principals in this cohort. Cohort 2 principals received only two days of initial training, and did not receive the follow up professional learning opportunities offered to the first cohort. To identify the impact of the new teacher evaluation system on student learning the study compared scores on reading and math assessments at the end of the first year between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools (who had yet to initiate the new observation system, and then again in the second year of the study when Cohort 1 was in its second year of the pilot and Cohort 2 was in its first year. One finding was that positive growth in student achievement was seen in Cohort 1 schools relative to Cohort 2 schools in year one, and this difference in achievement persisted in the second year when Cohort 2 schools joined the pilot. The second year cohort received relatively less initial training and technical support throughout the year, and the researchers concluded that the increases seen in student achievement for Cohort 1 school that were ostensibly attributed to improvement in instructional practice depended on both the principals' capacity to provide instructional leadership, including guidance and feedback on instruction during pre- and post conferences, and written feedback of the observations and the teacher response to this feedback in ways that generated instructional improvements (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). They further concluded that the training and support given to the Cohort 1 principals was

critical in developing this instructional leadership capacity. While this study made an initial connection between the leadership action of observation and feedback giving and student achievement, it did not elucidate the mechanisms by which this link exists. For instance, it did not measure or describe the specific feedback giving practices of leaders, nor the frequency or types of professional learning activities that teachers engaged in in response to feedback within the new TE system. It also did not seek to understand principals' perceptions of the impact of training and support on their ability to carry out their observation and feedback giving responsibilities. The studies by Robinson (2010), Sinemma and Robinson (2007), and Tuyten and Devos (2011) that were discussed within the theoretical framework section of this chapter clarify the connections between leadership action in observation practice, teacher response to it, and its potential impact on student learning, as well as measure leader capacity to carry out these actions. The action research study proposed here will specifically look at how school leaders understand their capacity to engage in feedback giving as part of their observation practice, and what leadership characteristics they rely on in their feedback giving practice.

Important considerations in implementing a teacher evaluation system are the attitudes of the evaluating school administrators toward using the evaluation tool to both evaluate teaching and improve teaching in their schools. Principals and assistant principals, and in some districts, content-area supervisors, are the most common classroom observers and function as the instructional leaders closest to teachers (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015; Robinson 2007). Therefore, the school leader's attitude about a teacher evaluation system, its components and implementation,

can affect both their own behavior as observer and can greatly influence teachers' attitudes toward being evaluated (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). Both of these factors become important within the feedback giving model proposed by Tuytens and Devos (2012) when considering how a school leader's attitude and behavioral practices as the feedback source may influence the reaction of teachers to the feedback. While principal dispositions toward teacher evaluation have been overall more positive than teacher dispositions, studies have shown a larger variance among the principal groups studied than in teacher groups (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). Additionally, there has been only a low-level association between more negative attitudes and the amount of teaching experience, administrative experience, or grade-band assignment of principals, suggesting that broader procedural and structural factors are influencing administrators' perceptions of teacher evaluation challenges. Factors identified as problems leading to principals' negative attitudes included time constraints, an increased observation load, use of an invalid evaluation tool and not having been properly trained in use of the tool (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015).

The findings from early implementation study of Chicago Public School's reformed teacher evaluation system suggest that implementation of evaluation systems are more effective in producing changes in teacher practices and student achievement when resources are devoted to training of evaluators, evaluation and feedback occur frequently, and system-wide supports, such as targeted professional development and instructional coaching and mentoring, are available at the time of implementation (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015).

2.4 Teacher Professional Learning

Situated Cognition (SC) theory argues that learning is the process of interpreting meaning from our experiences of phenomenon (Hung, Looi, & Koh, 2004). SC theory also contends that this interpretive process to establish meaning (knowledge) is located "in particular settings and involves other learners, the environment, and the meaning making activities that contribute to new knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991)" (Pella, 2011, p.109). These social interactions also impact individual identity formation. Therefore, "knowledge cannot be detached from the knower, it has no independent [external] existence; it is part and parcel of the identity of the individual" (Hung, Looi, & Koh, 2004, p. 194). Given the need for authentic learning environments and social interaction as a contextualizing factor in how meaning is constructed, feedback giving and feedback conversations between the classroom observer and the teacher can be an ideal tool and setting for professional learning to shift instructional practice.

Recent history of teacher professional learning. In 1975, Herbert M. Kleibard (2013) looked back across the twentieth century to offer a critical reflection on the application of scientific management in curriculum development, including teacher education programs. Kleibard (2013) remarked about the dominance of the scientific management in directing curriculum development saying, "it should be clear to anyone familiar with the current state of the art in the curriculum world that the scientific curriculum movement, with few adaptations and modifications, has been triumphant." (p. 75). In 1929, two proponents of scientific curriculum development, Werrett W. Charters and Douglas Waples, led the Commonwealth Teacher Training Study that surveyed thousands of teachers to identify over a thousand tasks and activities that characterized

teaching. Kleibard criticized the study for not defining a construct of teaching around which the identified teacher practices could be organized. He reduced the study to a simple, albeit comprehensive, *job analysis* that was not useful or practical in helping to train beginning teachers. Despite this later criticism by Kleibard, the *job analysis* approach, which was oriented in a behaviorist approach, took and maintained a hold as the pervading approach to curriculum design and teacher education. This included the development of competency-based teacher education (CBTE) programs beginning in the late 1950s as part of the *back to basics* movement and the call for schools to produce students who could compete internationally in areas of STEM (Kleibard, 2013; Forzani, 2014). CBTE programs identified specific teacher behaviors needed for effective teaching and categorized them under major functions that were expressed as measurable, behavioral objectives that became the basis for teacher education curriculum. Similarly, as classroom observation and teacher evaluation evolved as part of the tenure process for new teachers, evaluation tools were developed around these same competencies. However, these competencies did not place emphasis on responsive or facilitating teacher behaviors needed to engage students in discussion or inquiry, nor did the observation tools include assessment of student behaviors that would demonstrate learning. In many cases, the classroom observation tools developed were simple checklists of teacher behaviors (Forzani, 2014).

Teacher professional learning today. Today, the focus is once again on a practice-based approach to teacher learning where the classroom observation process can serve as a performance-based and formative assessment of instructional practice. The feedback giving (and receiving) during this process can be a reflective and collaborative

learning experience that leads to improved teacher practice and student outcomes (Mertler, 2014; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012).

Tutytens and Devos (2011) and Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2010) reviewed five characteristics within situated cognition theory required for adult learning. Adult learning should be a lifelong experience. Adult learning occurs across settings and circumstances, both formally and informally. Learning is influenced by an individual's past experiences. In other words, historical context is important to present learning. From a constructivist standpoint learning is a series of reconstructions as new context occurs (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). Adult learners are problem-oriented, and adult learners require an active role in their learning. Professional learning through the teacher evaluation process, in theory, meets all of these requirements as it should be an ongoing reflective process that engages the culminated knowledge of teachers. Feedback conversations can present authentic problems of practice contextualized by direct observations of teacher and student actions and the analysis of student data and work products. The teacher act of receiving and processing feedback and then reflecting on her practice to plan for instructional change is an active engagement role where the school leader serves as a coach and facilitator (Glickman et al. 2010). School leaders serving in the coaching role must be able to deliver feedback in a way that initiates a positive teacher response that results in willingness to engage in this type of professional learning toward instructional improvement (Ovando, 2005; Tuytens and Devos, 2011).

2.5 The Instructional Leadership Role

Several studies have addressed the effect of principal actions on teaching practice and student achievement and found that the principal leadership largely indirectly

mediates improvements in student performance through direct and indirect effects on the teaching and learning processes that occur in their schools (Robinson et al., 2008; Supovitz, Srinides, & May, 2009; Tuytens & Devos, 2011).

School leaders set the conditions and expectations for teaching and learning, and have the ability to create and provide opportunity for teachers to improve their instructional practice (Supovitz, 2013; Bambrick- Santoyo, 2012). While Odden (2011) identifies measurement of teacher performance as one of the two major aims of strategic human resource management, inclusion of features that allow teachers to learn from the results of their performance evaluation and the clear linking of evaluation to systems for instructional improvement is identified as an important organizational connection within any district's or school's educational improvement plan. The professional development of teachers is identified as one of the primary responsibilities of principals (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Glickman et al., 2010; NPBEA 2015). Teachers identified meaningful, high-quality professional learning as a major determining factor in job satisfaction and retention (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Specific to this professional development is the opportunity principals create to interact directly with teachers and to have teachers interact with each other concerning their classroom practice (Supovitz, 2013; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010).

The classroom observation process is an ideal time for the one-on-one interaction between the school leader and the teacher to occur. These interactions allow a designated time and place within the professional experience of teachers where they can expect to receive meaningful feedback about their craft. Danielson (2007) and Strong (2006) both

argue that the provision of specific, actionable feedback provided during the classroom observation process can lead to improvement in instructional practice. However, Danielson (2014) cautions that while feedback given during the evaluation cycle can be a lever for instructional improvement it must be delivered as part of a collaborative process where the teacher has an active role in self-assessing and reflecting on their own practice. Observing administrators then, must not only be prepared to provide feedback, but to engage in productive feedback conversations with teachers that engage teachers in reflection and the identification and implementation of instructional changes (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Glickman et al., 2010). Tuytens and Devos (2011) identified several problems school leaders face in engaging in this type of feedback giving during the classroom observation process. The first concerns the amount of time needed to truly differentiate and problematize observations of teaching and then articulate them to teachers during the pre- and post-observation conferences. Providing teachers critical feedback, that may also be associated with lower evaluation ratings, requires more time and explanation than more superficial feedback and higher ratings. Related to this first concern is the amount and depth of feedback given, both in written and verbal forms, during the observation process. Many administrators, in an effort to comply with TE requirements and manage their other building responsibilities, engage in the observation process in perfunctory manner characterized by a lack of meaningful feedback given (Derrington & Campbell, 2015; Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2017). Given these initial concerns, Tutyens (2011) identified specific concerns related to the school leader and their capacity to fulfill the feedback giving role. The concerns included a) the time balance between instructional leaders role and the building manager role; b) the readiness

and willingness of school leaders to engage in feedback giving role; c) leaders' feelings that engaging in the process can actually lead to teaching improvement; d) leader readiness and willingness to engage in conversations that may be uncomfortable and time-consuming; e) willingness to follow up feedback with additional rounds of observation and feedback required to produce sustainable change in practice; f) leaders' pedagogical content knowledge and application skill in recognizing effective teaching and f) leaders' feeling of self-efficacy and actual skill in facilitating effective feedback conversations and providing specific and actionable recommendations for instructional improvement.

In a review of the literature concerning instructional leadership, Lochmiller (2016) found previous work demonstrating that feedback is an important component in developing teacher practice. Research in the fields of educational psychology and organizational behavior support the potentially positive effects of feedback on performance (Rigby et al., 2017; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Supervision of classroom instruction is assumed to include frequent observations and professional development that includes coaching, collaboration, and feedback to teachers on their instructional practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015). In this model of supervision "'the principal is expected to understand the tenets of quality instruction as well as have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum to know that appropriate content is being delivered to all students' (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008, p.458)" (Lochmiller, 2016, p. 79). It also "presume(s) that the principal is 'capable of providing constructive feedback to improve teaching or is able to design a system in which other provide this support' (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008, p. 458)." (p. 79).

As a goal, in the secondary instructional setting school administrators would have the capacity to serve as "instructional leaders who both communicated expectations to teachers for quality instruction and gave content-specific feedback to teachers" (Rigby et al., 2017, p. 477) to improve student engagement and student outcomes. However, Lochmiller and Acker-Hocevar (2016) in a study of 21 high school principals and assistant principals across five high schools in different regions of the U.S., found that "[administrators] perceived that their own lack of understanding about math and science content prevented them from engaging classroom teachers about instructional improvement matters" through direct instructional feedback, and administrators instead adopted an "operational orientation to instructional leadership, which relied primarily on various human resource activities" (p. 283-284), such as scheduling collaborative planning time, hiring teachers who already modeled effective instruction, and bringing in external expert sources of professional development. Rigby et al. (2017) also found a failure of administrators to provide content-specific feedback that addressed teachers perceived instructional needs, stating "even in districts who aim for coherent systems of support, administrators' expectations and feedback, as described by teachers, were not targeted toward specific teachers' mathematics instruction in ways that would likely orient improvement in those practices" (p. 482).

2.6 Barriers to Feedback Effecting Instructional Improvement

Because classroom observation and feedback giving often occur as part of the formal teacher evaluation process, barriers can exist to productive discourse that results in actual change in teacher practice (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). These barriers, at the secondary level, include the lack of administrator content

area knowledge, the dual nature of administrators as both evaluators and instructional leaders, and the lack of perception of both administrators and teachers of the observation process as a collaborative and reflective process.

The first barrier, as discussed previously in this chapter, is the existence of content-area subcultures within secondary schools. Most high schools and many middle schools are departmentalized by subject matter, yet building administrators are tasked with both evaluating and providing instructional leadership across content areas. Siskin (1991) describes the existence of distinct subject matter sub-cultures that "has a shared and specialized language and draws on a separate knowledge base largely inaccessible to the uninitiated." (p. 143). Siskin (1991) illustrated how this led to "different departmental policies and [instructional] practice but also in different responses to the same external policies" (p. 144). Lochmiller (2016) suggests that the differential response to external policies, might also include "how teachers receive feedback from school administrators about their instruction and potentially shape their responses to administrators' feedback, particularly when the administrator does not share a similar conception of the subject they teach" (p. 80).

A related cultural barrier is a persisting institutionalized norm separating building administrators from matters of instruction and casting them more as building and operations managers, despite the push for greater instructional leadership espoused in federal policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Rigby et al., 2017; Sheng, Wolff, Kilmer, & Yager, 2017). This norm has also been reinforced by district organizational structures that adopt distributed leadership models where district curriculum and instruction supervisors, building department heads, instructional coaches and teacher

leaders act as the primary instructional leaders to teachers (Lochmiller & Acker-Hocevar, 2016).

Additionally, feedback alone, without job-embedded opportunities for teachers to collaborate and practice new instructional strategies and skills, does not lead to sustained change in instructional practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012, Danielson, 2007). Therefore in addition to instructional leadership practice including high-quality and regular feedback it requires leaders to build systems to support continuous adult learning and experimentation (Glickman et al., 2010; Ovando, 2005; Tomlinson & Murphy, 2015).

Finally the dual nature of administrators as both evaluators, in a strictly administrative sense, and instructional leaders who would serve as an instructional support creates a "tension [that] may prevent teachers from being able to view feedback as support for instructional change, even if the feedback is of high quality" (Rigby et al., 2017, p.482). When classroom observation is evaluative, teachers may see the observation and the corresponding feedback as a judgment of their teaching that has consequence for their professional image and even job security. Myung and Martinez (2013) proposed applying the biopsychosocial model of response to threat to the negative teacher response to feedback. In this model teachers perceive the feedback as a threat which initiates an automatic behavioral response that "interfere[s] with the teacher's interpretation of and willingness to respond to what he hears" (Myung & Martinez, 2013, p. 5). In contrast, if the classroom observation and resulting feedback conversation can be perceived as a challenge, instead of threat, the biopsychosocial response becomes flexible. When challenged, teachers can perceive the feedback conversation as a collaborative improvement process that allows for their input, and the feedback given as a

form of support for instructional improvement (Myung & Martinez, 2013; Ovando, 2005).

Potential strategies to combat barriers. Despite these barriers, there is a potential for high-quality, well- received feedback to be an impactful part of a system of professional supports that lead to instructional improvement. While Rigby et al. (2017) conclude that content-specific feedback is required to improve the practice of inquiry-oriented mathematics instruction (which would be both content and pedagogically specific), they also classify several types of feedback that focus on general instructional practices such as classroom management and organization that are not content-specific. Other types of general instructional practices, such as facilitating group discussion by posing higher-order questions or the use of argumentation in learning tasks, focus on cognitive engagement within in any discipline (Rigby et al., 2017; Buoncristiani & Buoncristiani, 2012). These types of instructional practices engage students in cognitive engagement practices, such as arguing from evidence, developing and using models, and constructing explanations, that are now included across disciplines in national sets of standards such as the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts, and the Next Generation Science Standards (National Research Council, 2015; Achieve, 2013). Therefore the provision of high-quality feedback in these general instruction strategies has the potential to improve student engagement in learning. Furthermore, many of these general cognitive engagement practices have also been identified as highly impactful in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy is often limited to instructional practices and curriculum that "focuse[s] on issues of student culture or critical [race] analysis of

world events" (Waddell, 2014, p. 13). However, broader definitions of culturally relevant pedagogy focus both on using students' cultural experience to make the content and learning more relevant and on the strategic use of general instructional practices that will increase student achievement for students of color (Hartlep & Ellis, 2012; Howard, 2010). In this way, providing high-quality feedback provides an opportunity for leaders to facilitate reflection and dialogue about the use of all instructional strategies that will better address students' learning needs. This may be feedback that suggests general instructional strategies that increase cognitive engagement to create intellectual curiosity; feedback that generates reflection opportunities that guide teachers to examine their own biases and attitudes toward students' differences and shift teachers' orientation away from cultural deficit mindsets (Howard, 2010) to "place[s] them on a trajectory for reconsidering their beliefs and practices" (Crockett & Buckley, 2009, p. 170); or feedback that provides specific examples of culturally responsive practices that broaden the curriculum by including a range of cultural perspectives and interpretations that allow students to use their personal experiences to enhance their learning (Howard, 2010).

However, providing this level of instructional leadership requires leaders who have an awareness of both their own positionality with respect to equitable educational practices and the utility of the feedback they provide to effect instructional change. Additionally, an understanding of the current self-efficacy of leaders and their actual skilled capacity in providing feedback is needed in order for districts to strategically provide professional supports administrators may need to implement an observation protocol and provide feedback that will lead to sustainable instructional improvement (Rigby et al., 2017; Lochmiller & Acker-Hocevar, 2016)

To improve the reception of feedback as a support and the observation process as a collaborative process for instructional improvement, administrators need to re-characterize the discourse around classroom observation and teacher evaluation. Roussin and Zimmerman (2014) suggest engaging in feedback discourse that focuses on mastery, not performance, in order to activate a growth mindset in teachers that leads to reflective practice beyond the observation. Feedback conversations should provide data for the teacher to analyze with the administrator and administrators should include questioning that asks teachers to reflect on the outcomes of the lesson and suggest future applications of the feedback (changes to practice for future lessons) (Danielson, 2014; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014). Roussin and Zimmerman (2014) and Myung and Martinez (2013) both suggest that administrators look for ways to shift the balance of power toward teachers during the observation process. Strategies could include asking or informing teachers ahead of the observation what instructional areas will be the focused on during the feedback discussion, utilizing active listening strategies to ensure that teachers' concerns and needs are heard during the conversation, and making sure to co-develop next steps that ensure ongoing support for the teacher (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013).

2.7 Summary

The data collected by the U.S. Department of Civil Rights (2016) and other studies have shown that schools serving poor and minority students have difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers with experience and strong content backgrounds, thus contributing to disparities in teacher quality. Research has also shown that teacher quality, or effectiveness, is the major influencing factor in student outcomes (Darling-

Hammond et al., 2011). Given these factors, teacher evaluation systems have the potential to function not just as accountability measures, but also as a tool to improve the instructional practice of teachers serving low-income and minority students. Specifically, classroom observation and the provision of feedback within teacher evaluation models have the power to serve this latter purpose. However, the effectiveness of classroom observation and feedback practice to improve instruction is highly dependent on the capacity of the instructional leader to engage teachers in reflective practice that identifies areas of weakness and facilitates instructional changes. This capacity is impacted not only by the leader's pedagogical content knowledge and interpersonal skills, but also by the attitudes held about the ability of the observation and feedback process to effect change and the power a leader holds in that process to effect change.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The choice of a research design for action research is largely dependent on the nature of the problem of practice and the type of research focus that begins to emerge in the initial stages of information gathering. However, other factors can play a role in influencing the choice of methodology in action research. One factor to consider is the potential audience that will review and use the research outcomes. Another factor is determining the type of data and conclusions that will be most beneficial in the development and evaluation of an improvement plan to address the problem of practice and the needs identified by the study (Mertler, 2014). After taking into account all of these factors, deciding upon a research methodology helps to frame the formal statement of the research question (Mertler, 2014).

A qualitative research approach is best used when seeking to understand the conditions of the educational setting surrounding the problem of practice and to understand the multiple viewpoints of the stakeholders involved in the problem (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). To be rigorous, the qualitative strategies used to gather data, such as interviewing, field observations, and review of existing documents, must provide a description of the range and depth of viewpoints, variables, and/or conditions under study. In this study a qualitative observational case study design was used to describe the administrator understanding and practice of a small cohort of

secondary school leaders in one district in providing instructional feedback. The study also used a questionnaire to provide an initial statistical and qualitative description of administrator perceptions regarding instructional leadership practices across the district. This chapter will briefly revisit the problem of practice, research purpose and research question, before describing the action research design, including the cycles of reflection that occur throughout the action research process, and the data collection methods that were used. The chapter will end with a discussion of the study limitations, ethical considerations, and the positionality of myself as the participant researcher in this qualitative study.

3.2 Problem of Practice

The Urban Rim School District (URSD) was in year three of implementing a new teacher evaluation system and adopting the Danielson Framework for Teaching as its evaluation tool at the time of this study. Administrators, including principals, assistant principals, and content-area supervisors, were assigned an increased number of formal classroom observations to complete. As part of the observation process, school leaders were expected to use the rubric-based Danielson Framework to collect evidence of teacher practice in two domains, the classroom environment and instruction. The domains included a district focus on five power components including the establishing a culture of learning, managing classroom procedures, questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, and the use of assessment in instruction. School leaders were expected to use this evidence to provide both written feedback and lead feedback discussions during the pre- and post-observation process. The district central office leadership had communicated that teacher evaluation would not only be used for

personnel decisions, but intended it as a mechanism for instructional improvement. School leaders were expected to facilitate the professional growth of teachers through the observations process, and specifically through the provision of meaningful feedback. These expectations represented a significant shift in the instructional leadership expectations of district school leaders, and administrators expressed mixed feelings about the increased workload, need for the changed observation process, and their ability to provide feedback that would lead to instructional improvement. These feelings are in line with several studies that have shown that a significant portion of administrators either feel ill-equipped to lead instructional improvement through teacher evaluation (Lochmiller, 2016; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011) or there is a discrepancy between teacher and administrator perceptions on the usefulness and quality of feedback given (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Khachatryan, 2015; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). As URSD entered its third year under the new TE system, the central office expectation was that administrators could now effectively utilize the rubric-based tool to provide high-quality feedback to teachers. However, district office review of written observation reports revealed that the quality and frequency of feedback was not consistent across all administrators, especially at the secondary level.

3.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this action research was to examine administrator understanding and practice in providing feedback for growth to teachers. It sought to describe the leadership characteristics that school leaders felt they employed in crafting feedback and

engaging in feedback discussions with teachers. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are school leaders' perceptions of their feedback giving practice to motivate professional learning and instructional improvement?
2. What leadership characteristics do leaders identify as important in the feedback giving process?

3.4 Action Research Method and Design

Setting and context. In New Jersey, each township or municipality has its own school district, with very few regionalized districts, as is often seen in other parts of the country. This districting practice over the years has meant that very affluent suburban districts with little racial diversity sometimes sit only a mile or two from urban and urban rim districts that have a much larger range of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, and a significant proportion of low-income students. The Urban Rim School district (URSD) is considered an urban rim district of approximately 3,500 students, bordered on one side by a large urban district, and on the other two sides by more affluent, predominantly white suburban districts. The district consists of one high school, one middle school and three elementary schools. As urban sprawl has occurred, the student demographic in URSD has become increasingly ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. The student population is about 16% Hispanic, 46 % Black and 30% White and 43% percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. Additionally the percentage of linguistically diverse students continues to increase each year. However, the teaching staff has remained mostly white and female. Minority teachers make up only 8% of the middle

school and high school teaching staff, and only 27% are male. There are twenty-one district and school administrators, of which five are minorities, constituting 24% of the district leadership in a district with a student population that is 62% black and Hispanic. All five minority leaders are black females.

Participants. To protect the identities of the participants and setting, pseudonyms will be used to represent the school district and school administrators. In URSD, secondary math and math special education teachers are observed and evaluated by eight administrators: a principal and two assistant principals at the high school, a principal and two assistant principals at the middle school, a K-12 STEM supervisor, and a grade 6-12 Special Education supervisor (see Figure 3.1). Six of the administrators chose to participate in the study beyond the initial questionnaire, including myself, as the participant researcher. This cohort of school leaders within the district was chosen by convenience sampling in that all six were assigned to observe a content area in which they did not hold a teaching certificate. All eight evaluating administrators had at least nine years of educational experience, but administrative experience ranged from one year to twelve years. None of the participating administrators were former mathematics teachers. However two of the administrators, including myself, were former science teachers with strong mathematical backgrounds in engineering and physics.

The role of the researcher in action research exists along a continuum that ranges from observer only to full participant in the setting that is being studied; I functioned as a "participant as observer*"* (Mertler, 2014, p. 94) . I had a participatory role as a co-observer of classroom teaching. I also functioned as an observer to collect and analyze the observational data in the form of field notes taken during co-observations, and

facilitator of post-observation debriefings and the focus group interview with the other seven administrators.

Table 3.1 Participant Profiles

Administrator Role	Yrs of Teaching Experience	Yrs of Administrator Experience
High School Principal	10	19
High School Assistant Principal	9	4
High School Assistant Principal	16	1
Middle School Principal	3	11
Middle School Assistant Principal	8	15
K-12 STEM Supervisor	10	14

In serving in these dual roles, it is important for the researcher to continually engage in an important and unique aspect of action research – *reflection*. According to Piggot-Irvine's model, action research is a repeating cycle of planning, action, and reflection in developing an improved system (Mertler, 2014). In this model, reflection during the analysis of the current practices informs the improvements to be implemented in the next cycle; reflection during the improvement cycle leads to a thorough review of observed changes and recommendations for continued action for improvement (Mertler, 2014). Constant reflection during the action research process allows for the researcher to maintain a level of objectivity that can be lost when the observer becomes a fully engaged participant (Mertler, 2014).

District Implementation. URSD formally adopted a new teacher observation tool, the Danielson Framework, during the 2015-2016 school year. This was two years later than required by the ACHIEVE NJ legislation because the old observation tool was

specifically identified in the teachers' contract. NJDOE issued a waiver to the district until the contract expired. However, in the preceding two school years, URSD administration began the planning and preparation for implementing the new model. This included in-district training for all administrators in the use of the Danielson Framework to collect and rate evidence of teacher practice within the components of each domain. The former district-developed classroom observation tool, which had been used for the eight years prior, was a yes/no checklist of items that could be observed or not, but allowed for a great deal of evaluator subjectivity. Administrators could choose to include a narrative description of their observations, but specific evidence to justify each item rating were not required, nor was any feedback required to be given.

Danielson Framework. URSD adopted the 2007 version of the Danielson Framework. To evaluate teacher practice in the classroom, the district used only rubrics for domains two and three that address classroom environment and instruction, respectively. Domains one and four, planning and preparation and professional responsibilities, were evaluated during the end-of-year summative evaluation only. Each domain is broken into components of teaching that align to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards. For each component in a domain (labeled a through e), Danielson provided a rubric that identified specific elements (teaching practices) within that component. The rubrics gave a detailed description of what could be observed of those teaching practices at four different levels: Distinguished, Proficient, Basic and Unsatisfactory. These four levels in the rubric correspond to ratings (and score) of Highly Effective (4), Effective (3), Developing (2), and Ineffective (1), respectively, within the URSD teacher observation report. URSD

used a data management platform called My Learning Plan (MLP) where all teacher evaluation data was stored and managed. These portions included a professional development plan (PDP), a record of professional development activities, classroom observation reports and scores, student growth objective plans and scores, student growth percentiles (SGPs) for those teachers in qualified tested grades and subject areas, walkthrough data, and summative evaluation reports. Access to teacher data in MLP was provided to me for school years 2013-2014 through 2016-2017.

As a way of transitioning both administrators and teachers in the year preceding the full Danielson implementation, an attempt was made to align each checklist item in the former tool to a Danielson component. Administrators were encouraged to use the Danielson Framework rubrics and language during post-observation conferences with teachers to discuss improvements in teacher practice. Preparation also included two turn-key trainings for teachers conducted by administrators. The first of these teacher trainings introduced teachers to the rubric structure of the Danielson Framework and the two domains of teaching practices, the Classroom Environment and Instruction, to be evaluated during classroom observations. The second teacher training, held toward the end of the 2014-2015 school year was intended to present teachers with the finalized evaluation template, which included the Danielson observation rating report.

Research Design and Data Collection. The study followed the four phases of action research proposed by Mertler (2014): *planning, acting, developing, and reflecting.* During the planning phase, information was gathered from various sources within my district to develop an initial understanding of the problem of practice. These sources included a review of previous observation and walkthrough data, discussions with the

superintendent and assistant superintendent about the plan for implementation of the Danielson Framework, formal and informal conversations with teachers and fellow administrators, and information collected from discussions at district leadership meetings with other administrators on the challenges of implementing a new observation tool and the other evaluation requirements of ACHIEVE NJ. An initial review of the research literature concerning teacher evaluation reform revealed several implementation challenges faced by school districts nationwide, including lack of professional support in meeting observation practice expectations for evaluators (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). It also provided a theoretical basis for the function that observation and feedback can have on changing teacher practices (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010), and the importance of instructional strategies that facilitate student engagement on cognitive learning (Buoncristiani & Buoncristiani, 2012). The acting phase involved implementing the research plan and collecting and analyzing the data which will be further detailed in the following sections of this chapter. The developing phase of this action research entailed review of the results and findings from the data analysis and the development of an improvement plan based on the outcomes. Reflection was a key practice in every phase of this action research study (Mertler, 2014). The time points and focus for reflection will be described throughout the following sections and then summarized in a separate section.

Overview of the research plan. The study had a qualitative observational case study design (Mertler, 2014). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) compare the design of a case study to a funnel where the initial collection of data is broad, and ongoing analysis of data is used to determine what aspects of the emerging narrative will be explored in depth. In this

study, four data collection methods were used: a questionnaire, field observations followed by informal interviews (debriefings), a review of existing documents, and a focus group interview. The initial questionnaire was given to all district and building administrators to identify some of the current perceptions held about instructional leadership and providing feedback. This information was analyzed to identify emergent themes that were further explored through field observations and informal and formal interviews. Perceptions shared about formulating and providing feedback were compared to the actual feedback and ratings given in the written observation reports. A follow up focus group interview was conducted to provide information on what leadership characteristics leaders employed in formulating and providing feedback. The participating administrators for this study were chosen by convenience sampling. I have regular interaction with these administrators concerning the instructional practices of the teachers through professional development planning, personnel review, and leadership discussions for the high school and middle school, and the district at large.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Observational case studies are characterized by the use of exploratory methods and ongoing data analysis to identify emerging patterns or narratives that then direct the researcher to a deeper, more focused investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, in qualitative research designs it is important to collect and triangulate multiple sources of data. Triangulation serves to verify the quality and accuracy of interpretations generated during the inductive analysis of data (Mertler, 2014).

In exploring principal perceived and actual observational practices, several studies have used a multi-site case study design with cross-site analysis (Lochmiller, 2016;

Ovando & Ramirez, 2007). Collecting information from multiple sites improves the reliability of emergent themes and can provide a richer description or reveal nuances from site to site that reveal how small differences in building culture, setting or demographics can cause variance in leadership practice (Lochmiller, 2016). However, focusing on a single case allows for a deeper exploration of perceptions, practices, and experiences of a limited number of participants; it allows the researcher to carefully examine the influences of a particular contextualized setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Mertler, 2014). Cherkowski (2016) demonstrated this deep observational dive in studying the experience of one high school principal in developing professional learning communities amongst a staff of veteran teachers in a small, rural district. The researcher's stated purpose in selection of the case study design was to provide a "source of knowledge from which other school leaders may draw to reflect on their own journey toward improved professional learning in their context" (Cherkowski, 2016, p. 525).

Another value of single-site case study design specific to action research is the end goal of developing an improvement plan to address a problem of practice in a specific contextualized setting. Focusing on the observations and trends that emerge at a single site to develop solutions that meet the immediate needs of stakeholders is an appropriate research design for action research (Mertler, 2014). In keeping with the research design purpose stated by Cherkowski (2016) , education action research is not meant to be generalizable to all educators across all educational settings but the findings, conclusions, and recommendations are often transferable to other contexts and settings (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). Ovando (2005) conducted an action research study to understand ways to build instructional leadership capacity in aspiring leaders in one

leadership preparation program. Findings from the study revealed the importance of including field-based experiences in the program coursework at a point where aspiring leaders had a sound conceptual foundation of supervision and instructional leadership. This finding, while specific to the graduate program studied, has transferable implications for other leadership preparation programs in designing courses and course sequences. This action research used a single-site case study design to explore the perceptions and practices of a small cohort of secondary school leaders at a middle school and high school in one district.

Four sources of data were collected and analyzed to provide information about how administrators provide feedback to teachers. Data sources included a questionnaire, informal debriefing sessions after each co-observation with the participant researcher, review of written observation report, and a focus group interview. An initial questionnaire concerning instructional leadership understanding and feedback giving was given to all district school leaders. The purpose of this first data collection method was to gain an understanding of how instructional leadership and feedback giving is understood by all leaders within the district, including across grade levels and buildings. The remaining data collection methods used were to collect information on the practices and perceptions of a smaller cohort of secondary leaders in the district in order to compare secondary leadership practices to the broader set of leadership practice. Co-observations followed by debriefing interviews were held with the smaller cohort to discuss the formulation of feedback to be given. Nelson and Sassi (2000) provide a rationale for the use of co-observations of instruction followed by immediate de-briefing sessions of co-observers. As part of their research design, they provided prompting questions during

these sessions to encourage administrators to share observations and discuss salient feedback points they would share with the teacher. Their intent was to "encourage administrators to articulate and examine their own understandings of learning, teaching, and mathematics—ideas that many administrators had had for so many years that they functioned as assumptions and were no longer critically examined (Nelson, 1999)." (Nelson & Sassi, 2000, p. 562).

To confirm the delivery of the planned feedback, written feedback in the observation reports of the co-observed lessons was reviewed and compared with the potential feedback discussed during the debriefing sessions. Finally, a focus group interview with the cohort was conducted to gain insight into the leadership characteristics and actions used to formulate and deliver feedback.

Inductive coding of the open-ended questionnaire responses was used to identify emergent themes around instructional leadership practice and feedback giving beliefs across all district school leaders. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe how to search through the narrative data for patterns that can be developed into coding categories. One type of coding category is strategy codes that reveal the methods and tactics people use in their practice. In perception studies of school leaders' practice, this type of inductive coding of narrative responses was used to categorize responses into initial groups of similar perceptions (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2017; Range, Young, and Hvidston, 2013), and then using theoretical perspectives from the literature review, further grouped under emerging leadership practice themes (Lochmiller, 2016; Ovando & Ramirez, 2007).

In qualitative research, formative analysis of initial data becomes an important step to focus and inform succeeding data collection. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014)

define formative analysis of data within education action research as "the process of carefully considering data *as* you collect it, and using your consideration of it to help inform instructional decisions and next steps in your inquiry" (p. 158). Three planned questions were used during each of the informal debriefing interviews to understand leader initial thought process and understanding in delivering feedback on observed instruction. However the themes that emerged from the questionnaire were used to direct the follow up questions asked during these sessions and the focus group interview to provide clarification of each school leader's perception of practice, and deeper understanding of any nuanced differences that may exist in the smaller focus group of secondary school leaders from the larger district group (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Focus group interviews have the benefit of making participants more comfortable as they engage in collegial conversation rather than the formality of a one-on-one interview. Additionally, group discussion can draw out additional information from participants (Mertler, 2014). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Mertler (2014) both caution that the researcher must ensure that all voices and perspectives are heard during the discussions. Bogdan and Biklen provide a set of norms to guide discussions and allow for all participants to be heard and properly identified when audiotaping that will be adapted to the interview guide used (see Appendix D).

Questionnaire. An open-ended questionnaire was given to district administrators who regularly conduct teacher observations, including principals, assistant principals, and curriculum and instruction supervisors. The questionnaire was completed using Google Forms. Administrators received an email with a link to the Google Form and submitted responses anonymously. Reminders to complete the questionnaire were given at the

district leadership team retreat before the beginning of the school year and in the first two weeks of 2017-2018 school year.

Field Observations and Debriefing Interviews. Observation notes were made during the co-observation of the classroom instruction followed by a de-briefing session (informal interview) with the peer school leader. During the co-observation, in adherence to the district guidelines for co-observers, I collected evidence and listed potential feedback I might give to the teacher. The de-briefing session with the administrator occurred within one day of the observation, and in most cases immediately following the observation. During the de-briefing, the school leader was asked to discuss the evidence collected and potential feedback he or she would give. De-briefing interview notes were recorded along with the co-observation notes in a field notes form (see Appendix C). Three prompting questions were used to guide the discussion and to ensure that similar points were discussed and observed for each participant. Guiding questions included the following:

1. What observations concerning student engagement did you make (positive or negative)?
2. What evidence did you collect related to these observations?
3. What initial feedback in the area of student engagement do you think you will give at this point?

Review of Existing Documents. The evidence and feedback provided in the written teacher observation report for the co-observation was reviewed and compared to the potential feedback that was discussed during the debriefing and notes in the field notes. Areas of corroboration between feedback discussed verbally between co-observing

administrators and written feedback given was noted, as well as any discrepancies between discussed and written feedback. Notes from the review of written observations were also recorded in the field notes form.

Focus Group Interview. In order to gain a fuller description of how this cohort of leaders formulated the feedback to be provided and planned for feedback discussions with teachers a focus group interview was conducted. During the interview, leaders described the ways they provided feedback and engaged in feedback giving. Leaders were then given definitions of the three leadership characteristics proposed to be involved in instructional feedback giving by Tuytens and Devos (2011) (see Chapter 2 sub-section on feedback theory). Questioning during these semi-structured interviews asked leaders to describe which characteristics they felt they employed in crafting their feedback and delivering it during feedback discussions.

3.6 Reflection Plan

The focus and design of this action research study was informed by the numerous traditional research articles, state and federal policy reports on educational mandates, and commentary and position papers from leading researchers and education advocates, such as Michael Apple, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Charlotte Danielson. While these sources of traditional research on education policy, practice and theory are important guides for education practitioners, they do not address the specific problems of application and implementation unique to each classroom, school, and school district. Action research, as well as other practical improvement methods like professional learning communities, fills the functional gap between theory and practice (Mertler,

2014). Common among these practical methods of educator and school improvement, is the inclusion of reflective practices.

Reflecting on the preliminary information gathered during the planning phase of the study helped me to position myself and my professional role with respect to the problem of practice. Reflection also helped to define the function that action research could serve in addressing the problem of practice, and aided in the development of an appropriate research plan. As the research plan was implemented, reflection during and after the data collection and analysis allowed for ongoing interpretation of the results and outcomes, and informed the development of the action plan.

In the final reflection phase of the study, the design and results were formally communicated to the district leadership team and to county and state professional groups that I participate in, such as the New Jersey Leader to Leader program and the New Jersey Principal and Supervisors Association. During this time, I facilitated group reflection on the case study results specific to URSD and engaged in discussions of similarities and differences observed in other districts across the state. The reflection within the district leadership team not only informed future action research that I may pursue, but informed the planning for the next phase of the district's overall teacher evaluation implementation.

Finally, reflective discussions with my colleagues on how the design of the study could have been enhanced to increase the rigor of the research for future studies was an area of growth for me as I continue to develop my own action research practice.

3.7 Action Plan Development

During this phase in the action research, results and findings of the research data analysis were presented to district leaders and outcomes from the research were discussed. Mertler (2014) lists several possible outcomes to be considered in the development of an action plan where the ultimate goal is to connect the research to educational improvement as a "mechanism for engaging teachers, administrators, and support personnel in systemic, self-initiated school improvement" (Mertler, 2014, p. 23). For this study these outcomes could have included, but were not limited to the following:

1. A better understanding of the range of perceptions held by administrators, and how these perceptions influence administrator practice;
2. Identification of needs administrators have in fulfilling district expectations for instructional leadership, including professional development needs and time management needs;
3. A need to assess (and perhaps redefine) the vision of instructional leadership within the district;
4. A need to assess how instructional leadership responsibilities are distributed among district leaders;
5. A need for further study to look at the perceptions that teachers hold concerning instructional feedback or to gather comparison information on the actual observation practices of administrators.

The outcomes of the data analysis determined the action plan that was developed. The improvement action plan is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

3.8 Study Limitations

A goal of traditional education research is to be able to apply conclusions beyond the study to a more general population. The extent to which this can occur is a function of the external validity of the study. Establishing external validity requires that researchers consider the conditions of the broader population to which the study results will be applied. The research design should be as proximally similar to the people, places, times, and settings that exist in that target population (Trochim, 2006).

In action research, research findings are intended only to be used within the local (classroom, school or district) setting and for a small intended audience such as other teachers, school and district leaders, counselors, or parents. Therefore, establishing external validity in the research design is not a priority (Mertler, 2014). Additionally, using a case study design is an intentional choice to study a unique setting, group of people, and/or organizational process in one location. The ability to generalize findings to a broader population is therefore limited due to the lack of random selection of setting and participants (Bogdan, 2007).

The implementation of a new model of teacher evaluation is complex, presenting several types of challenges and involving multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, and administrators. Therefore it was necessary to delimit the problem of practice and research focus to something that could be effectively researched within the parameters of action research. For this study, the focus was limited to only exploring the perceptions and practices of administrators on providing feedback to teachers. While the entire district is transitioning to the new model, I have chosen to study only the observation practices of secondary administrators evaluating secondary math teachers. I

supervised this department and have directly and regularly observed the practices of the teachers involved, and interacted regularly with the participating administrators.

3.9 Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

Ethical issues can arise in each stage of the research process. These issues should be considered during the research design, data collection and analysis, and writing and communication of results phases (Creswell, 2009). During the development of the research plan, the driving purpose was to improve upon evaluation practice with a potential outcome that better instructional leadership practices, such as giving higher quality feedback, would lead to improved teacher practice. The principle of beneficence is described as research "to acquire knowledge about human beings and the educational process" (Mertler, 2014, p.112) with an end goal of providing a benefit to people. The present action research study is not intended to marginalize any of the stakeholders involved in teacher evaluation – students, teachers, or administrators. Reported data and observations were not associated with any individual participants. Interpretation and discussion of results looked for ways that administrator practices can be further improved.

Two other principles that guide ethical considerations are the principle of honesty and the principle of accurate disclosure. All participants in the present action research study were given an informed consent form that identified the purpose of the study, the extent of participation for each group of participants, the data that would be collected and the duration of the study and data collection. I identified myself as the primary researcher and identified my sponsoring institution (Mertler, 2014). Additionally, the appropriate permissions to collect and use any data from the district information management system

were obtained from the district superintendent with a discussion of the potential impacts and outcomes of the study (Creswell, 2009).

During the research process, collected data was used only to report trends and themes that emerged. Individual administrator responses, when used, were reported anonymously and without identifying information. Information provided by individuals was not shared with other participants during the data collection except for that voluntarily shared during the focus group interviews (Creswell, 2009).

Mertler (2014) identifies the improvement of educational practice and the promotion of school or district level improvements as two potential outcomes of conducting action research. This study was designed with two practical intentions- to increase awareness of how administrators provide specific and constructive feedback for growth to teachers in a content area and to help assess the effectiveness of the instructional leadership practice. While the Deweyan pragmatic viewpoint to provide working solutions to problems (Creswell, 2009) is well served by action research within one's realm of responsibility, it also means that the research is conducted within one's realm of influence. The primary difference between action research and traditional research is that the researcher typically functions as both researcher and participant. Even if the action researcher is not intimately involved in the process being specifically studied, they are a part of the larger organization, and therefore professionally, and even personally, connected to the research. This connection to the study, its participants, and its outcomes creates a continuous ethical dilemma for the researcher. Reflective checkpoints were present at each step of the research process to ensure that the research

was completed without causing harm to any persons and without distortion of the data or its interpretation in any way.

In the United States, public education evolved along with the new republic. The idea of universal education available to all became a representative symbol of the democratic society (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012). In later years, educational equity became a primary battleground for civil rights movements pursuing equal opportunity within the larger society for racial minorities, women, and the disabled. Given that historical context, many educators identify problems to research that are rooted in issues of social justice or whose findings, at least, can be applied toward making all aspects of our educational system fully accessible and beneficial to all students. Action research in this way takes on a worldview of advocacy (Creswell, 2009). This viewpoint, even when not the dominant worldview held, can make limiting the research question and the human focus of a study an internal ethical challenge.

Problems of practice are rarely one-dimensional. Most are the result of external and internal factors interacting with some aspect of the institutional school structure, be it culture and climate, curriculum and instruction, or school and community dynamics (Mertler, 2014). Problems of practice often have multiple stakeholder groups, each with a distinct perception of the problem, and specific vulnerabilities. Teacher evaluation, in particular, has been a hotly contested issue among stakeholder groups, including teachers' unions, administrators' unions, and student and parent advocacy groups. The need to limit action research to a specific question that can be accomplished and provide productive data to inform next steps or institute useful changes can conflict with the

desire to address the most critical issues for the most vulnerable stakeholders in an immediate and decisive way (Creswell, 2009; Mertler 2014).

While my action research focused only a small portion of the teacher evaluation problem, there were different advocacy viewpoints of how researching administrator practices in teacher evaluation could potentially benefit the stakeholders involved.

Student Viewpoint. The need for an effective teacher evaluation system that improves instruction delivered to students is paramount. All students deserve to receive high quality instruction. The previous teacher evaluation system in New Jersey was a binary rating system (satisfactory or unsatisfactory) and did not require feedback to be given. In one study of 254 New Jersey teachers, of which 183 were tenured, 56% reported only being observed once or not at all by a building administrator (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015).

Teacher Viewpoint. Teachers deserve to be evaluated fairly using evaluation criteria that measures their individual performance and accounts appropriately for school and student-level factors beyond their control (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011). Models used should be aligned to accepted standards of teacher practice. Evaluation systems should be implemented in a way that allows less effective teachers to improve their practice over time, and not be limited to functioning solely as a procedural mechanism for dismissal or an accountability measure (Domenech, 2015; Danielson, 2014).

Administrator Viewpoint. Teacher evaluation reforms have been implemented in ways that largely place a burden on building-level administrators without requirement to provide leaders with supports and resources. New systems require an increased number

of classroom observations. Each observation also requires at least a post-observation conference, and for every teacher at least one observation each year requires a pre- and post-observation conference. Evaluators are expected to provide feedback to teachers recommending strategies to improve their teaching, yet teacher evaluation reform policy has been vague in requiring professional development for administrators in instructional leadership practices (Griffin, 2013; Khachatryan, 2015). Principals and supervisors are also responsible for the collection and review of other components of the evaluation requirements, including lesson plans, student growth objectives, and professional development plans. Without proper training in the use of the evaluation tool and opportunities to develop their own instructional leadership skills, many administrators may feel ill-equipped to provide the necessary support to all teachers across all content areas (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). This may especially be the case at the secondary level, where teachers hold content-specific certifications and elements of pedagogy and practices can be content-specific.

The challenge in pursuing a more pragmatic approach to the research topic is to stay the course and not broaden the research or the researcher's actions to one of advocacy for the specific stakeholders. In developing a deeper understanding of the problem, contributing factors, mechanisms, and potential solutions, it can be possible to address concerns of each stakeholder group in a balanced and sustainable way. One potential drawback of targeted advocacy research is that it often ignores the solutions that address multiple factors, for multiple stakeholders, in favor of the solution that best addresses the concerns of the stakeholder group it advocates. The benefit in pursuing a well-designed course of action research is a deeper understanding of a problem that can

lead to informed decision-making to resolves issues for all stakeholders in a more effective and sustainable way (Mertler, 2014; Creswell, 2009).

3.10 Summary

Teacher evaluation and classroom observation are hot button topics throughout the world of education, from educational policy makers, to researchers, to the practitioners in schools across the nation and globally. Its value and connection to student achievement and its use as an accountability measure continues to be questioned. However, when teacher evaluation is considered at the interpersonal level, it becomes an issue of the observer and the teacher engaging in meaningful, reflective dialogue about the instructional practice. For this communication to occur and lead to improvement of instructional practice it requires the development of a certain skill set for both the evaluator and the teacher. The outcomes of this action research were used to continue the cycle of improvement to effectively and practically implement a teacher evaluation system that meets the local needs of the Urban Rim School District.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

Chapter four will present and analyze the data gained from the four collection methods used in this case study. The purpose of this study was to describe school leaders' understanding and practice in providing feedback on teaching as part of the teacher observation process. Tuytens and Devos (2011) provided a framework to understanding the role of leadership action in feedback giving and its potential influence in facilitating teacher professional learning and instructional improvement (see figure 2.2). Within the feedback giving model proposed, Tuytens and Devos identified three leadership characteristics leaders could potentially employ during the feedback giving process. These categories included charismatic leadership, active leadership supervision, and leadership content knowledge (table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Leadership Practice Characteristics and Abbreviations

Characteristic	Abbreviation
Charismatic Leadership	CL
Active Leadership Supervision	ALS
Leadership Content Knowledge	LCK

This study sought to describe leaders' understanding of instructional leadership, the type of actions that fell within the realm of their own instructional leadership practice,

and their perception of the role feedback giving has as a part of their instructional leadership practice. Secondly, the study sought to describe actual leadership practice of secondary school leaders in feedback giving during the teacher observation process. The second part of the study was limited specifically to secondary school leaders in order to explore how practice was impacted when providing feedback in a specific content area outside the leader's own content certification. As reviewed in the literature review of this study, the leadership content knowledge (LCK) of secondary administrators has been identified as a specific barrier to teachers perceiving feedback as meaningful and initiating instructional improvement in response to feedback. Siskin (1991), and later Lochmiller (2016), attributed this perception barrier to the departmentalized structure and culture of secondary schools. Limiting the study to secondary administrators allowed the exploration of how administrators understand and practice their instructional leadership role when providing feedback to content specific teachers, and how the three leadership traits are employed during feedback giving within this specific sub-context.

Results from the first part of the study are presented as a summary of questionnaire responses from school leaders who regularly conducted classroom observations. Summary information includes key word and theme analysis and descriptive statistics. Results from the second part of the study are presented through descriptions of leaders' responses to debriefing questions and focus group questions, descriptions of the written feedback provided to teachers for the co-observations conducted with the researcher, and quotations from participants to provide examples, context, and rationale for certain practices.

4.2 Participants

Phase one of the study involved collecting data through the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent out to all fourteen district administrators who regularly conduct classroom observations, excluding myself, using a Google Form to collect responses. Twelve of these administrators responded and completed the questionnaire. Equal numbers of male and female administrators participated in the questionnaire with the majority of administrators having eight or more years of administrative experience and five or more years of teaching experience (see figure 4.1). Seven of the twelve administrators held teaching certifications in Elementary Education. Other certifications included Special Education, World Languages, Secondary English, Physical Education, and Physics, however, none of the educators held teaching certification in Secondary Mathematics or a middle school endorsement in Mathematics.

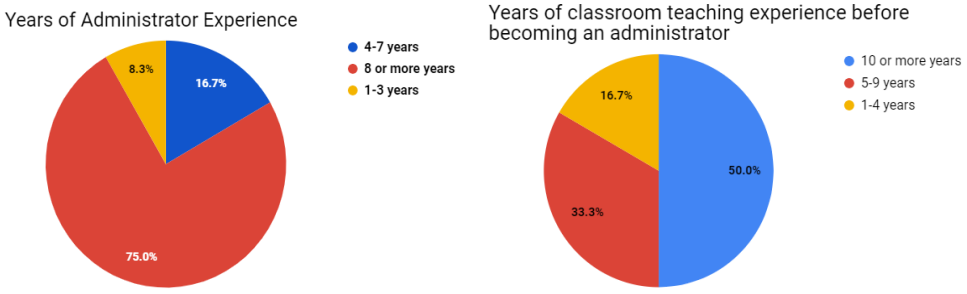

Figure 4.1 Leaders' Years of Administrative and Teaching Experience

Phase two involved a case study design that gathered data through multiple methods. The participant pool for phase two of the study was limited to those who observed secondary math teachers, a total of seven administrators. Five administrators elected to participate in the second part of the study to include a co-observation and

debriefing interview with the researcher and focus group interview, as well as a researcher review of the written observation report. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality as listed in table 4.2. One of the five participants, Jared, was unable to participate in the final focus group interview due to a medical leave of absence.

Table 4.2 Secondary School Leader Participants

Participant	Years of Administrative Experience
Joseph	19
Diane	11
Mike	1
Jared	15
David	14

4.3 Results

Phase One- Summary of Questionnaire Responses. The first data collection phase in this qualitative study was to gather a sense of how school leaders across the district understood instructional leadership and what specific leader actions they associated with it. To this end, a questionnaire was delivered to twelve school leaders in the Urban Rim school district. Respondents held roles as elementary, middle school, and high school principals and assistant principals and district curriculum and instruction supervisors with K-12 responsibilities in various content areas. These school leaders all conduct both informal (walkthrough) and formal classroom observations, and are held jointly responsible for the quality of instruction and student achievement in the district.

The first portion of the questionnaire asked leaders to describe what the term instructional leadership meant to them and to identify specific ways they fulfilled their instructional leader role (table 4.3). Respondents in most cases identified specific leader actions that they felt embodied an instructional leader, and responses included having responsibility over curriculum delivery, supporting and ensuring effective instruction, analysis and use of school level data, and responsibility for establishing a culture of teaching and learning. Appendix E includes a full list of questions from the questionnaire. Theme analysis of responses revealed that leaders identified leadership actions that correlated most strongly with active leadership supervision. Three sub-categories of active leadership supervision emerged. Leaders described actions that could be categorized as instructional support, instructional oversight, or instructional modeling (table 4.3). The categorization was developed on the type of verbs leaders used to describe the actions they took in fulfilling their perceived instructional leadership role. Action verbs that described support included providing, supporting, assisting, and allocating. Oversight verbs included reviewing, evaluating, adjusting, managing, monitoring, and analyzing. Modeling actions included modeling, setting, knowing, and leading. Further analysis of these categorized responses looked at the direct object of leader actions (who or what receives the action of the leaders). Direct objects included teachers, instruction, data, feedback, curriculum, and school community.

Leaders identified four factors that could be directly influenced by the leader when acting in their instructional leadership role. The four areas of leader influence were people interactions, classroom-level factors, school-level factors, and outside resources to bring into the school. Leaders described data as both a classroom-level and school-level

factor in their responses. Interestingly, while many leader statements of how they fulfilled their instructional leadership role included student achievement or student development as an end outcome, none of the participants mentioned any type of direct interaction with students.

Table 4.3 Leader Actions that Fulfill the Perceived Instructional Leadership Role

Leader Actions	**Instructional Support** providing supporting fostering assisting allocating	**Instructional Oversight** reviewing evaluating adjusting managing monitoring insure analyze	**Instructional Modeling** modeling setting knowing leading	
Direct Object of Leader Actions	**People Interactions** teachers school community	**Classroom Factors** instruction lesson plans data* feedback	**School Factors** curriculum culture climate goals tone data*	**External Resources** resources support
	***** Responses indicated the production and use of data by leaders at both the classroom and school level			
Intended Goals of Leader Actions	**Student Development and Achievement** quality educational experience for support for all students improve student learning promoting student achievement and overall development student performance in all areas student learning and growth (school) community focus on teaching and learning		**Teaching and Instruction** effective instruction best possible instruction for their students efficient instruction (school) community focus on teaching learning	

This finding is consistent with findings from the meta-analysis by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) showing that the leadership actions having the greater impact on student achievement were those involving leader-teacher interaction, including regular classroom observation and the provision of formative and summative feedback.

Leaders were asked to list two to three specific actions they took in their buildings (principals and assistant principals) or in their K-12 content areas (curriculum and instruction supervisors) that they perceived fulfilled an instructional leadership role. Nine action areas emerged that directly addressed instruction and teacher practice during response analysis. Analysis also revealed five other actions that leaders identified as part of their instructional leadership role (table 4.4). These self-identified actions or practices were coded to the three major leadership traits. The direct actions correlated to active supervision leadership and leadership content knowledge traits, while all of the indirect actions identified by leaders correlated to charismatic leadership traits.

Leaders were asked to estimate how much time they dedicated to instructional leadership actions and responsibilities daily on a scale of one to five, with one being less than 20% of their time on most days and five being 75% or more of their time. Ten of the twelve respondents indicated spending approximately 50% or more of their time on most days focusing on perceived instructional leadership responsibilities.

When asked specifically about the role of the administrator in improving classroom instruction, all twelve respondents listed multiple actions. Five of the twelve respondents identified feedback giving as one of those actions (figure 4.2). Other responses included provision of professional development to teachers, knowledge and ability to guide teachers in implementing best practices, and being responsible for

establishing instructional goals and then monitoring teacher progress toward those goals. The identification of feedback as a primary instructional leadership tool was further confirmed by responses to a related question. Respondents were asked to choose between feedback giving, providing professional development, or providing rigorous curriculum as the most effective way to improve teacher practice in engaging students in learning, five out of twelve respondents chose feedback giving (figure 4.3). Another five chose provision of professional development and only two chose providing a curriculum that included rich learning tasks and activities.

Table 4.4 Direct and Indirect Instructional Leadership Action Areas

Direct Instructional Leadership Action Areas	**Code**	**Indirect Instructional Leadership Action Areas**
Provide materials and resources	ALS	Be highly visible (CL) Follow through with teachers (CL) Work collaboratively with stakeholders toward goals (CL) Taking the lead in challenging situations with parents (CL) Provide support and encouragement to teachers (CL)
Provide professional development to teachers (not stated as personally delivered)	ALS	
Personally provide professional development or model instruction	ALS LCK	
Review and analyze data with teachers	ALS	
Review and provide feedback on lesson plans	ALS LCK	
Pursuing personal professional development/learning	LCK	
Informal Observation or Walkthroughs	ALS	
Formal Observation	ALS	
Feedback on Observation	ALS	
Open dialogue/conversation about teaching (identified separately from feedback and only as part of the informal observation process)	CL ALS	

In an effort to categorize each respondent's perception of their instructional role, each individual survey was analyzed. Two of the twelve respondents described a purely evaluative and monitoring role, while six of the twelve describe a purely guidance and facilitating role. Both of these role types fall within active leadership supervision that encompasses both transformational and instructional leadership traits (Tuytens and Devos, 2011), albeit the purely evaluative role could, in practice, be limited to a more transactional style of leadership (Acvi, 2015). The other four respondents perceived their overall role as complex with multiple roles to fulfill. One respondent stated, "You need to be leader, coach, manager, etc…you are the one responsible for the children's education…" Another respondent admitted to the "dual role of providing leadership and direction while facilitating the professional needs of teachers". These responses about the duality of instructional leadership reveal how active leadership supervision, charismatic leadership, and leadership content knowledge may all need to be employed in a school leader's daily practice.

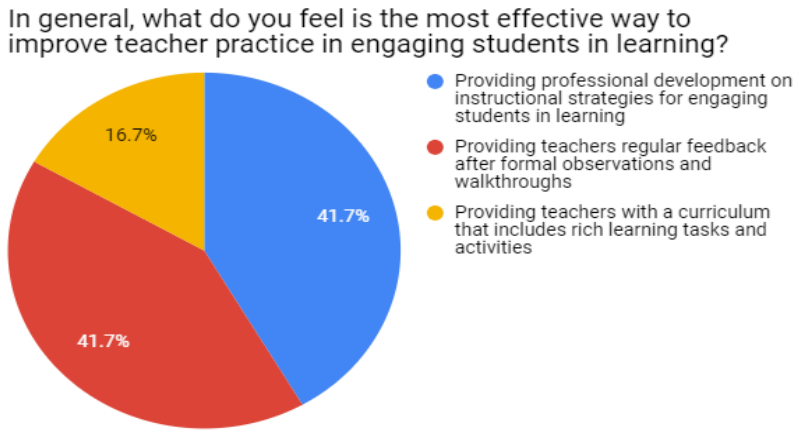

Figure 4.2 Leadership Actions to Improve Teaching

Feedback giving was listed both by those who perceived their role to be evaluative and those who perceived their role to be more guidance and facilitating. This revealed that school leaders may perceive the purpose of feedback giving within the instructional improvement process differently. This disagreement with how feedback is used in the formal observation process was addressed specifically by one respondent who perceived his/her role as one of guidance and facilitating. This school leader described "not hav[ing] to offer critical feedback which will be formally held against the teacher" and instead having more time to visit classrooms and then have "open conversation" where the "administrator can come alongside the teacher to help, support, celebrate, or enhance" the teaching. Further evidence of this split in the purpose and timing of feedback giving was seen in how two leaders distinguished between feedback giving in a formal observation setting and feedback giving in informal observation settings as separate leadership actions in their responses.

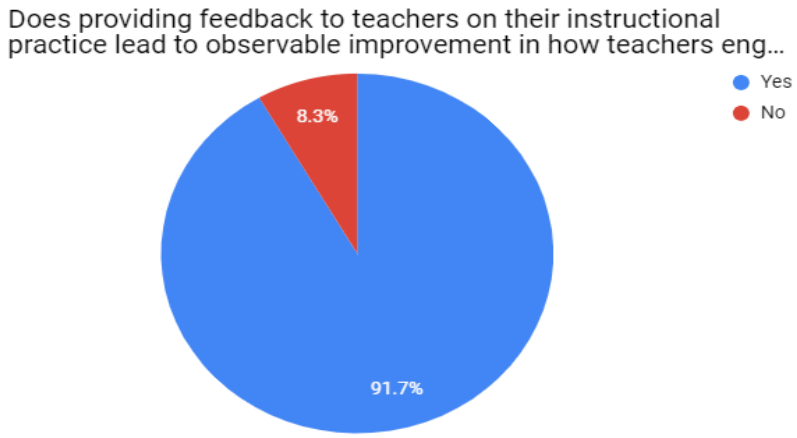

Figure 4.3 Feedback Giving to Improve Teaching

Another question asked leaders if they believed that feedback giving to teachers on their instructional practice would lead to observable improvement in how teachers engage students in learning. Eleven of twelve respondents responded affirmatively that feedback giving could lead to observable improvements (figure 4.3). However, when asked to provide an explanation of how feedback could lead to instructional improvement respondents expressed different and overlapping conceptualizations of *effective* feedback, that feedback that would lead to observable improvement or change in teacher practice. Four of the twelve respondents focused on the format of the feedback, identifying feedback that is clear and definable with specific examples given and specific strategies suggested for teachers to try. This format-specific feedback will be referred to as *feedback for growth* format throughout the rest of this section. Four respondents focused on the outcome or result of the feedback delivery, identifying that effective feedback was feedback that led to teacher action, including putting recommendations into place and personal reflection. Seven respondents identified effective feedback as needing to be part of a larger process of instructional improvement. However leaders expressed two points of view of who owned that improvement process, the teacher or the administrator. Leaders either saw feedback as part of an ongoing process of coaching and monitoring on the part of the administrator or a process of teacher reflection and revision where the administrator played only a support role in the teacher's more self-directed learning. One respondent also identified feedback giving as a way to build teacher content and pedagogical knowledge.

The final component of the questionnaire how observation practice, including feedback giving, had changed since implementing the use of the Danielson Framework.

Ten of the twelve respondents indicated that their overall observation practice had changed. Six leaders identified specific changes in their observing practices while in the classroom, including looking for and collecting specific evidence, being more aware of what students are doing and saying as opposed to what teachers are doing and saying, and being more aware of how specific instructional practices, like questioning and student engagement, are being addressed by the teacher. Four of the respondents indicated changes to the type or quality of their feedback giving, and enhanced opportunity to have feedback discussions. One leader explained,

> With the Danielson rubric we are no longer in the 'all or nothing' type of feedback on an observation. Teachers can be rated as effective and still have room to grow, which is an improvement over the previous system which rated teachers either as Highly Effective, or Ineffective because of the Yes/No ratings.

All twelve respondents indicated that they engage in giving *feedback for growth* to teachers, defined as providing an observation of a teacher action or student action along with a specific recommendation of a strategy to improve in a corresponding component of their teaching. Ten of the leaders said they engage in this level of feedback regularly to both non-tenured and tenure teachers even when rating them effective and two leaders indicated they only engage in this type of feedback when giving an ineffective or partially ineffective rating.

When asked about the delivery of their feedback giving, the majority of respondents reported providing feedback both verbally and in writing. Half of respondents (six of twelve) indicated they gave written feedback in the formal observation report and then discussed that feedback verbally with teachers during the

post-observation conference. Another five leaders indicated that in addition to providing feedback in writing and during the post-conference, that they also provided feedback on the planned lesson during the pre-observation conference. Only one respondent indicated giving only written feedback, and no verbal feedback.

When asked about how use of the Danielson rubrics on Questioning and Discussion Techniques (3b) and Engaging Students in Learning (3c) affected their understanding of student engagement, the majority of leaders indicated that their understanding had been enhanced by use of the framework. These enhancements included a deeper understanding of what engagement looks like in the classroom and the distinction between participation as a form of ritual compliance and true cognitive engagement in learning tasks. One leader commented, "Engagement is more than students 'looking busy'; it is having them involved in activities that challenge their thinking and get them excited about learning." Leaders also noted that the rubrics helped them distinguish between partially effective, effective, and highly effective teaching, and enabled them to make their feedback more specific by providing suggestions and strategies to improve.

Phase Two- Case Study of Secondary Administrators. Findings described in the remainder of this section are from the five members of the secondary level leadership team who chose to participate in the case study phase. All five conduct evaluations of middle school and high school math teachers, however none hold a secondary mathematics teaching certification. However, one holds science teaching certification and has an educational background in physics. The case study phase included data collected during co-observations and peer debriefing sessions with the participant researcher, from

review of written observation reports and a focus group interview with four of the five participants.

For this case study, a total of five co-observations were conducted with five secondary school leaders. The school leaders included the high school principal (HSP), the middle school principal (MSP), a middle school assistant principal (MSAP), a high school assistant principal (HSAP), and a district curriculum and instruction supervisor (DS). Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant as presented in Table 4.3. All of these leaders are assigned by the district to observe secondary math classrooms as part of their yearly teacher evaluation responsibilities. The district also requires every administrator to participate in at least two co-observations per year in accordance with state teacher evaluation legislation (ACHIEVE NJ). The teachers observed included three non-tenured teachers with one to three years of teaching experience, and two tenured teachers with eight or more years of experience. All teachers held certifications to teach secondary mathematics. Findings from the co-observations and subsequent debriefings, as well as the review of written observation reports, are presented by participant. Findings from the focus group interview are described, organized, and presented as a discussion of how each leadership characteristic was demonstrated or employed in administrator practice. This discussion is followed by secondary discussions of how the characteristics are interconnected within leader practice, and specific barriers leaders identified as limiting factors in their practice.

Co-Observations and Debriefings. The debriefings for all five leaders started with the school leader expressing an initial impression of the effectiveness of the lesson.

Diane. At the start of the debriefing Diane expressed that the lesson we had observed was overall effective. Diane stated that she typically tries to observe teacher actions that facilitate student engagement. She specifically noted in this observation that the teacher asked students to solve problems at the board and asked questions that prompted students to share their solving strategies during whole class discussion. She also indicated that she collects evidence on the types of activities or tasks student are asked to engage in during the lesson, in addition to listing out components of the lesson present, question examples, and any examples of student misbehavior as part of her evidence gathering during observations. When asked what initial feedback she thought she would give she formulated four items of feedback that included commendations, acknowledging what was done well, and recommendations for improvement. The recommendations she voiced concerned increasing the cognitive engagement of the students through questioning and for the teacher to engage in more teacher-facilitating behaviors than teacher-directed behaviors. All recommendations were stated in a *feedback for growth* format. The *feedback for growth* format includes a statement of the desired practice or change in practice and a corresponding example or suggestion for the teacher to implement. Diane stated she planned to engage the teacher in self-reflection to initiate the feedback conversation, and stated that facilitating teacher reflection was a normal part of her practice that she felt led to meaningful discussion whether there was agreement or not on the effectiveness of practices. Diane stated

> My first question to every teacher is how do they think the lesson went, and then letting them reflect. That self-reflection usually leads into a discussion of what was seen in the observation. Sometimes the things the teachers identify are the

exact things I have identified in my observation and that's good. We go through that together. And then sometimes teachers think the lesson didn't need improvement and should have gotten fours [highly effective ratings] and then we have to go into that.

Joseph. At the beginning of the debriefing, Joseph admitted to having a pre-conceived idea of what he would observe or the quality of the lesson, but allowed his impression to change based on what he observed. While the lesson was not as bad as he anticipated, he still felt it was an ineffective lesson. In describing the types of observations he made, Joseph focused primarily on teacher actions that facilitated student engagement and student actions that demonstrated that engagement. Joseph recorded both qualitative evidence (i.e. examples of questions asked) and quantitative data (count of low and high level questions, count of students not engaged). Joseph expressed that the teacher's inability to communicate and connect to students was the major concern. He compared the teacher's presence in the classroom to that of the Economics teacher in the 1986 movie, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, which is a common pop culture example of student disengagement in learning. When asked what initial feedback he planned to give, Joseph identified three items but only one was initially stated in the *feedback for growth* format with a specific strategy to implement. Later as the discussion continued, he reformatted another piece of feedback to include a suggested strategy. When asked how he would have the feedback conversation with the teacher, Joseph listed out the feedback he would give, but did not describe any strategy in how he would have the conversation, although he admitted it would be a difficult one to have with the teacher. Later that day in a meeting that Joseph and I both attended the assistant superintendent (AS) inquired

about the progress of the teacher. Joseph responded that he had co-observed him that day and provided the AS with three strategies that had been suggested to the teacher that he observed in use during the co-observation.

Mike. During the debriefing Mike indicated the lesson observed was only partially effective. He collected evidence of teacher interactions with students, student comments and classroom procedures, such as timing of transitions. He focused his observations and feedback primarily on issues of classroom management. When asked what initial feedback he thought he would deliver he identified three items, but only one of the items was articulated as *feedback for growth.* Mike indicated that he would start the feedback conversation by asking the veteran teacher to reflect on the lesson, stating

> I find it easy to ask what her take on it was, similarly to how you asked me about positive and negatives I will ask her the same. And then assuming our observations align I will get into recommendations. If they don't align then we will delve into where the differences are.

Mike also indicated that he anticipated the teacher would say she has already tried several strategies. He stated he "could live with that…A teacher knowing their students and having tried different strategies so that what I observe may be the best that works for that group of students." Mike, a first year administrator, expressed a willingness to concede to the teacher that she had already tried everything she could and what was observed was the best that could be expected for that particular class.

Jared. Jared expressed that the lesson he observed was effective. When asked what observations stood out for him he focused on teacher actions that facilitated engagement in the lesson and how the lesson activities and tasks were designed to

engage students in higher order thinking and challenging content. Similar to Diane, he formulated three items of feedback that included both commendations and recommendations for improvement. Recommendations focused on further increasing the cognitive demand of lessons and were verbally stated in a *feedback for growth* format. During the debriefing, Jared made it clear that part of the purpose of the feedback conversation was to encourage and develop a rapport with the teacher, especially since it was a first year teacher. He stated that with new teachers, he starts the conversation the same way by stating what his philosophy on teacher evaluation is

> To listen, to look, to observe, and collect evidence. There is no 'get you'. Catching you in what you are doing - celebrate what is being done well, and then provide some recommendations where I can that I have seen other teachers do or I think will make a difference.

Jared expressed using several adaptive strategies when engaging teachers in feedback discussions based on the teacher's readiness to have a reflective conversation that can lead to a change in practice. He stated he usually submitted his written report in the online platform for the teacher to review prior to the post conference, however for more negative observations he would wait to submit and go over the observation with the teacher face to face. For negative observations he would first ask the teacher to self-reflect and hopefully have the teacher identify the areas for improvement he had also identified. After feedback giving and discussion, he would submit the observation to allow the teacher time to review and further reflect on their own before finalizing the observation. A final strategy Jared shared was not to submit the evaluation and offer the teacher a second observation. However, he stated that he reserved this option only for

teachers who demonstrated an awareness of the need for improvement during the feedback giving discussion and not for teachers who just didn't want to accept the need for instructional improvement.

David. David stated his initial impression of the co-observed lesson was that it was only partially effective. Similar to both Diane and Jared, David's observation focus and recommendations centered on issues of student cognitive engagement. However, David's stated evidence collection procedures were more quantitative and systematic than others. Unlike all other participants he collected evidence using a hard-copy observation form of his own design instead of recording evidence directly into the online observation form. The form included sections to tally the number and type of questions asked (open or closed-ended questions), tally the number of students on or off task at set intervals of time (each ten minutes), and list and tally the types of off-task behavior observed. The form also included sections to record more qualitative evidence such as examples of questions asked and student responses, and examples of tasks and activities.

When asked what observations stood out for him, David stated, "[I] was going to call it questioning, but it's more of the whole problem-solving experience for the students." He went on to describe the teacher's inconsistency in posing open-ended questions that allowed students to engage in problem-solving and critique of their solving strategies versus offering closed-ended questions that scripted the discussion or just provided the answer to the students. At this point in the debriefing, I posed a follow-up question to David, asking if he had noted any discretion the teacher may have used in using the two types of questioning or providing the answer. David, referred to his notes, and stated that the teacher had done it by groups except for once. "The four times he

didn't do it right [provided only closed-ended questioning] involved three specific groups. The times he did open-ended involved other groups, except one group he engaged twice, one open-ended and one not." David also commented on the level of student disengagement, providing the tallies of off-task students he had recorded at 10 min intervals and the types of disengaged behaviors he observed.

When asked about the initial feedback he planned to give, David identified two items of feedback, and one additional item he would bring up only if the teacher received the first two pieces of feedback well. One recommendation was for teacher to "systematically step away [to the outside of the student groups] to observe all the groups and notice what the students are doing". A follow up question was posed to clarify if David viewed his recommendation as one of classroom management or student engagement. He replied, "Instructional engagement. In some cases, like the middle check before the transition, many students were finished or just tired of the activity and ready to move on. I perceived this as students becoming disengaged periodically with individual tasks or activities within the lesson, although they may re-engage later in the lesson."

David indicated the feedback conversation might not be easy to have with the teacher. For the feedback giving, David described a detailed plan for delivering the feedback that was leader-directed. He indicated he had identified two initial pieces of feedback that he would include in the written observation report and discuss verbally during the post-observation process. The third feedback item he would discuss with the teacher verbally, and only if the teacher had received the first two items of feedback well. He discussed the need to sometimes prioritize feedback when there are several areas a

teacher needs to improve upon so that the teacher does not become overwhelmed and can take action to change practices most in need of improvement.

Discussion. Overall, three of the five school leaders (Diane, Jared, David) articulated a specific approach for engaging teachers in a feedback conversation. Within these approaches they articulated an understanding of the need to adjust either the feedback given or method of delivery based on an assessment of the teacher's readiness to receive critical feedback or engage in reflection. Formulating strategic approaches to feedback giving demonstrate leader problem-solving capacity, an active leadership supervision characteristic. However, also within the assessment of the teacher's readiness to receive feedback is a consideration of the leader's relationship with the teacher, a foundational aspect of charismatic leadership. Jared, in particular, identified relationship and trust building as part of his observation practice, and articulated its connection to teacher willingness to engage in instructional improvement. These three leaders were also able to formulate feedback using a *feedback for growth* format – clearly communicating the desired practice and providing actionable suggestions to implement the practice. David was most articulate in describing how the current teacher practice limited student engagement and in providing multiple suggestions for the teacher to choose to increase engagement. These practices demonstrate an integrated use of active leadership supervision, charismatic leadership, and leadership content knowledge characteristics. Active leadership supervision is demonstrated through the use of feedback formulated as feedback for growth that provides teachers with specific and actionable strategies they can try out immediately in their teaching, as well as an analytical and problem-solving ability to assess the teacher's readiness to receive

feedback and adjust the feedback discussion accordingly. This latter supervisory practice also involves charismatic leadership characteristics. These school leaders demonstrated an awareness of the need to adjust the feedback given so as not to overwhelm or discourage the teacher, thus building or maintaining trust between the leader and teacher (Tuytens & Devos, 2011). This attention to trust building as a component of the observation process was most evident in the Jared's responses. He stated that he begins each observation with a new teacher by assuring them that this is not a "get you [doing wrong]" moment, and that his role was to "listen, observe, celebrate what is being done", and then provide some recommendations for improvement where he can. He also expressed a willingness to not count the observation and come back to re-observe if the teacher had an awareness of the need for improvement. These two practices demonstrate an understanding by Jared of the affective domains involved in feedback reception and adult learning (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014), and leader emphasis on establishing a mastery orientation over a performance orientation within the professional learning culture (Roussin & Zimmerman, 2014; Shim, Cho, & Cassady 2013). In contrast to Jared's approach to relationship building that facilitated reflection and instructional improvement, Mike's stated approach allowed the teacher to discount the utility of any feedback given. The first year administrator's willingness to concede to the teacher that her observed practice was the best that could be expected demonstrated an unsophisticated application of charismatic leadership that could even be viewed as transactional in nature.

Other School Leader Behaviors Observed. During the debriefing, Diane and David both attempted to engage me in peer reflection as a previous solo observer of the

teachers. I believe this was done for two reasons- to use a peer resource to gain input on what was observed, and to understand the history of previous feedback given to each teacher. This information could be used to contextualize their own initial impressions of the teaching observed and as part of the assessment of where in the professional learning continuum that teacher ought to be. This input-seeking behavior demonstrates problem-solving skill and further demonstrates active leadership supervision traits in these leaders.

Review of Written Feedback. The written observation reports for each co-observation completed were reviewed. Written feedback was compared to the initial feedback each administrator formulated during the debriefing session.

Joseph. During the debriefing Joseph identified two initial feedback items that related to cognitive student engagement, higher level questioning and engaging students in problem solving and reasoning. However, in the written report Joseph provided a different set of feedback that was limited to classroom management procedures, including the distribution of materials and protocol for calling on students. Additionally, only one suggested strategy was provided. While the feedback provided was relevant, it shied away from the more complex engagement concerns discussed during the debriefing. Joseph avoided formally addressing the student engagement concerns observed in the lesson. Lack of leader content knowledge to provide specific strategies to improve cognitive student engagement could be a potential reason for Joseph's avoidance of formally documenting the student engagement issues. Alternatively, Joseph may have decided that the classroom management issues for this first year teacher needed to be addressed first before providing support to increase the quality of student engagement.

David. David included in the written report the two items of feedback that he discussed he would provide in writing during the debriefing. In each case he provided an evidence statement and then a recommendation of how to change the practice. In both cases the recommendations were stated as feedback for growth statements with one to four suggested strategies that teacher could choose to try to improve the practice. As an example, he provided the following:

As the small group activity progressed the number of students engaged in off-task behavior increased. Consider implementing one or more of the recommendations below to prevent this:

- Periodically halt progressing from group to group monitoring and facilitating their progress. Position yourself in a spot, where you can survey all groups. Note the progress they are making, their applied effort, and if some have finished.
- Timing can be difficult for activities, such as the one observed, where students had differing needs helping each correct their mistakes on their test from the previous day. Monitor general class progress and end the activity when it appears there is a need to move on. If some of the slower students are not finished because of levels of effort being applied earlier, not finishing can be a logical consequence. Those not finished can do so for homework.
- Have an alternative assignment for those finishing earlier. An easy way to do this is to prepare some math games, along with needed materials. Have these games organized in some way, such as small bins, so that as

students finish their assignment, they can pull a game and play it. These bins can be on past material, not the focus of the current unit. Such practices make for a great review.

- For some activities, such as the one observed, students who have successfully completed the assignment early can be used as aides, going to other groups to help students who can use it.

The second item of feedback provided by the David dealt with questioning. The recommendation was less detailed than the first one, but stated the desired practice (open-ended questioning), followed by an evidence statement describing when and how the teacher had achieved this level of questioning, and a request for consistency ("Do this, as a first step, all the time.").

Diane. Diane also provided written feedback for all four items of feedback discussed during the debriefing. For the two commendations she described the teacher practice and its outcome. For the recommendations, she first stated what practices within that instructional domain the teacher did well. She then provided a recommendation for improved practices, however, a specific strategy was provided for only one of the two improvement areas. Below is the recommendation that was stated as a feedback for growth statement:

> Instructional materials and resources are suitable for the lesson and engage students. Pacing is appropriate throughout the lesson. However, Ms. H should foster student independence by allowing students to come to the Smartboard and solve the problems on their own, as she facilitates it. Also she should allow

students to exchange the whiteboard with each other for peer review instead of teacher review.

Jared. Jared discussed three items of feedback during the debriefing, and expressed that he felt the lesson observed was very effective for a first year teacher. In his written report, Jared provided two items of feedback. In both cases, he provided first the evidence statement that described the teacher practice, followed immediately by feedback specific to that observed practice. One item of feedback was given as recommended alternative strategy to what the teacher did. The other item was posed as a reflection question, "Was seven minutes enough? In looking back at this activity was there something you would have changed relative to the time component?" Both feedback items would be considered as feedback for growth. The reflection question was stated in a way that the teacher is being asked to provide their own alternative strategy, and the question can be used a discussion starter during the post-observation conference.

Mike. During the debriefing, Mike indicated that he would provide three items of feedback dealing with classroom management. His written feedback included these three items, including recommendations to continue modeling positive student interactions, setting procedures for quick dissemination of materials and addressing off–task behavior of students working in groups. Similarly to the verbal discussion during the debriefing, Mike did not articulate any of the feedback as *feedback for growth* statements- no examples or suggested strategies were given.

Mike was the only administrator to use the *Feedback Section* in the written observation form. This section is broken down by component and provides a scaled rubric of generalized evidence statements for each element of that instructional

component. The evidence statements for each element can be clicked on to provide the teacher with generalized feedback of where their practice is along a continuum of ineffective, developing, effective or highly effective. Mike rated the teacher as *Effective* (rating of three) overall in Student Engagement (Component 3c) in the Scoring Section, and provided no specific recommendations for improvement. However, within the Feedback Section, he selected the *Developing* evidence statements for three of the five elements within the student engagement component, which would correlate more with a rating of two. There was a misalignment of statements and ratings in the scoring and feedback sections of the written report along with a lack of any specific verbal or written feedback being given.

Focus Group Interview. The interview guide for the focus group was divided into three sets of questions. The first sought to provide another opportunity for leaders to reflect on their observation and feedback giving practice. Leaders initially described these practices and engaged in feedback formulation during the one-on-one debriefings that occurred immediately following each classroom observation. During the interviews, administrators were asked to share within the group their approach to feedback formulation, evidence they looked for during an observation, and factors they considered when planning their feedback conversations.

In the second part of the interview, leaders reviewed the three types of leadership characteristics proposed to be involved in instructional leadership and feedback giving by reading definitions of each and studying the feedback model proposed in the literature review of this study and pictured again in figure 4.5. Questions then facilitated a discussion of how much each characteristic was involved in their own leadership

practice. Leaders also reviewed and then discuss how much each characteristic was involved in their own leadership practice.

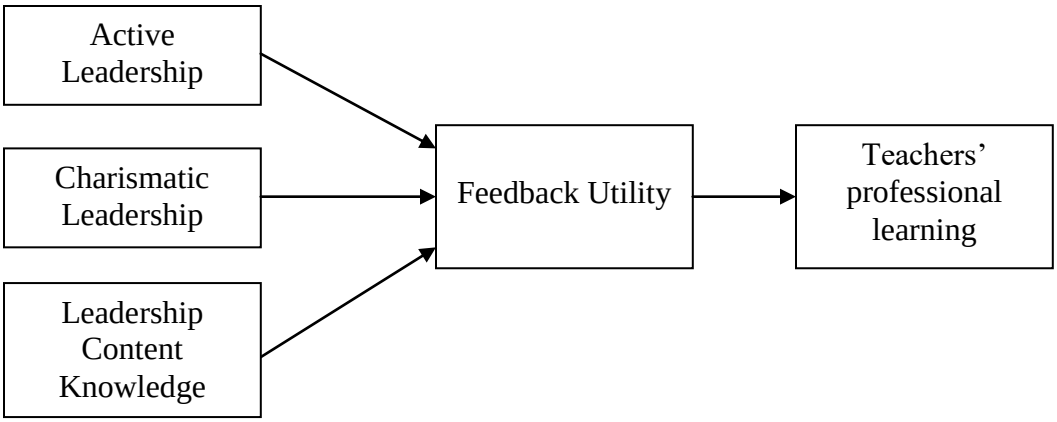

Figure 4.4 Leadership Characteristics Proposed to Play a Role in Feedback Giving

The third part of the interview asked leaders to explore how they felt teachers received and acted on the feedback they gave, and discuss what leadership characteristics were involved in feedback reception.

Active Leadership Supervision. All five leaders shared strategies and skills they felt demonstrated active leadership supervision, such as prioritizing the feedback to be delivered, engaging teachers in reflection, and identifying and creating access to resources. These practices and the leaders' rationale for how and why they used them demonstrated the problem-solving, trouble-shooting, and strategic engagement capacities of the leaders. As an example, Diane shared

> I do something similar to David where I prioritize if I see more than two major things. But I also have my pre-observation conference so I always ask them 'What is it that you want me to focus on?'Because sometimes they think for example that they have a need.

Engaging the teacher early in the observation process, during the pre-conference, is strategic. Diane demonstrated an ability to trouble shoot and engineered a solution to a common barrier to positive reception of feedback. Diane also employed aspects of charismatic leadership (CL) in this example. She engaged the teacher in reflective action prior to the observation by asking the teacher what Diane, as the observer, should focus on. By asking the teacher to identify an instructional area to receive feedback in and then delivering feedback in that area, Diane felt she built trust with the teacher and provided the teacher choice in identifying the area for instructional improvement. She felt both of these factors then increased the likelihood that the teacher would act on the feedback given. Diane's actions were both relationship-building and motivational.

Three of the leaders, Diane, Jared, and David formulated their feedback, both oral and written, as *feedback for growth* statements. Feedback for growth includes a statement of what practice was observed or the desired practice, followed by specific, actionable suggestions or practice recommendations. Diane explained the rationale for providing feedback in this way as related to clarity so that teachers can act on the feedback. In describing a typical feedback conversation she would have with a teacher during a post conference she said,

> 'I observed this and this is not what should be taking place'. Or be very clear with your vocabulary. 'This is what you need to do but this is how you can do it'. Giving them the strategies and any supports that they need to make it happen.

Another common practice, expressed both by Diane and Mike, was engaging the teacher in self-reflection. In Mike's responses he indicated an effort to engage the teacher in discussion beyond the rating, or score, received. He stated, "I'll start off with asking

them before they see the score what their thoughts were about the observation." Mike corroborates his described practice of engaging teachers in self reflection first in order to facilitate discussions where he needs to discuss both positive and negative feedback. He does this strategically before they see the score assigned which demonstrates a consideration of the affective domain of feedback giving. Jared, who was not present for the interview, also described during his debriefing engaging teachers in self-reflection as an adaptive strategy when he anticipated that the feedback conversation would be difficult due to a low observation score being given. One of the major criticisms of teacher evaluation models is that assigning scores and ratings to teacher performance tied to accountability undermines the use of teacher observation as an instructional improvement tool (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2011). However, these three administrators have instituted strategies within their practice that re-engage teachers in the feedback process. These practices again demonstrate problem-solving capacity on the part of the leader.

Diane further explains the challenge of using teacher evaluation as both accountability system and improvement tool. When asked about allowing teachers to review the written report prior to the post-observation conference she shared,

> I think it's helpful in terms of you want people to read it. You don't want to blind side somebody with it. I think if they got it right there [in the post conference], they might not have time to actually interpret it which may make it easier for the observer because they are busy reading and you have a quick post conference. But then you're done without them really understanding what it says. When you give it to them a day or two ahead of time to read it, I think it gives them time to read

it, understand it. I've even had people come to me with 'I read your comments and I agree. This is how I am going to implement it the next time around...your commentary'. I think it's actually beneficial to actually get them to do or react to the comments.

Diane recognized that allowing teachers time to review written observation and feedback before the feedback conversation allows them needed time to process and accept the feedback. She felt allowing this time often resulted in better reception of the feedback and a willingness on the part of the teacher to implement change in practice. She also noted that it can result in teachers taking ownership of the need for change and formulating their own change solutions. Diane provides evidence that allowing an appropriate amount of time for teachers to reflect on feedback and make connections to their own practice can result in teacher-initiated changes in practice. This affirms the strongly held assumptions about the criteria for adult learning, and identifies the perceived feedback utility as an important step in the feedback process leading to change in teacher practice. The initiation by the teacher to engage in instructional improvement was based on a perceived deficiency or need for improvement that occurred as a result of reflection on the feedback given. Glickman et al (2010) assert that adult learning is more rigorous and adult learners are more motivated when learning is centered around a problem of practice and have choice in how the learning is achieved. The motivation for the learning is founded in the learner's desire to achieve a performance goal and increased ownership by selecting learning or change activities suited to their individual learning preferences. This conceptual understanding of adult learning requirements can be applied to the observation and feedback giving process for teachers. Feedback giving

that is highly connected to a teacher's daily practice, helps the teacher to identify problems of practice, and facilitates teacher choice in the selection of the strategies they will implement could increase teacher perception of the utility of the feedback and the likelihood that they will initiate improvement action, such as pursuing professional development or redesigning a lesson (Glickman et al, 2010; Supovitz, Sirinides & May, 2009).

All four leaders in the interview felt they used active leader supervision skills and strategies as the primary component in providing effective feedback. The three building administrators (principals and vice principal) acknowledged that they strategically employed active supervision to facilitate support from content specialists when their own content knowledge in a certain area limited the feedback they could give to a teacher. Mike, for instance, explained how active supervision during feedback giving isn't always about providing the actual recommendation of instructional strategies but about connecting and making available to the teacher other human and material resources.

> I told him I would provide him with coverage…because I want you to see how these teachers get a level two class that doesn't seem to be interested in the activity energized and motivated as an example.

Mike connected a struggling teacher with another teacher who he felt could model instructional areas the teacher found challenging. In this case, a leader used the resources and authority available to him to connect teachers, provide release time, and coordinate peer observation to support struggling teachers.

Charismatic Leadership. While all four leaders interviewed identified active leadership supervision as the leader characteristic they relied on the most, many of their

descriptions of their practice and the rationale behind the use of them revealed aspects of charismatic leadership. Both characteristic leadership and active leadership supervision fall within transformational and instructional leadership models, and therefore it is not unexpected that actual leadership practices would exhibit aspects of both characteristics (Tuytens & Devos, 2011). While active supervision relates to managing many of the technical aspects of facilitating instructional improvement such as creating time and opportunity to reflect on teaching, providing resource support and engaging in situated learning discussions (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007), charismatic leadership manages the more affective domain of change dynamics, such creating safe spaces for trial and error learning and using trust and credibility as motivating forces for teacher to engage in change tasks (Tuytens & Devos, 2011).

As leaders described approaches to feedback giving, there was a common consideration given to teacher attitude and disposition, both prior to the feedback giving and as a result of receiving the feedback. Leaders discussed limiting the amount of feedback given so teachers did not feel overwhelmed. Leaders also discussed making decisions about what feedback would be put in writing and what would be said only verbally. Leaders considered the variance of individual personality and goal orientations and how that related to teacher buy-in and the need to customize the feedback message and delivery. As an example, David described prioritizing the feedback when he plans his feedback giving.

> I list commendations and recommendations, and then I take the recommendations and I limit it to one to three depending on what I feel a teacher can take.

> Sometimes I might only put one to two in writing and hold the third one to see how they're taking those during the post conference... I don't go too far because I want them to focus on improving the most critical issues so I prioritize them… I'm careful in what I put in pre-writing because I found that if you do too much negative, your teacher just shuts down or gets defensive.

David describes taking into account the affective domain of feedback giving. He considered the amount of feedback to give, the timing of its delivery, and how a potentially negative evaluation of the teacher's performance would impact teacher receptiveness and perceived feedback utility. In another example of charismatic leadership in feedback giving, Diane addresses the concept of gaining teacher buy-in as a requirement for change in practice.

> One thing I consider when I'm planning the feedback conversations is the personality of the teacher. I think when you're discussing some sort of feedback you clearly want that person to buy in. If I know it's going to be let's say a seasoned teacher who really thinks they know it all, and they get a two instead of the three or four on one particular area, [then I ask myself] 'How do I deliver this message to this particular person?' Sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's a little more difficult.

Later in the interview leaders were asked what they felt was the most effective way to deliver feedback that would result in teachers taking action to improve their instruction. Diane's response describes the difficulty of establishing teacher buy-in while still

delivering the message of the need for improvement. Diane recalled advice she had received from her former supervisor on having feedback conversations,

> 'No flowers around the outhouse'. Sometimes we're too focused on making the not-so-nice go down nicely, which starts you off with what you did really well and then we sneak something you didn't really do well in and end with more compliments. That sometimes brings us back rather than pushes us forward because the teacher loses the message in the midst of all this.

She reveals a belief that a leader cannot prioritize making the message nice or easier to accept over delivering a clear message about the instructional improvement needed.

Leadership Content Knowledge. During the group interview, a follow up question asked leaders if they perceived lack of content knowledge in a specific secondary subject area as a barrier to providing effective feedback and if so, how did they address it. Four major findings resulted from the discussion that followed.

The first finding was there was some disagreement among the administrators about whether perceived lack of leadership content knowledge (LCK) in a specific secondary subject area is a significant barrier to providing useful feedback. Joseph and Mike both felt it was not a significant barrier, while David acknowledged difficulties in establishing credibility with high school math teachers as he transitioned from a former science teacher to STEM supervisor. The second finding related to the different ways leaders defined leadership content knowledge, which then impacted any perceived deficits in LCK capabilities.

Joseph stated,

> I don't find it as a challenge. I started in high school, so observing a Spanish class, a Spanish IV class for example, Honors or AP, where I don't understand what's going on and you still have learning that's happening. Good teaching is good teaching. Good instructional practices can translate from phys ed, a gym or health room, to a classroom. … The challenge I found was going into elementary school from a high school background or middle school background, because number one, I found those teachers to be a little bit more sensitive to recommendations or comments made about their teaching. The other area was that I wasn't in my natural area of expertise. It was just always learning - learning from the teachers, learning from the supervisors, learning from other principals - different instructional strategies and techniques that they would use on an elementary level.

In a somewhat contrasting statement, David stated,

> At the elementary level, I found just being aware worked. There were some major problems with how we were doing the Science, so I focused on fixing them first. So, I kind of got the buy in of the teachers because they saw things change that they really wanted to change and felt needed to change. The other transition, Science to include Math, STEM, that was different. Luckily, I kind of had the heads up almost a half year in advance. I joined the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. I did the journals at all four [grade] levels and I also had frequent meetings with professors from three different universities, Math education

> professors from three different universities, including the two local ones. I got their advice and also put them on a task force to transform our Mathematics program. That helped a lot but mostly at the elementary and middle. The barrier of the high school was some of the teachers there still see me as a Science teacher. They're set on how they want to teach Math. And I am still to them probably just an outsider trying to change just for change.

While Joseph did not perceive his lack of content knowledge in a specific secondary subject as a hindrance, he described his perception that he needed to develop leader content knowledge of instructional strategies appropriate for elementary age children to be an effective elementary principal. He believed that the instructional strategies at the secondary level translated from one content area to the next, but felt the greater divide existed between instructional practice at the elementary level and instructional practice at the secondary level.

David, on the other hand, perceived his LCK deficit to occur across content areas and not across developmental or grade levels. As a STEM supervisor with a strong background in science, he perceived that his ability to address content-specific curricular concerns helped him develop rapport and buy-in with teachers when specifically addressing science instruction that he could then leverage to motivate teacher action. However, David also acknowledged the flip side of the LCK coin when describing his ability to influence changes in math teachers' instruction. He expressed that the math teachers' perception of his lack of leader content knowledge created a barrier to their willingness to engage in instructional change, even if the perception was not accurate. He

also alludes to how departmental subcultures create barriers to feedback utility through group identity and non-member exclusion. (Lochmiller & Acker-Hocevar, 2016; Siskin, 1991). The two leaders varied in how they defined leadership content knowledge. Joseph saw it more as pedagogical practices varying across grade or child developmental levels. David saw knowledge across content areas, especially at the secondary level, as the potential leadership deficiency.

The third finding was that despite the variation in how Joseph and David defined and perceived LCK, they both sought out their own forms of professional development as a common leader response to their perceived deficit of content knowledge. Joseph engaged in peer interaction with veteran elementary principals with elementary teaching backgrounds, while David engaged in independent study by reading math education journals and attending content-based workshops. The self-initiation by the leaders to engage in professional development based on a perceived deficiency or need for improvement in one's practice is similar to the response of the teacher who initiated instructional improvement after reflecting on feedback given. It further affirms that when the motivating factors for adult learning are provided, people will engage in change.

The final finding regarding leader perceptions on leadership content knowledge was that all four leaders felt that possessing LCK and providing any content-specific feedback was primarily the responsibility of the curriculum and instruction supervisors. Diane stated that "Leadership content knowledge is more important in terms of supervisors." Joseph supported this sentiment describing how "[i]t's beneficial to have the supervisors provide the content knowledge and building administrators provide the support in terms of instructional practices. That's what I find. The more you know,

obviously, the better you're going to be able to give feedback to the teachers. [But] If I have a question, I can email or call David or call Kayla, one of our other supervisors, and get feedback on an observation. David, as one of the content area supervisors, also agreed with the expectation for leadership content knowledge to be more relegated to the leadership role of content area supervisors. He shared, "I feel my role is to bring into the engagement piece and the other [instructional] pieces how it applies to science, math or engineering."

The leaders acknowledge a division of responsibility within the model for instructional feedback giving in use in the district. The role of the building administrators is to focus on instructional components of teacher practice, such as cognitive student engagement, questioning, classroom management, and the role of the supervisors is to work with teachers to understand how those instructional components are applied to teaching the specific content area, in this case, math, science and engineering. However, all three building administrators at different points throughout the interview acknowledged the benefit of having some level of content knowledge both to provide more specific feedback on the teaching and to establish more credibility with the teachers that impacted the teacher reception of the feedback and the likelihood that they would then act on that feedback.

Both Joseph and Mike described interactions with supervisors and others with strong content knowledge as valuable professional learning opportunities for them. Mike referred to the instructional walkthrough protocol that was instituted for the first time that school year as a method for increasing his own leadership content knowledge.

> This year we started the walkthroughs by departments…to find out what specific things that supervisor is looking for when we go in there [subject-area classroom]. So having the opportunity to meet with David and see what he's looking for [instructionally] when he sits down makes it easier to for me to have an idea walking into the next class.

The instructional walkthroughs were administrator meetings of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, the content area supervisor, the special education supervisor, and the building principals and assistant principals. Meetings began with the supervisor presenting a current problem of practice they had identified within the department. Supervisors would also discuss professional development and training teachers had received, any curriculum and instruction initiatives within the department, and the supervisor's expectations both for use of curricular resources and instructional practices. The group then conducted walkthroughs of three to four teachers within the department and then debriefed to discuss what was observed and how it related to the problem of practice.

Integration of Leadership Characteristics. Many of the examples and responses provided by the school leaders demonstrated the integrated use of two or more leadership characteristics. These leader actions reveal how the characteristics can be interconnected and are used to strategically as leaders seek to both provide instructional guidance and support while motivating and influencing teacher willingness to receive feedback and act on it. David described his rationale for limiting the amount of written feedback and providing additional feedback verbally, and only if the teacher was ready to receive it. Within his rationale he discussed prioritizing the feedback with a focus on delivering the

most critical pieces, those that would have the greatest impact on student learning and that could be accomplished most immediately by the teacher. This example demonstrates the interconnection between charismatic leadership and active leadership supervision. David adapted his feedback delivery approach to accommodate teacher disposition in order to facilitate his ability to provide instructional guidance in ways that will be better received by a teacher.

Another integrated practice that took into account both the affective and cognitive domains involved in adult learning was expressed by both Diane and Mike during the debriefing and corroborated during the interview. They described engaging the teacher in self-reflection to facilitate a more productive discussion. Mike indicated how this is needed sometimes to engage the teacher in discussion beyond the rating, or score, received. He stated, “I'll start off with asking them before they see the score what their thoughts were about the observation.” Mike described the usefulness of engaging teachers in self reflection first in order to facilitate discussions where he needs to discuss both positive and negative feedback. Strategically using self-reflection to identify negative aspects of a person’s performance before they see the evaluative score related to the performance demonstrates a consideration of the affective domain of feedback giving. Specifically their actions address a need to increase the perceived feedback utility that can lead to teacher action, and recognition that even high quality feedback is ineffective if the teacher is not willing to act on it. This examples also highlights one of the major criticisms of teacher evaluation models is that assigning scores and ratings to teacher performance tied to accountability undermines the use of teacher observation, and the

feedback given, as an instructional improvement tool (Danielson, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2011).

Diane expounded on the challenge of using teacher evaluation as both accountability system and improvement tool. When asked about allowing teachers to review the written report prior to the post-observation conference she shared,

> I think it's helpful in terms of you want people to read it. You don't want to blind side somebody with it. I think if they got it right there [in the post conference], they might not have time to actually interpret it which may make it easier for the observer because they are busy reading and you have a quick post observation. But then you're done [with the conference] without them really understanding what it says. When you give it to them a day or two ahead of time to read it, I think it gives them time to read it, understand it. I've even had people come to me with 'I read your comments and I agree. This is how I am going to implement it the next time around...your commentary'. I think it's actually beneficial to actually get them to do or react to the comments.

Diane recognized that allowing teachers time to review written observation and feedback before the feedback conversation allows them needed time to process and accept the feedback. She felt allowing this time often resulted in better reception of the feedback and a willingness on the part of the teacher to implement change in practice. She also noted that it can result in teachers taking ownership of the need for change and formulating their own change solutions. Ownership and choice is an important motivator of adult learning (Glickman et al., 2010, Supovitz et al., 2009).

When asked directly about how each of the leadership characteristics came into play in their feedback giving, all four leaders said they relied most on active leadership supervision. However, leaders went on to describe how the characteristics are interconnected in feedback giving and employed strategically as needed as described in the two examples above. Diane described the need for both ALS and CL.

> For me, the most important would be the active leadership supervision because that applies to anybody regardless of the content knowledge to really go in there and look at teaching and to give appropriate feedback to the teacher and obviously support. Charismatic is applicable in a way that teachers have to trust you; that you're coming into really help them with their teaching and you don't have an ulterior motive. It's not about being punitive.

While all of the leaders felt they relied on active leadership supervision the most in their feedback giving, all four acknowledged a perception that charismatic leadership and leadership content knowledge practices were most highly valued by teachers. Joseph stated, "Lots of teachers value content knowledge, especially at the high school level. I would argue even for the elementary level; they see themselves as specialists." David felt charismatic leadership was the most important factor in teacher reception of the feedback. He stated, "We haven't really been talking about it much, but the reality is if they like you and trust you, they're more likely to listen to you. That's something that you have to use all the time, not just through evaluations, to build that up." David's comment highlighted how charismatic leadership is specifically needed to influence teacher reception. Leaders described relying on active supervision in formulating and providing feedback, but David acknowledged the need for charismatic leadership to ensure the

successful receipt and use of the feedback. David's comments point to a distinction within the model where administrators may use certain characteristics to observe, formulate and deliver feedback and then another combination of the characteristics to ensure high levels of teacher reception. David also perceived that trust and relationship building happened over time through all of your leader interactions with the teacher not just during the observation process. Mike perceived a benefit in the integrated use of all three leadership characteristics within a system of ongoing feedback. He stated,

> Teachers would prefer to have the content specific knowledge, but I don't think it's done by design, or at least I would like to think so. When we are assigned to do our observations it's choosing each of us from a couple of different areas. They [teachers] are getting their content knowledge, they're getting someone charismatic… I'm not that charismatic per se, but as David said, I do agree that we all have to have that [charismatic leadership skills] all the time to be able to have those conversations. But by balancing it out between the active supervision and the content, they're getting this [feedback], not just from one person but through the course of their two to four observations.

Mike's observation supports David's assertion that individual administrators differentially employ different aspects of their instructional leadership during the different parts of the observation process. He also perceives a benefit in the district practice (and ACHIEVE NJ legislative mandate) of having multiple observers to ensure that teachers' experience with feedback giving will include varying leader interactions where all three leadership characteristics will play significant roles depending on the

strengths of the different observers and perhaps the timing of the interactions within the feedback cycle. This idea was corroborated by some of the other administrator practices that were observed during the co-observation process. Diane and David both sought peer input into what feedback had been previously given and where the teacher was in their coaching and professional learning/instructional improvement continuum in order to tailor their own feedback giving.

Additional Findings. During the group interview, administrators identified teacher goal orientation as having a strong influence on how teachers perceived the usefulness of feedback given and their willingness to engage in instructional improvement tasks. Diane describes its impact on the feedback process,

> There are some teachers…and this is regardless of experience, this really relates to personality. There are some teachers who are very open to constructive criticism and are happy to engage in that conversation with you because they are always looking for ways to improve and want to know what they can do to move beyond.

Shim, Cho, and Cassady (2013) explored how achievement goal orientation affected teacher's intrinsic motivation and behavioral practices. They hypothesized that teachers' achievement goal orientation would lead to the promotion of different types of learning outcomes in their classrooms. Teachers with a mastery goal orientation to develop their teaching competence would see *effective* teaching as those practices that led to student growth and mastery. Teachers with a performance goal orientation to either demonstrate their superior teaching ability (performance approach) or avoid judgment for incompetence (performance avoidance) would see *effective* teaching as those practices

that led to students demonstrating observable performance on measures such as tests, placement in advanced classes, the receipt of academic distinctions or a focus on basic skills instruction, drill and practice, and a focus on remediation, respectively.

Similarly, Diane described teachers whom she perceived as having a more mastery goal orientation were more willing to engage in feedback conversations and constructive critique. Following Shim et al. findings for classroom behavioral practices, those teachers with more of a performance goal orientation could see the feedback giving process as a threat to their sense of achievement or identity in their job role, or seek to avoid any possible negative feedback in order to preserve their sense of achievement. Diane reflects the two possible performance-oriented responses (performance approach and performance avoidance) to feedback in her continued comments,

> The ones that are there to perfect their craft will take the feedback right away and implement it. I do agree with David. The defensive ones sometimes will take it and implement it and you'll see it the next time around. But I don't know how much it is because maybe they reflected and said, "Oh, they're right" or how much of it is "give me my A", "give me my four." The apathetic teachers, I don't see implementing. They just look at you and nod. You go back in and they're going to give you the same thing over and over. I believe they're the worst category and how I address that is continuous monitoring. I see that you're not going to do it…I'm going to come back on this day… Hopefully, you will be done then. You just have to have a lot more supervision with that type of teacher. And maybe even more supports. "I'll come back but how about you do this in the meantime?

Go to this workshop, go observe this teacher, or go co-plan with one of the coaches."

Significant in Diane's response is how she expressed a belief that she could still effect instructional improvement in teachers with both types of performance orientation. She also acknowledged that it required an adjustment to her supervisory approach, one that is interpreted as being more characteristically active leadership supervision. She specifically mentioned the need to use both monitoring and evaluation aspects of ALS, as well as the provision of professional supports, in order to get desired improvement from the tier of performance-avoidance oriented teachers.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The purpose of this chapter was to describe school leaders' understanding of how feedback giving fit within their instructional leadership role and their perceptions of how they employed different leadership characteristics during the observation process and feedback giving. An initial theoretical framework of feedback giving informed both the data collection methods used and the initial analysis of data. Key word and phrase analysis from phase one of the study were used to describe ways in which leaders fulfilled their instructional role and to describe how leaders situated feedback giving within this role. In the second phase, findings were organized and compared by participant and then by described practices that fell under each leadership characteristic framed in the initial model. Key themes that emerged and a proposed revised feedback model will be discussed in chapter five. Chapter five will also discuss the implications of the findings and propose an improvement plan to further develop both individual and leadership team capacity for providing effective feedback for instructional improvement.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

5.1 Discussion of Major Findings

Analysis of qualitative evidence from this study, mainly leader descriptions of their practice, revealed four major findings. First, described leader actions and rationales demonstrated an integrated and differentiated application of the three leadership characteristics during feedback giving. Second, participants perceived the feedback giving process as having two distinct components, feedback formulation and feedback delivery. Third, school leaders relied on the three leadership characteristics differently when formulating feedback than when delivering feedback. A third component of the feedback giving is the feedback source, or school leader. A fourth finding was each leader differed in their reported self-efficacy and reliance on each of the leadership characteristics, thus affecting the feedback giving. Leaders relied on different combinations of the leadership characteristics depending on their own perceived strengths and weaknesses in both content and pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, leaders utilized different approaches and strategies within the three leadership characteristics according to the situational context of the teacher-leader interaction in an effort to make their feedback as meaningful and effective as possible for each teacher.

Figure 5.1 Leadership Characteristics' Influence on Feedback Giving

Figure 5.1 graphically represents the integrated application of charismatic leadership, active leadership supervision, and leadership content knowledge in the feedback giving process. Leaders may employ different strategies and approaches within each of the characteristics and in different combinations to effect the most meaningful feedback giving in each case. Figure 5.2 revises the feedback model proposed by Tuytens and Devos (2011) to reflect a broader construct of *feedback giving.* In this revised model, feedback giving has three distinct components wherein these leadership characteristics can act in combination to influence perceived feedback utility.

School leaders described two major components of their feedback giving practice, feedback formulation and feedback delivery. Leaders described a varying reliance on each of the leadership characteristics during the different phases of feedback giving. Feedback formulation begins during the observation and continues into the writing the of

the observation report. It involves the decision-making of observed instructional practices as either effective or ineffective, and the identification of improvement strategies for teachers to implement and resources to support the improvement process. Feedback formulation also involves decision making about which items will be addressed and how the feedback will be formatted.

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Feedback delivery involves decision making about and execution of approaches that engage teachers in productive conversation. Leaders described such approaches as facilitating self-reflection, presenting the teacher with observation data, and determining the appropriate balance of positive and critical feedback to deliver to keep the teacher engaged in the feedback discussion and motivated to pursue the improvement process. Feedback delivery included decision making about the content of written and verbal feedback. Importantly, delivery also involved a choice about where along the supervisory behavior continuum leaders would position themselves when facilitating the feedback conversation and expressing their expectations for improvement (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010).

The third component or variable in feedback giving is the leader as the feedback source. Each leader comes to the feedback giving process with variable levels of

competence and comfort in the strategic deployment of the three leadership characteristics. Limiting the study to observations of math instruction where most of the leaders lacked content expertise, allowed them to describe more fully the reliance and interconnections between the three characteristics.

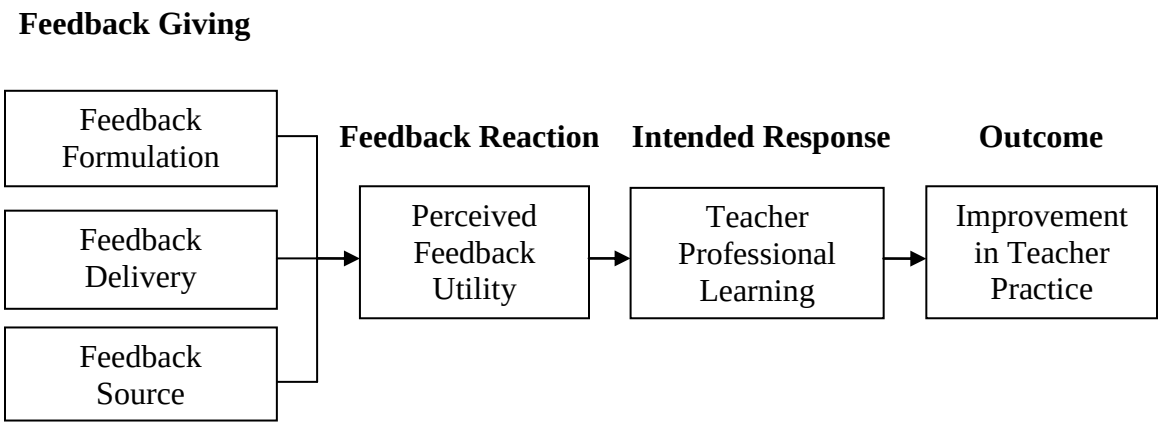

Figure 5.2 Revised Feedback Giving Model

Feedback delivery involves decision making about which leadership approaches will engage teachers in productive conversation about their instruction and then successful execution of those approaches. Leaders described such approaches as facilitating self-reflection, presenting the teacher with observation data, and determining the appropriate balance of positive and critical feedback to deliver to keep the teacher engaged in the feedback discussion and motivated to pursue the improvement process. Feedback delivery included decision making about the content of written and verbal feedback. Importantly, delivery also involved a choice about where along the supervisory behavior continuum leaders would position themselves when facilitating the feedback conversation and expressing their expectations for improvement (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010).

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All five leaders perceived that they relied on active leadership supervision (ALS) approaches most heavily in their feedback giving overall. Active leadership supervision was specifically demonstrated in the strategies they reported using when analyzing observation data and formulating feedback. When asked to describe their practice in delivering feedback, leaders spoke about strategies and approaches to develop trust and relationship with teachers that they felt would motivate teachers to engage in instructional improvement. These practices were more consistently characterized within charismatic leadership traits. While this study did not seek to quantify the extent of reliance on each trait during the feedback formulation and feedback delivery, the qualitative findings are consistent with those found by both Tuytens and Devos (2011) and Robinson, Llyod, and Rowe (2008). In both of those studies, active leadership supervision, as a component of instructional leadership, was found to be most important in influencing feedback utility as perceived by teachers. In this study, leaders also identified ALS as the most important and most relied upon leadership characteristic. Tuytens and Devos (2011) also found a direct relationship between ALS and teacher undertaking of professional learning activities. Leaders in this study described both anecdotal instances of teachers pursuing professional learning after receiving effectively formulated feedback (feedback for

growth) , and self-reported examples of specific ALS actions they had taken to facilitate professional learning for teachers, such as providing release time for a teacher to peer observe another teacher or sending a teacher to a outside workshop. However, this study indicates that while active leadership supervision and charismatic leadership are both necessary leadership traits, leaders employ them strategically throughout the feedback process to optimize the feedback reaction and intended response on case by case basis.

Co-observations for the second phase of the study were limited to secondary math classes in order to explore how secondary leaders dealt with a lack of leadership content knowledge (LCK) in their feedback giving. At the outset of the study, leadership content knowledge (LCK) was defined in line with the definition provided with the feedback model proposed by Tuytens and Devos (2011). Leadership content knowledge was knowledge a school leader possesses about a certain content area and the ways the subject matter is taught and learned. None of the leaders in the study were previous teachers of mathematics, however the curriculum and instruction supervisor of STEM claimed to hold some content expertise in mathematics, and related subjects such as Physics. When asked specifically how content knowledge or lack thereof influenced their ability to provide useful feedback, leaders acknowledged that having specific content knowledge is useful, but not required, in feedback giving. Leaders described that being able to apply content knowledge within the formulation and delivery of feedback could increase one's credibility with the subject area teacher making it more likely that the teacher will perceive the feedback as valid and useful. Leaders also described that it allows for increased specificity of the feedback during feedback formulation (i.e. being able to recommend pedagogically appropriate strategies with specific examples from the content

area). In the absence of strong LCK, leaders reported providing feedback on broader and more general aspects of effective teaching, such as the use of open-ended questioning or engagement strategies that facilitate student discussion and cooperative learning. Leaders also described the employment of active leadership supervision strategies to compensate for lack of content knowledge. These strategies included activating resources that could provide the content knowledge guidance needed by the teacher. Interestingly, one leader provided a differing definition of LCK as related to its importance in providing useful feedback. Having served first at the high school level, and then the elementary level before returning back to a high school principal role, he perceived a larger difference in pedagogical practices across developmental age groups (elementary to secondary) than he perceived between different secondary content areas. The range of leadership content knowledge across grade and development levels and its impact on feedback utility is an area for future study and would be important in understanding the effectiveness of school leaders who transition between elementary and secondary leadership roles.

5.2 Improvement Action Plan

The findings in this study point to a need to develop the secondary leadership team's overall and individual member capacity to provide consistently effective feedback that is well received by teachers and leads teachers to engage in professional learning opportunities. The study findings indicate that individual leaders need to develop fluency in the use of different leadership strategies to both formulate and deliver feedback. The findings also support that development of increased leadership content knowledge in core academic areas would assist leaders in developing rapport and credibility with content area teachers and offer feedback support for district-wide and content area curricular and

instructional initiatives. These leadership needs are made more significant when the broader context of changing expectations for student engagement in classrooms is considered. Leaders need to be able to formulate feedback that identifies specific teacher practices that do not meet expectation and offer alternative instructional strategies that meet the needs of students in the classroom and the content demands of the curriculum. Leaders also need to be able to establish a strong professional learning culture in their buildings and content areas. The feedback giving process should ideally be a formative evaluation of instructional practice, and serve as the initial professional learning activity that teachers engage in with their school leader as the facilitator and guide. Leaders should be able to leverage the feedback giving process as a platform for teachers to engage in critical reflection of instructional practices and utilize available resources that support their professional learning.

In order to address the needs identified in developing leadership capacity in feedback giving, a two-armed professional learning plan is proposed for the secondary leadership team. To develop overall consistency in the formulation and delivery of feedback, leaders will engage in feedback calibration sessions during the monthly principal, assistant principal, and supervisor meetings facilitated by the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. These calibration sessions will be carried out as professional learning communities. Leader groups will review feedback statements selected by the assistant superintendent from observations across the district. Groups will critique these feedback items and practice re-formulating them as *feedback for growth* statements. The feedback for growth format will clearly articulate the instructional practice in need of improvement and provide actionable recommendations of strategies or

approaches for improving the practice. Also in these sessions, leaders will engage in discussions of how to deliver the formulated feedback in different scenarios. As a third component of the professional learning community, leaders will be asked to share evidence and preliminary feedback from observations where the post conference has yet to occur. Each leader will then lead a discussion of how to deliver the feedback. At the subsequent meeting, the leader will share his or her reflections of the feedback delivery that occurred, including the teacher response and any evidence of teacher change in practice that may have occurred.

Partnered with the calibration sessions, the secondary leadership will participate in a more structured co-observation protocol. ACHIEVE NJ, the state law that prescribes the teacher evaluation system, requires that each administrator participate in co-observations twice a year, however no formal procedure is described for how they should be conducted. In URSD, all administrators will be required to participate in three co-observations a year with three different administrators. One of those co-observations will be conducted with a central office administrator (superintendent, assistant superintendent, or directors) and be included as part of the school leader's performance evaluation. Following each co-observation, leaders will engage in a face-to-face debriefing session and document a discussion reviewing the evidence collected, the initial formulation of feedback, and the strategizing of the feedback delivery methods that could be used in the post conference by the assigned observer. Three primary questions will be addressed during the debriefings in regard to feedback formulation and feedback delivery: What practices are in need of improvement? What should the feedback messages be? How should the feedback message be delivered for maximize teacher utility? Finally

administrators will be asked to engage in a short post evaluation reflection with their co-observer to discuss the actual feedback giving that occurred. These may occur in person, over the phone, or virtually through Google Hangouts.

The second arm of this professional learning plan will be the formal introduction of instructional rounds as a leadership practice. In the first year, rounds will be conducted separately at the elementary, middle school, and high school level and involve all leaders at the level with an initial goal of increasing leadership content knowledge in the core academic areas (Math, English, Science, and Social Studies). The instructional rounds will follow a network protocol modeled after that described in *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2010). For each content area, the instructional round will begin with the leadership team convening to identify a problem of practice and the evidence supporting it as such. From the problem of practice the team will develop 1-3 questions they want to address to improve practice. The content area supervisor will facilitate this portion of the rounds, and provide context as needed such as describing new curricular initiatives or instructional expectations, and the professional development teachers have already received. The team will then conduct three to four 20 minute classroom visits within that content area and collect evidence of the teaching and learning as related to the problem of practice. After all classroom visits are complete, the team will immediately debrief to share the data collected and discuss what was observed. The discussion will be organized around the pre-determined problem of practice questions in order to keep the discussion focused on the broader instructional problem and not individual teacher

practice. In line with the goal to improve leadership content knowledge in the core content areas, City et al. (2010) identify the goal of the debriefing discussion as

> not to evaluate the teaching we saw in that single classroom, but to understand the practice of teaching and the process of learning… groups come to agreement about the nature of the learning that results from different interaction at the core…these debrief practices allow participants to describe the specific behaviors and structures they see that cause, enable, or at times diminish learning (p.123).

The learning that occurs during instructional rounds should both improve leadership content knowledge for individual leaders, as well as equip the team to better develop school and district-level improvement plans by having a more in-depth understanding of the instructional and learning needs of teachers and students and strategies and resources that may increase improvement outcomes.

5.3 Action Plan Rationale

The action plan provides three opportunities for leaders to engage in reflective practice within a professional learning community (PLC). Professional learning communities are rooted in the theory of situated cognition (SC), which argues that learning is the process of interpreting meaning from our experiences of phenomenon (Hung, Looi, & Koh, 2004).). SC theory also contends that this interpretive process to establish meaning (knowledge) is located "in particular settings and involves other learners, the environment, and the meaning making activities that contribute to new knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991)" (Pella, 2011, p.109). Given the need for authentic learning environments and social interaction as a contextualizing factor in how meaning is constructed, communities of practice can be an ideal tool and setting for learning to

occur. Within the PLC groups, leaders can engage with other leaders to establish common understandings about instructional challenges such as what rigor and engagement look like in the classroom. They can collaboratively engage in problem solving to develop a common system of strategies and approaches to instructional needs identified within and across content areas and grade levels. Leaders are able to apply this learning in their feedback giving with teachers, and then return to the PLC group to share data and observations, and reflect both individually and within the group (co-reflection) to further develop their leadership practice. In this way, professional learning communities serve as communities of practice (CoP). "Communities of practice (as rich, situated contexts) are ideal learning environments for learning *to be*, and practice being the effective [leader]. Practice, then shapes and supports learning" (Hung, Looi, & Koh, 2004, p.195).

Participation in the instructional rounds and calibration sessions also models reflective practice and a culture of professional learning which leaders can pass down into the learning culture of their own schools and content areas. Leaders will experience the benefit their teachers would receive from engaging in communities of practice, and see a working framework for structuring these professional learning communities around issues rooted in actual teaching practice (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hung, Looi, & Koh, 2004).

One barrier to engaging fully in instructional leadership practice within their roles was the issue of time constraints. This action plan incorporates most of the professional learning into the existing meeting and evaluation system structure. Principals, assistant principals, and supervisors currently meet in job-like groups with the assistant

superintendent once a month. One additional curriculum and instruction meeting is held at each building roughly every other month to review building level data, develop and communicate progress for school improvement plans, and address emerging issues that involves both the building administrators and content area supervisors. Embedding the professional learning within the existing leadership framework demonstrates an efficient use of time and resources, while also ensuring that all leaders are consistently dedicating time and energy toward instructional leadership responsibilities. As another support to leaders and to more fully engage central office administrators in the leadership learning, it is recommended that the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and directors conduct more teacher observations, in addition to the co-observations they will conduct with school leaders. This will lighten the observation load across the leadership team, while giving central office administration more insight into the instructional and personnel needs across the district.

In the same year of this study, the central office administration began to pilot some aspects of this action plan. Instructional rounds were conducted at the high school and middle school focused on the English department and Social Studies departments; the instructional round protocol was facilitated by the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Additionally, this study modeled and provided school leaders a preview of the nature of conversation around professional practice during the debriefing sessions and during the semi-structured focus group interview. The four administrators who participated in the group interview all commented that it was a valuable use of their time to discuss their practice, strategies, approaches, and challenges, with their peers.

It is recommended that central administration introduce the action plan in its entirety at the leadership team retreat that occurs each summer prior to the start of the school year. The rationale provided here, in addition to a sampling of feedback comments from administrators across the district to demonstrate the broad range of feedback quality and frequency that currently occurs within the district should be used to justify the need and time investment for this type of professional learning for the district's school leaders. Additionally, it should be explained that this plan supports school leaders in meeting multiple performance indicators within their own evaluation rating rubric. Full leader engagement in this action plan would address performance standards within instructional leadership practice, including collaboratively planning, monitoring, and evaluating instructional programs that enhance teaching and student academic progress, and lead to school improvement; and analyzing current instructional strategies to make appropriate educational decisions to improve classroom instruction, increase student achievement, and improve overall school effectiveness. The plan also supports administrators in meeting performance indicators within human resources management, including managing the supervision and evaluation of staff in accordance with local and state requirements; fully supporting the important role evaluation plays in teacher and staff development, and evaluating the performance of personnel using multiple sources.

As the leaders engage in the professional learning it will create a more collaborative culture within the leadership organization. School leaders, especially principals, have a great influence not only on teacher quality, retention, and development, but also in executing district improvement strategies that improve student outcomes. Therefore, investment in developing the performance competencies of school leaders is

part of a broader plan for strategic management of human resources, and one that should pay dividends in improving teaching quality, and thus student outcomes (Odden, 2011). Specific benefits of this plan from a district perspective would be the alignment of feedback across observations so that individual teachers, as well as content area and grade level groups, receive a consistent message for instructional expectations. This plan also supports the ongoing sharing of instructional areas of need that will support the development of professional learning initiatives for teachers that align to teacher and student needs. Additionally, this collaboration will aid in the personnel decision-making for retention and placement, and the identification of potential teacher leaders ready to take on certain leadership functions.

In keeping with the iterative nature of action research and improvement processes, the learning and leadership practice outcomes from this plan will be evaluated throughout the first year and modified to meet the emerging needs of leaders as they grow in their practice. In the years to come, the professional learning culture and framework that will be established as a outcome of this action plan can be used by the district to tackle emerging educational leadership challenges.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Study

While building administrators and district curriculum and instruction supervisors are held jointly responsible for improving teaching and learning and student outcomes in the district, this study did not specifically look for differences in how these two groups of administrators differ in their perceived and actual instructional leadership roles. Differences in how the two groups are able to dedicate time, and the efficacy the two groups possess in carrying out their roles may differ. This could be affected by many

factors including differences in leader content knowledge and the limiting of supervisors to working with teachers in specific content areas but across multiple buildings where culture and practices may differ. Additionally, there may be differences in how teachers perceive the roles of supervisors and building administrators (principals and assistant principals) that could impact their reception to leader actions and the corresponding range of teacher responses. For instance, are teachers more or less likely to feel compelled to utilize feedback provided to them by their content area supervisor than their principal? Or do teachers interpret observation and feedback giving as more formative and aligned to their professional learning when provided by a supervisor versus being more evaluative when received from a principal? Teacher perceptions and the likelihood of acting on instructional feedback could also be influenced by the instructional modeling and culture professional learning that is established. Culture setting occurs primarily at the building level (Gruenert &Whitaker, 2015) and studies have shown this is most influenced by the building principal (meta-analysis by Robinson et al., 2011), however content area supervisors are currently primarily responsible for the development and delivery of professional development in the district. A model for distributed instructional leadership is further supported when considering the need for strategic human capital management of educational leaders to create effective organizations (Odden, 2011). Robinson (2010) recommended further research on instructional leadership capability that focused not just on increasing individual leader capacity, but also on " research-informed tools and associated routines that scaffold the work of instructional leadership" within instructional leadership systems. As an added caveat to the question of distributed leadership models, is the consideration of how instructional leadership responsibilities are perceived in small

districts without a large leadership structure. For instance, is the disposition of principals about the instructional leadership role different in districts that do not have content area supervisors? Would principals in those districts feel more obligated to develop their leadership content knowledge to fill that gap or would it be disregarded as part of the required leadership traits needed to provide effective feedback that leads to instructional improvement? Or, would principals compensate for their the lack of leadership content knowledge by utilizing their active leadership supervision to employ and direct the use of content specialists at their disposal to fill that gap, such as instructional coaches, master teachers, mentors, or outside consultants (Odden, 2011, p.134)?

A second area for future research that emerged from the study and its findings is the concept of formal versus informal conversations about teaching. Some school leaders distinguished between having informal and formal conversations with teachers about their teaching. Robinson (2009) identifies these informal conversations as "open to learning" conversations where the focus of the teachers and leader is on "quality of the thinking and information that we use when making judgments about what is happening, why, and what to do about" (p.1). This may be in contrast to the focus of formal conversations during the evaluation process (pre- and post-conferences) where the focus of both the school leader and the teacher may be more centered on the evaluative rating being given and the impact to summative decision-making such as retention and tenure decisions. Robinson (2009) categorizes these informal conversations as part of the trust building actions associated with charismatic leadership actions and transformational leadership than instructional leadership. This highlights a potential secondary role for feedback giving as a method for building trust and relationships between administrators

and teachers, and may point to a need for a dual structure for formal feedback giving and informal feedback giving. If informal feedback giving can be used to develop relationships between leaders and teachers or within teacher groups, then this relationship capital can then be leveraged to motivate teachers to engage in instructional change actions (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Within the dual and sometimes competing cultures of accountability and school improvement, leaders may recognize the limited potential for feedback to be positively received and acted upon by teachers when given during the formal teacher evaluation process. Leaders focused on their instructional leadership role may then rightly distinguish informal conversations as part of the formative instructional improvement process where reflective dialogue occurs between the school leader and teacher, and create alternative times and opportunities to engage in these "open to learning" conversations (Tuytens and Devos, 2017).

A third item for future study would look at the role instructional leadership plays in ensuring educational equity for all students, especially traditionally underserved populations. This study was conducted in an urban rim district where forty percent of the population is economically disadvantaged, and African-American and Hispanic students make up approximately seventy percent of the student population. Administrators varied in their willingness to address specific instructional issues of rigor and engagement, and have difficult conversations with teachers that would include address implicit biases that impacted teaching practice. In one example from this study, a leader described a willingness to accept a teacher's explanation that what he identified as ineffective practice was the best that could be expected for the level of students being taught. The leader acknowledged that the teacher's explanation was an excuse, but did not

demonstrate that he provided feedback or instructional support that would shift the teacher's practice to be more rigorous. What is the leader's role in pushing back on those narratives that provide justifications for low rigor in high-need classrooms? This presents an issue of equity because many times deficit-based narratives justifying low rigor in the classroom are utilized as part of the pedagogy of poverty when teaching poor and largely minority children (Howard, 2010; Haberman, 1991).

5.5 Study Conclusions

This study originated from expressed concern from school administrators of how they were meeting the instructional leadership demands that emerged when a new teacher evaluation system was implemented across the state of New Jersey. The specific problem of practice that emerged was developing the leadership team's capacity to engage in feedback giving that would lead to improved teacher practice and student learning outcomes. The qualitative case study design carried out revealed three major findings involving the need to provide teachers with consistent feedback across the leadership that targeted areas in need of instructional improvement and provided specific and actionable strategies and supports for improvement. The findings provided insight into the elements involved in feedback giving and how leaders apply both instructional leadership and transformational leadership traits in an integrated approach to feedback giving. This integrated approach can be used to optimally influence teacher response to feedback and motivate teachers to pursue professional learning to improve instruction. The findings also identified a need for professional learning within the leadership team. The described action plan will help individual leaders improve their feedback giving and increase their

ability to employ leadership content knowledge in their feedback, and improve the overall effectiveness of feedback giving as an instructional improvement tool within the district.

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APPENDIX A

EVALUATION TOOL EXAMPLES

Criteria	Ineffective	Developing	Effective	Highly Effective
Engaging Students in Learning	• Activities and assignments are inappropriate for students' age or background. Students are not mentally engaged in them. • Instructional groups are inappropriate to the students or to the instructional outcomes. • Instructional materials and resources are unsuitable to the instructional purposes or do not engage students mentally. • The lesson has no clearly defined structure, or the pace of the lesson is too slow or rushed, or both.	• Activities and assignments are appropriate to some students and engage them mentally, but others are not engaged. • Instructional groups are only partially appropriate to the students or only moderately successful in advancing the instructional outcomes of the lesson. • Instructional materials and resources are only partially suitable to the instructional purposes, or students are only partially mentally engaged with them. • The lesson has a recognizable structure, although it is not uniformly maintained throughout the lesson. Pacing of the lesson is consistent.	• Most activities and assignments are appropriate to students, and almost all students are cognitively engaged in exploring content. • Instructional groups are productive and fully appropriate to the students or to the instructional purposes of the lesson. • Instructional materials and resources are suitable to the instructional purposes and engage students mentally. • The lesson has a clearly defined structure around which the activities are organized. Pacing of the lesson is generally appropriate	• All students are cognitively engaged in the activities and assignments in their exploration of content. Students initiate or adapt activities and projects to enhance their understanding. • Instructional groups are productive and fully appropriate to the students or to the instructional purposes of the lesson. Students take the initiative to influence the formation or adjustment of instructional groups. • Instructional materials and resources are suitable to the instructional purposes and engage students mentally. Students initiate the choice, adaptation, or creation of materials to enhance their learning. • The lesson's structure is highly coherent, allowing for reflection and closure. Pacing of the lesson is appropriate

Figure A.1 Danielson Rubric for Engaging Students in Learning

Facilitates active student participation	YES	NO
Makes effective use of time	YES	NO
Provides for individual differences	YES	NO
Presents lesson in an organized manner	YES	NO
Provides appropriate instructional materials and activities to the class	YES	NO
Utilizes appropriate instructional materials	YES	NO
Effective implementation of lesson plans	YES	NO
The lesson was conducted in an effective manner	YES	NO
The lesson met standards and expectations	YES	NO

Figure A.2 Student Engagement Indicators in Former Evaluation Tool

APPENDIX B

INITIAL PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Classroom Observation Survey

Please provide responses to the questions in this perception survey. Some questions may seem redundant, but please provide a response to each question. All responses will be collected in the Google form, coded, and analyzed anonymously.

* Required

Instructional Leadership

1. In one to two sentences describe what the term instructional leadership means to you? *

2. Name three specific ways you fulfill your instructional leadership role within your building or content area(s). *

3. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much of your daily work is dedicated to instructional leadership actions/responsibilities? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Less than 20% on most days						75% or more on most days

4. In 2-3 sentences, describe what you feel the role of an administrator should be in improving classroom instruction? *

Classroom Observation Practice

The term observation process will include the pre-observation conference, classroom observation, writing of the observation report, and post-observation conference. Observation practice will include all administrator actions during the observation process.

5. In general, what do you feel is the most effective way to improve teacher practice in engaging students in learning? *

Mark only one oval.

- Providing professional development on instructional strategies for engaging students in learning
- Providing teachers regular feedback after formal observations and walkthroughs
- Providing teachers with a curriculum that includes rich learning tasks and activities

6. Does providing feedback to teachers on their instructional practice lead to observable improvement in how teachers engage students in learning?
Mark only one oval.

- o Yes
- o No

7. Please provide a brief explanation to question number 6. *

8. Has your observation practice changed since using the Danielson Framework as the district evaluation tool? *
Mark only one oval.

- o Yes
- o No

9. If you answered "yes" to question 8 please provide at least one example of how it has changed. If you answered "no" please move on to question 10.

10. Choose the selection that best describes when you provide feedback for growth to teachers on a component of their teaching during the observation process? (Feedback for growth would be an observation of a teacher action or student action collected as evidence and a specific recommendation of a strategy to improve in that component of their teaching). *
Mark only one oval.

- o I rarely provide this type of feedback.
- o I occasionally provide this type of feedback, but only when giving an ineffective (1) or partially ineffective rating (2) in a Danielson component.
- o I provide this type of feedback regularly, but only/mostly to non-tenured teachers.
- o I provide this type of feedback regularly to both non-tenured and tenured teachers even when I rate them effective.

11. Choose the selection that best describes how and when you prefer to provide feedback during the observation process? *

Mark only one oval.

- I provide verbal feedback during the pre-conference based on the lesson plan discussion with the teacher.
- I provide written feedback only in the formal observation report submitted in My Learning Plan.
- I provide verbal feedback only during the post-conference.
- I provide both written feedback in the observation report and discuss the feedback verbally with the teacher during the post-conference.
- I provide feedback during the pre-conference and post-conference, and in both written and verbal forms.
- I do not typically provide verbal or written feedback during the observation process.

12. Have the Danielson rubrics on Questioning and Discussion Techniques (3b) and Engaging Students in Learning (3c) affected your understanding of student engagement? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

13. If you answered "yes" to question 12 please briefly describe how using the Danielson rubrics have impacted your understanding.

Demographic Information

Please provide the demographic information requested below. This information will be used to categorize response trends by administrator characteristics. Again, all responses are anonymous.

What is your gender? *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male

How many years have you been an administrator? *
Mark only one oval.

- 1-3 years
- 4-7 years
- 8 or more years

In what grade levels do you conduct classroom observations? (Check all that apply.) *
Check all that apply.

- K-5
- 6-8
- 9-12

How many years of classroom teaching experience did you have before becoming an administrator? *
Mark only one oval.

- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10 or more years

In what content area(s) do you hold a teaching certification? (Check all that apply) *
Check all that apply.

- Elementary Education
- English Language Arts (Secondary or Middle School Endorsement)
- Fine Arts
- Mathematics (Secondary or Middle School Endorsement)
- Physical Education
- Science (Secondary or Middle School Endorsement)
- Social Studies
- Special Education
- Technology
- World Languages
- Other:

APPENDIX C

FIELD NOTES FORM

Field Notes Form

Administrator: _____

Years as an Admin: _____ Years of Teaching: _____ Content Area Taught: _____

Co-Observation Date/Time: _____

Teacher: _____ Content Area: _____ Academic Level: _____

Debriefing Date: _____ Time Started: _____ Time Ended:_____

Observations during Co-Observation	**Researcher Comments**
Debriefing (Informal Interview) Notes	**Researcher Comments**
Guiding Questions: 1. What observations concerning student engagement did you make (positive or negative)? 2. What evidence did you collect related to these observations?	

3. What initial feedback in the area of student engagement do you think you will give at this point?	
Review of Written Observation Report	**Researcher Comments**
1. Written Feedback given: 2. Rating for Questioning and Discussion (3b): 3. Rating for Engaging Students in Learning (3c):	

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Focus Group Interview Guide

Guidelines for Focus Group Discussion (adapted from Bogdan & Biklen (2007):

1. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in understanding your perspectives on how you provide feedback to teachers.

2. You do not have to agree or have the same responses as others. The purpose is to collect all the views you each have. Your responses will be shaped by your experience, your setting, and your personal point of view.

3. Be honest. This is a judgment-free zone and a conversation among colleagues. No real names or identifiers will be used in the published research reporting.

4. This discussion will be audiotaped. Please talk one at a time so responses can be heard clearly.

5. Please say your first name before each response so that the person who transcribes the tape will know who is talking.

Facilitator: I conducted a co-observation with each of you during the Round 1or Round 2 cycle. For each of you we de-briefed following and I posed the three questions here on the board and on side A of your handout.

1. Please share with the group some of the ways you think about forming the feedback you give teachers.

2. What kind of evidence do you look for during an observation?
(Are you more systematic about evidence collection or do you just sit back and try to observe everything?)

3. What things do you think about or consider when planning the feedback conversation you will have with a teacher?

Facilitator: On side B of your handout, are three leadership characteristics that have been proposed to be involved in instructional leadership and feedback giving. Please take a moment to read through the definitions and ask any questions you have about their meaning. You may also jot down any thoughts that come to mind as you read.

4. What are your thoughts about how each of these come into play when you provide feedback?
   (Alternatively are there any that you feel don't come into play when giving feedback)

5. Which of these characteristics do you feel you rely on the most when providing feedback to teachers? Which do you rely on the least? Provide an example or explain.

Facilitator: The last few questions will explore how you feel teachers respond to the feedback you give:

6. How do you feel teachers typically perceive the feedback you give?

7. Do you feel they take any action in response to the feedback you give? If so, what actions have you observed or had a teacher report to you about following feedback giving.
   (How often do you feel this type of response occurs?)

   (Are these responses you intended the teacher to take?)

8. Think about your own feedback giving and the conversations you have had with other school leaders about their feedback giving. What do you feel is the most effective type of feedback or way to deliver feedback? By *effective* I mean what teachers are most likely to respond to by trying to improve their instruction in some way.