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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EVALUATION PROCESSES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF FEEDBACK THAT LEAD TO CHANGE- A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EVALUATION PROCESSES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF FEEDBACK THAT LEAD TO CHANGE- A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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This dissertation is dedicated to the people who made this journey possible.

To my sweet children, Kelli, Kenzie, and Cason, who loved me through long nights of writing, missed dinners, fast food meals, and the many moments I couldn't be there. Your patience, hugs, and unconditional love carried me through every chapter of this work. I hope this achievement shows you that hard work, even when it's difficult, can create new possibilities. Thank you for believing in me even when time was scarce.

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Abstract

Increases in state and federal accountability standards have led to a focus on increasing student achievement and a shift towards instructional leadership practices. While leadership practices have a mostly indirect effect on student achievement, research is clear that the practices implemented by leaders are invaluable in guiding schools towards meeting accountability standards. Using a General Inductive Qualitative Model, this study used semi-structured interviews of 10 high school teachers from schools in Oklahoma City to examine how teacher evaluation processes impact teacher practices and professional growth, and to determine the specific characteristics of feedback that lead teachers to make changes to their teaching practices. The intent of this study was to provide research for district and site administrators to utilize to ensure they are providing teachers with constructive feedback that leads to changes in teaching practices, professional growth, and increases in student achievement.

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Student achievement has been at the forefront of American educational policy and reform for many years. This is evidenced by the implementation of federal policies and programs such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002, Race to the Top initiative in 2009, and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015. Each new legislation brings with it new standards and accountability measures for assessing and tracking student achievement, and new guidelines for rating and measuring teachers' performance and professional capabilities. In 2021, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported 37% of high school seniors scored at or above proficient on reading performance, and 25% scored at or above proficient in mathematics performance. They also reported the national average graduation rate in 2019 to be 86%. According to this report, these numbers showed very little improvement, if any, from the reported data from the two years prior (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2021). The American College Testing (ACT) test, a standardized test used to measure a student's college readiness, sets benchmark scores that, if met, indicate a student has "a reasonable chance of success in first-year credit-bearing college courses at the typical college" (Allen & Radunzel, 2017, p. 1). These benchmarks also help states, districts, and schools monitor student achievement over time. The benchmark scores are based on the data of actual performance and outcomes of college students. In *The ACT Profile Report-National 2021*, ACT reported that nationally, 56% of tested high school graduates met the ACT Readiness Benchmark in English, 44% in reading, 36% in math, and 35% in science. Only 25% of the tested high school graduates met all four Readiness Benchmarks indicating a majority of tested high school graduates are profoundly unprepared to be successful in college or careers (National ACT, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

If strictly using standardized test scores as a measurement of student achievement, the failure of students to meet these benchmarks would indicate that, even with the national focus on student achievement, schools are still failing to meet the educational needs of the majority of their students. States, districts, and schools need to look for innovative ways to facilitate the increase of student learning and achievement. Because of teachers' direct contact with students, many researchers would agree they have the most significant and direct, school-based impact on student achievement (Akram, 2019; Ding & Sherman, 2006; Jacob, 2012). However, some teachers lack the skills and knowledge required to implement the required instructional practices needed to effectively improve student achievement (Johnson, 2019). In the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 75% of teachers in the United States had fewer than 10 years of teaching experience. Also, an average of 18% of teachers entered the teaching profession though an alternate route to certification including alternative and emergency certification (National ACT, 2019). While some researchers suggest years of service and route to certification have a limited impact on teacher capacity and student achievement (Irvine, 2019), others argue "measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and mathematics, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status" (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Many teachers enter our school district with a lack of instructional capacity needed to be effective. This is especially evident as it pertains to classroom management, dealing with difficult students and parents, and implementing effective instructional practices that lead to increased student achievement which are all essential to a comprehensive learning system in schools (Johnson, 2019). Given teachers' current struggles with limited instructional capacity, seeking support from their school leader is crucial, both to

enhance their effectiveness in meeting student needs and to foster their professional growth and improve their instructional skills.

In her literature review, Jacob (2012) cites multiple studies confirming that an increase in teacher quality leads to an increase in student achievement. In order to remedy the deficit in teachers' skills and knowledge, and positively affect teacher quality, principals are called to take on the role of instructional leader (Soehner & Ryan, 2011). Because the impact of principal actions on student achievement is mostly indirect, it is increasingly important for instructional leaders to focus their attention on the actions they know increase student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2010). However, when school leaders offer their support and guidance through evaluation feedback, they are often met with teachers who are resistant to implementing changes in their instructional practices. It is clear that it is important for instructional leaders to provide teachers with constructive feedback in order to help them improve their instructional capacity. What remains unclear are the specific characteristics of the feedback and aspects of the evaluation processes that prompt teachers to modify their instructional practices and enhance their instructional capacity leading to increases in student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general inductive qualitative study is to better understand how teacher evaluations impact instructional practices and professional growth. This study aims to identify specific characteristics of feedback that lead to changes in instructional practices, and evaluate how administrators can provide more constructive feedback to teachers during evaluations. The intent is to provide research for district and site administrators to utilize to ensure they are providing teachers with constructive feedback that leads to changes in instructional practices, professional growth, and increases in student achievement.

The primary research questions framing this study are:

1. How do teacher evaluation processes impact teacher practices and professional growth?
2. What are the specific characteristics of feedback that lead teachers to make changes to their instructional practices?

Significance of the Study

Once we gain a clear understanding of how evaluation processes impact teacher practices and professional growth, we can begin to implement new evaluation methods that better align with teachers' needs, ultimately increasing teacher effectiveness and enhancing student learning and academic achievement. If this study uncovers barriers that hinder instructional leaders from driving meaningful change, we can identify strategies to overcome these obstacles, leading to more efficient leadership and more impactful instructional practices. Furthermore, recognizing these effective leadership practices will enable us to design targeted training for school leaders, equipping them with the skills to better support and develop teachers. The findings from this study can inform decisions about how feedback is delivered during evaluations, allowing leaders to tailor their feedback to the specific needs of teachers. Additionally, the results may highlight weaknesses in current evaluation systems, providing valuable insights into areas for improvement and identifying where further training may be necessary.

Organization of the Study

In the following chapter, I discuss the evolution of school accountability and describe how changes in state and federal accountability led to a shift in the role of principals to that of an instructional leader. Through the lens of the Self-Determination Theory, I discuss the dual purposes of teacher evaluation systems and how they relate to motivation and changes in

instructional practices. Lastly, I discuss teachers' perceptions of evaluation feedback and the importance of using post-observation conferences to help teachers self-reflect on their instructional practices. For the methodology section in Chapter 3, I describe a General Inductive Qualitative study where I conducted semi-structured interviews to better understand teachers' perceptions of their evaluation processes and the extent to which they impact teacher practices and professional development. In Chapter 4, I present the analysis of my research findings, including a detailed description of the themes and/or patterns that emerged from the data, and use these interpretations as supporting evidence to answer my research questions. And finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of my findings in relation to the literature, and draw conclusions, offering recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

American education policy reform and school accountability measures have played a significant role in shifting the national focus toward student achievement. Initiatives like the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002, Race to the Top initiative in 2009, and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 emphasized the need for increased student outcomes, leading to schools being held accountable for academic performance. Each new legislation brought with it new standards and accountability measures for assessing and tracking student achievement, and new guidelines for rating and measuring teachers' performance and professional capabilities. Despite these efforts, test scores have remained stagnant (National ACT, 2021; USDE, 2021), revealing that the challenges in education go beyond policy, and teachers often enter the classroom without the necessary skills or knowledge to effectively address the needs of their students (Johnson, 2019). In order to remedy the deficit in teachers' skills and knowledge, positively affect teacher quality, and enhance student learning, principals are called to take on the role of instructional leader (Soehner & Ryan, 2011). Because the impact of principal actions on student achievement is mostly indirect, it is increasingly important for instructional leaders to focus their attention on the actions they know can increase student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2010).

The purpose of this study is to better understand how teacher evaluations impact instructional practices and professional growth. This study aims to identify specific characteristics of feedback that lead to changes in instructional practices, and evaluate how administrators can provide more constructive feedback to teachers during evaluations. The intent is to provide research for district and site administrators to utilize to ensure they are providing teachers with constructive feedback that leads to changes in instructional practices, professional growth, and increases in student achievement.

I will begin this literature review by discussing the evolution of school accountability and describe how changes in state and federal accountability led to a shift in the role of principals to that of an instructional leader. Through the lens of the Self-Determination Theory, I will discuss the dual purposes of teacher evaluation systems and how they relate to motivation and changes in instructional practices. Lastly, I will discuss teachers' perceptions of evaluation feedback and the importance of using post-observation conferences to help teachers self-reflect on their instructional practices.

Evolution of School Accountability

In the early part of the 20th century, the high-school population drastically increased due to immigration and new compulsory attendance laws, and standardized tests were used to sort students into specific educational tracks, to determine grade promotions, and to award diplomas with distinction. These tests were used to classify students (gifted or special education), uncover talent, and make distinctions between the elite who would go on to college and those who were being prepared to work in the factories (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Linn, 2001). For immigrants, scores on standardized tests could result in entrance to or rejection from the United States (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Scores on these tests could be used to “confirm the superiority or inferiority of various races, ethnic groups, and societal classes” thus ensuring the “maintenance of the status quo along those racial, ethnic, and class lines” (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 3). Unlike the standardized tests of the past where the intent was the use of standards to differentiate and classify, the standardized tests of today are those of high standards for all students (Linn, 2001).

A Nation at Risk

The launch of Sputnik in 1957 by the Soviet Union caused United States politicians to question American education, and "state and federal politicians became more actively engaged in the conduct of education, including advocacy for the increased use of tests to assess school learning" (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 3). Politicians then began to initiate a "minimum competency testing movement to reform schools" in order to ensure that students would learn "the minimum needed to be a productive citizen" (p.3). In 1983, the National Commission on Education released *A Nation at Risk*, the "most influential report on education of the past few decades" (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 3). This report called for an end to the minimum competency exams and the beginning of high-stakes testing measures that would "raise the nation's standards of achievement drastically" (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 4). The report led to a nationwide panic regarding schools due to its reporting a decline in school quality, a watering down of curriculum, and other indicators that the United States was falling behind other countries (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). The National Committee on Education called for more rigorous standards and accountability measures to be put into place in order to bring the United States back to its global super status. They recommended states implement a more rigorous curriculum and include accountability measures to ensure schools were meeting those standards (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). While most curriculum and instruction decisions rested with local governments before this time, the political pressures led state governments to begin to implement standardized testing to ensure standards were being met and to hold schools accountable (Hursh, 2005).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), enacted in 2001, called for annual testing of every child in grades 3-8 in math and reading (science was added later and testing was extended to high school in 2008) with the hopes to "unequivocally reform education" (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 11; Hursh, 2005). Under this federal legislation, every state was required to develop standards, standardized tests, and accountability systems which essentially transferred power away from the teachers and local control, to that of the political leaders at the state and federal level (Hursh, 2005). NCLB required schools to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) based on a specific threshold or standard set by the state. Whether a school achieved AYP told little about whether the school was improving, as schools were not evaluated on improvement but if they met a specific standard. The key belief behind this federal policy was that NCLB sanctions would provide incentives for educators, including school administrators, to change their behaviors in order to avoid these sanctions (Mitani, 2018).

With the implementation of NCLB, school leaders became responsible for leading the way in instructional improvement in order to meet the state and federal accountability mandates (Watkins et al., 2021). NCLB was accompanied by progressive and cumulative sanctions for schools that did not meet AYP for consecutive years (Mitani, 2018). Some sanctions that came along with a failure to meet AYP included withholding federal funds or a reallocation of funds in order to offer the required supplemental educational services to students from low-income families. Additionally, some states allowed for students to transfer out of failing schools to a public school of choice which often promoted competition between schools (Hursh, 2005; Mitani, 2018). If a school remained on the list for sanctions for additional years, they were required to take further corrective actions such as replacing school staff, decreasing management

at the school level, implementing new curriculum, or extending the school day or year (Mitani, 2018). These are sanctions that not only affected funding and students, but school personnel as well. As a last resort, imposed sanctions could include school restructuring, school closures, or loss of accreditation (Hursh, 2005; Mitani, 2018; Paris, 2000).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), signed into law in December 2015, combined aspects of NCLB's high stakes accountability policies, but provided states with some opportunities for flexibility. Accountability was no longer based on just test scores, but factors like attendance, school climate, and graduation rates (Adler-Greene, 2019). ESSA called for implementing personalized learning, college and career readiness, and equitable access to quality teachers (Watkins et al., 2021). It also required state education agencies to develop and submit consolidated state plans for how they would address testing and accountability, English language proficiency, attendance, and graduation rates (Adler-Greene, 2019; Mitani, 2018). Some of the teacher accountability was relaxed with ESSA, and the sanctions for schools were not quite as detrimental, however many states still rate their schools and districts based on the results of test scores, which indicates the high-stakes testing system is still in place (Adler-Greene, 2019).

Modern Accountability

The standards-based testing, accountability, and student achievement movement has fueled the idea that principals must increasingly carry the responsibility for student learning. When considering the primary unit of accountability concerning standardized testing, the responsibility for student learning falls largely to the individual schools, not the school boards, districts, or superintendents (Elmore, 1999). According to Elmore **(**1999), "standards-based reform offers a single explanation—the school and the people who work in it are accountable for

student learning" (p. 3). The matters of what teachers teach and what students learn are up for public discussion, measurement, and inspection, and the signal is clear to schools that their main focus should be on improving teaching and learning. Likewise, "the public and the press are more likely to use what they believe to be inadequate assessment results to blame educators than to use good results to praise them" (Mehrens, 1998, p. 23). This means, if schools fail at addressing student learning to the standards required, it could lead the public to lose confidence in the schools leading to long-term, devastating consequences (Elmore, 1999). Since the principal is the leader of the school, and the success or failure of the school will primarily lie with them, it is the principal's responsibility to guide and influence matters involving student learning.

Due to possible sanctions and corrective measures that affect school funding, students, and school personnel, principals must focus on the work associated with student learning, and work with teachers to ensure that learning goals are linked to researched based instructional strategies that have been shown to increase academic performance in order to help schools achieve high standards and meet their performance goals (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Liethwood et al., 2010). Many of the accountability reforms link "curriculum content and teaching practices with assessments and accountability" which would require changes in multiple areas in order to achieve success (Hursh, 2005, p. 618). A key assumption behind NCLB sanctions was that the possibility of sanctions would provide principals incentives to change their leadership behaviors in such a way to "influence classroom instruction and student learning" and "raise student performance to avoid sanctions" (Mitani, 2018, p. 830). Many educational researchers have provided information from studies on how the role of principals changed as a result of standards-based testing and the accountability that accompanied these state and federal mandates. When

investigating the association between NCLB sanctions and principals' working conditions, Mitani (2018) found that principals redesigned curriculum or changed programs to focus on tested subjects, spent more time in classrooms, distributed leadership on issues related to school improvement, and spent more time analyzing data in order to address student learning and avoid sanctions. In a study based on the perceptions of a statewide accountability program, principals indicated the program most impacted how they "monitored student achievement, aligned the curriculum to the testing program, provided student remedial or tutorial opportunities, assigned teachers to grade levels or subjects, and protected instructional time" (Lyons & Algonzzine, 2006, p.1). In a study investigating principals' perceptions of an overlap between accountability and innovation, principals described how their roles shifted to being innovators. They began helping teachers deliver content in new ways, using new tools, and creating new learning environments. They also reported a shift to being marketing specialists and networkers who market their schools as they create networks with families, students, staff, and the community. Lastly, they had to shift to being tech-savvy leaders who are aware of technology and how it can benefit students, teachers, and the curriculum (Watkins et al., 2021). What is common between all of these studies is that "the duties and responsibilities of the principal must be modified to meet the rising tide of accountability" (Cooley & Shen, 2003, p. 13).

The Administrator as the Instructional Leader

Elmore's (1999) model for leadership in an era of accountability explains the purpose of leadership is to improve practice and performance, encourage continuous learning, lead by example, distribute leadership so there is cooperation and shared expertise, and to provide support and resources for others so they can accomplish what they are required to do. In order to do this, leaders should focus on building and nurturing collective teacher efficacy, clarifying

school goals, providing meaningful capacity-building and collaborative opportunities for staff, and engaging staff in professional learning communities and joint decision making (Leithwood, Harris, et al., 2020). This aligns with O'Donnell and White's (2005) argument that it is important for leaders in the accountability era to promote the school learning climate through protecting instructional time and providing professional development, and by defining and communicating a shared mission and vision for learning.

In their study on how secondary principals perceive their professional job responsibilities in the context of accountability, Cooley & Shen (2005) concluded:

> The principal remains the key to accountability; as such, principal and teacher roles must be reexamined. If students and schools are to meet performance standards, then collaboration, communication, and a universal understanding of the standards must occur. Principals and teachers must communicate and have the time to mutually discuss instruction and student learning on a regular basis. (p. 22)

They go on to explain that teachers should be encouraged to teach the curriculum that they develop, and additional resources are needed to address the "social and cultural problems that students bring to school" (p. 22). They argue that in order to improve instruction, the skills of the teachers and leaders need to be elevated through professional development that holds all parties accountable to change. Principals argue that if testing is going to remain one of the most important measurements to assess schools, they have ideas on how to improve accountability systems including providing data that highlights growth for students and subgroups, ensuring that accountability systems provide information principals can use to support teachers in sound instructional practices, ensuring accountability systems provide "actionable information" that

principals can use to exercise strong leadership practices, and help principals focus on teaching and learning by managing testing burdens and distractions (New Leaders, 2015).

Instructional Leadership

The role of an administrator as an instructional leader emerged in the early 1980s and was influenced by research that effective schools frequently had leaders who emphasized the importance of this form of leadership and had a high focus on curriculum and instruction (Hallinger et al., 1983; Jenkins, 2009; Lashway, 2002). Before this time, the usual responsibilities of school leaders were, in order of importance, managerial, political, and instructional in nature, and the roles were mostly kept separate. Now, principals are seeing a shift in their role, especially due to the accountability movement, towards a focus on instructional leadership, and an interconnection between the other managerial and political roles (Friesen et al., 2015; Jenkins, 2009; Lashway, 2002).

In their meta-analysis of approximately 70 studies, 2,800 schools, 1.4 million students, and 14,000 teachers, Marzano et al. (2005) calculated an average correlation between leadership behavior and average academic outcomes of students to be 0.25. This average correlation was based on the individual correlations of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified from their meta-analysis with some responsibilities having a higher impact and others having a lower impact on student outcomes. Recognizing the impact leaders have on student outcomes will vary depending on their leadership practices, Robinson et al. (2008) set out to determine which type of leadership had the most impact on student achievement, and which specific leadership practices correlated to the largest gains in student achievement. After a meta-analysis of 27 studies, they were able to conclude that the effect size of instructional leadership on student outcomes was 0.42, and was three to four times larger than that of transformational leadership

(0.11). When investigating the impact of particular leadership dimensions, they found moderate to high average effect sizes on student outcomes for leadership practices that are associated with instructional leadership. The leaders in the study who were identified as having a strong focus on instructional leadership were reported to be "more focused on teaching and learning, to be a stronger instructional resource for teachers, and to be more active participants in and leaders of teacher learning and development" (Robinson et al., 2008, pp. 657-658).

In *Ten Traits of Highly Effective Principals,* McEwan (2003) lists the following broad traits that describe principals who are effective at influencing student performance: communicator, educator, envisioner, facilitator, change master, culture builder, activator, producer, character builder, and contributor. Within each of these broad categories are additional descriptions that provide more detailed understanding of that specific trait. Within the educator trait is a detailed description of an instructional leader—a leader with a "strong intellect and personal depth of knowledge regarding research-based curriculum, instruction, and learning who motivates and facilitates the intellectual growth and development of self, students, teachers, and parents" (McEwan, 2003, p. xxx). Instructional leaders are directly involved in establishing a culture of learning in the school by establishing goals for the instructional program, facilitating the curriculum, and working with teachers to improve instruction (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Calabrese, 1991; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Matthews & Crow, 2003). It is often equated with the observation and evaluation of teachers, development and implementation of curriculum, and "program development in terms of remediation or initiation of innovative academic programs" (Calabrese, 1991, p. 54). Instructional leaders make "instructional quality the top priority of the school and attempt to bring that vision to realization" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 35).

While the research is pretty consistent on the goals of instructional leadership, there are multiple frameworks that describe the processes and practices leaders use to implement instructional leadership. Hallinger et al. (1983) describe three dimensions of instructional leadership including defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting the school's learning climate. Each of these three dimensions consists of additional leadership functions and behaviors leaders employ in order to be successful instructional leaders. Leithwood, Sun, et al. (2020) propose four similar domains of instructional leadership including setting the direction of the school, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and improving the instructional program. Smith and Andrews (1989, as cited by Marzano et al., 2005) also describe four dimensions of instructional leadership including resources provider, instructional resource, communicator, and a visible presence in the classrooms and the school. What seems to be common between all the ideas of instructional leadership is that instructional leaders should participate in establishing goals and expectations for learning, managing the instructional program to "maintain consistency between the school's achievement goals, classroom objectives, curricular materials in use, and the instructional practices of teachers" (Hallinger et al., 1983, p. 87), and promoting a positive learning climate (Jenkins, 2009).

Qualities of Effective Instructional Leaders

The positive effects of principals as instructional leaders are well documented in the research literature. Marzano et al. (2005) analyzed approximately 70 studies and determined leadership behaviors could account for approximately 25% of the variance in student outcomes. In a study examining the link between instructional leadership and student learning, Bamburg and Andrews (1990) found principals in high-achieving schools were sought out by teachers for

instructional guidance, could clearly communicate instructional goals, maintained high visibility on campus, were active participants in staff development, and were recognized by teachers as instructional leaders. When studying the impact of leadership behaviors on student outcomes, Robinson et al. (2008) determined the leadership behavior of "promoting and participating in teacher learning and development" has an effect size of 0.84 on student outcomes (p. 663). This provides support for leaders to be actively involved with teachers as the learning leaders of their schools. Additionally, they were able to conclude principals in higher-achieving schools were more likely to be accessed by teachers as an instructional resource. These teachers consider their principals a resource on "current trends and effective instructional practices" who are "tuned in to issues relating to curriculum, effective pedagogical strategies, and assessment" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 36).

As discussed above, one of the roles of an instructional leader is to work with teachers to plan, implement, and evaluate instructional programs. Additionally, they monitor the implementation of the instructional program through classroom observations, and provide feedback to teachers based on their knowledge of best instructional practices. As such, it is important for instructional leaders to have a robust knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and learning theories as this knowledge is essential for instructional improvement (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). In order to achieve one of the dimensions of instructional leadership described by Hallinger et al. (1983), managing curriculum and instruction, leaders need knowledge of the curriculum and effective instruction. Knowledge of the curriculum and the associated resources is necessary if leaders are going to effectively coordinate the school's curriculum with state and/or federal standards (Hallinger et al., 1983). Principals also need to know about the "changing conceptions of curriculum, educational philosophies and beliefs,

curricular sources and conflict, and curriculum evaluation and improvement" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 36) if they are going to make curricular decisions that align with the mission, vision, values, and goals of the school. The leader charged with evaluation must have "sufficient knowledge of instructional methods to be able to make valid and useful critiques of their performance" (Hallinger et al., 1983, p. 87). Due to an increasing emphasis on student performance for accountability purposes, instructional leaders need to be knowledgeable of not only the curriculum, but also effective instructional practices. While they do not need to be expert teachers, they do need to be able to recognize good teaching and give feedback on how to implement effective teaching strategies (Corcoran, 2017). Due to increased accountability demands, instructional leaders must be able to "recognize whether lessons are aligned to standards, develop classroom assessments consistent with standards, and evaluate student work for evidence that standards have been achieved" (Lashway, 2002, p. 4). They must be confident in their abilities to analyze assessment data and "lead teachers to produce tangible results on ambitious academic standards" (Lashway, 2002, p. 3). In order to provide input on curriculum, instruction, or assessments, they must understand their interconnectedness and their impact on student learning. "It is crucial that principals know and understand these theories [of learning] so they may serve as a resource in enhancing instructional effectiveness" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 36). Likewise, they also must understand how adults learn as they are responsible for suggesting and providing the right kinds of specialized professional development opportunities" (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 600) based on the learning needs of the teachers and students.

In order to carry out these leadership practices, leaders must be skilled at building relationships with their stakeholders including students, teachers, parents, board members, and community members. Building relationships benefits leaders by helping them recruit teachers,

allowing them to feel comfortable enough to provide constructive feedback, and "creating a culture in which deep knowledge of instruction and learning serve as the foundation for an interdependent professional community" (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 600). Concerning the management of the instructional program, plans need to be considered for how the leader will supervise and evaluate instruction, coordinate the curriculum, monitor student progress, protect instructional time, and promote professional development (Sheppard, 1996, as cited by Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Using a wide assortment of school achievement data, school leaders need to plan strategies to identify gaps between desired goals and present performance, and "work with teachers, students, and the community to design and enact strategies to move the school closer to the desired ends" (Kaplan & Owings, 1999, p. 84). Since it is a role of the instructional leader to manage the instructional program, they are also responsible for guiding classroom instruction by giving constructive feedback on instructional strategies and classroom practices through classroom observations (Jenkins, 2009). Skills and processes needed to achieve these observations and to provide this type of feedback include classroom observation and data gathering methods; teaching methods, skills, and repertoires; understanding of the relationship between teaching and learning; data analysis; and how to make a conference reflective and non-threatening (Blasé & Blasé, 2004, p. 22). Research and evaluation skills are needed to "critically question the success of instructional programs" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 37).

Allen et al. (2014) define dispositions as "a person's core attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as one interacts with oneself, others, one's purpose, and frames of reference" (p. 3). They contend that for great leaders, these dispositions are foundational for leadership, and a focus on dispositions leads to a magnification of all other leadership skills, characteristics, and abilities (Allen et al., 2014, p. 1). Leaders who

have a positive perception of self believe in themselves and their ability to positively impact others. They are "confident without being overbearing, identify readily with others, can see diverse points of view, and display a positive attitude towards life and work" (Allen et al., 2014, p. 3). These leaders tend to be more self-trusting, are less threatened by others, are open to constructive criticism, and can provide others with non-threatening feedback. Leaders who have a high perception of others "see other people with whom they work as having the capacity to face up to challenges and be successful when given the opportunity and resources" (Allen et al., 2014, p. 4). When leaders have high perceptions of others, they can use this to influence the attitudes and beliefs of others in the school (Hallinger et al., 1983). McEwan (2003) describes a leader with a high perception of others as one who believes all students can learn, provides training and support for all teachers, creates cognitive dissonance, establishes and implements academic standards, focuses on instruction, models continuous learning, and develops teacher leaders. These leaders are reflective and curious (Blasé & Blasé, 2004), and are committed to life-long learning and mentoring (Allen et al., 2014; Matthews & Crow, 2003). They treat everyone equitably and fairly, and are willing to listen to diverse viewpoints on issues in order to find a common ground. The goals and attitudes of these leaders are positive, and they use positive leadership strategies while avoiding being sidetracked by trivial issues that distract from the attainment of goals (Allen et al., 2014; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Hallinger et al., 1983).

Leaders who are people oriented have a frame of reference that "recognizes that people, with all their human strengths and fragilities, are the valuable human resource through which goals get met" (Allen et al., 2014, p. 4). They are of the understanding that "relationships, effective teams, and sharing responsibilities and rewards are the pathways to important accomplishments" (Allen et al., 2014, p. 2). For success to be long-term, these leaders must be

focused on the attitudes, beliefs, and welfare of the people working alongside them. Their main focus is on building and maintaining positive relationships with all their stakeholders. These leaders are intelligent, courageous, tenacious, creative, and flexible (Calabrese, 1991), and possess an emotional intelligence that allows them to remain calm and extend patience and grace to their co-workers (Barnett et al., 2012).

Theoretical Lens: Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is an approach to human motivation that assumes everyone is prone to growth and learning, but that this motivation and engagement in their own learning is largely a function of the social context of their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020). This natural inclination toward growth and learning does not occur without supportive conditions of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020) which when satisfied foster motivation and increased mental well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to the idea of one's ownership of and ability to initiate their own actions. It is best supported through experiences of interest and value, and is hindered when there are feelings of external control. Competence refers to the idea of mastery and the sense that one has the ability to successfully grow and develop. Competence is best supported in environments that offer challenges, meaningful feedback, and opportunities for growth. Relatedness refers to being connected and belonging. It is supported when one feels respected and like they belong. When any of these three basic needs is not met, motivation is often lacking (Ryan & Deci, 2020) and can be accompanied by a decrease in mental health (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Motivation

Motivation is the force that provides energy and direction to one's actions and behaviors. It produces change and mobilizes people to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While

motivation is often viewed as a singular construct, people are moved to act due to varying factors, with widely differing results. People can be motivated by internal interests and values or be motivated by reasons external to themselves (Firestone, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020). When motivation is more authentic, people tend to be more excited and confident than those whose motivation is externally controlled, and this generally leads to enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to "doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71). The maintenance and enhancement of intrinsic motivation requires supportive social and environmental conditions, and it can be easily disrupted by non-supportive conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Support of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness increases intrinsic motivation leading to internalization, growth, and higher achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Positive performance feedback, communication, and rewards that cause feelings of competence can enhance intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, feelings of competence alone will not enhance intrinsic motivation unless they also feel that their actions and behaviors are self-determined. (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Providing people with choices, acknowledging their perspectives, and allowing opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow greater feelings of autonomy. Conversely, tangible rewards as well as "threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evolutions, and imposed goals diminish intrinsic motivation because they conduce towards an external locus of control" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p 70).

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation refers to "the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71) and can vary greatly in autonomy based on the motivating factor behind the behavior. While intrinsic motivation is highly autonomous, extrinsic motivation covers a continuum between amotivation (unwillingness) and intrinsic motivation, with varying extents to which their regulation is autonomous, internalized, and integrated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsically motivated behaviors that are externally motivated are the least autonomous and are typically performed to satisfy an external demand (ex. compliance, external rewards, punishments). A more internalized but still externally controlled type of motivation is *introjected regulation* where behaviors are performed in order to avoid guilt or anxiety or to enhance the ego. A more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is *identified regulation* where there is a conscious valuing of the behavior and it is accepted as personally important, but it has not been integrated into the person's own value system. A last form of extrinsic motivation is *integrated regulation* which occurs when a person both internalizes and integrates the value of the behavior with their own value system. This type of extrinsic motivation is autonomous and similar to intrinsic motivation; however, the behavior is still done to achieve separable outcomes and not for their inherent enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020).

Internalization and Integration

The more autonomous forms of motivation lead to higher engagement, growth, and learning; while attempting to control growth through extrinsic rewards results in decreased motivation and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Additionally, the more externally regulated a behavior is, the less interest and value is shown in achievement, and the more others tend to be blamed for negative outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). So, how do individuals acquire the

motivation to carry out behaviors that do not motivate them intrinsically? When asked to carry out a behavior, the person's motivation for that behavior can range from amotivation (unwilling) to passive compliance, to active personal commitment, depending on the degree to which that person has internalized and integrated the value of that behavior. (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Tending to the three basic physiological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness can help to nurture the internalization and integration of the value of that behavior, and lead to increased motivation, higher engagement, growth, and learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Autonomy support is seen as promoting both the needs of autonomy and relatedness, and when it is done in a structured manner, competence as well (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy is best supported when there is an attempt to understand the other person's perspective and they are provided with the opportunity to take ownership of their decisions by making choices (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Additionally, listening and being responsive to questions shows that you are taking an interest in their perspective and leads to an increase in autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Ryan & Deci (2020) suggest using structures that support autonomous motivation such as having clear expectations, goals, and guidelines, and providing informational support and efficacy feedback which also increases competence. Extrinsically motivated behaviors are often performed because they are prompted, modeled, or valued by others who are significant to us. This suggests that relatedness, the need to feel connected with others is central to internalization (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, these behaviors are more likely to be internalized when people perceive they are competent to perform those activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Teacher Evaluation Systems

A focus on student growth due to a growing international competition to increase educational outcomes led policy makers to demand greater accountability from both teachers and

students to show increased test score outcomes (Guenther, 2021). Legislation began to apply sanctions and incentives for test scores in an attempt to incentivize and motivate teachers and administrators to provide better education for students (Ryan & Deci, 2020). As teaching became a major focus of policy attention, teacher evaluation became a primary tool being promoted to assess and improve it. Teacher evaluations systems became the attention of state and district leaders, in large part, because detailed teacher evaluation systems became a requirement of federal accountability initiatives (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

A *Nation at Risk* was focused on creating the standards for teachers to teach and gave very little guidance for how teachers should be evaluated. Once the standards were written, it was assumed that the teachers should be able to teach them (Hibler & Snyder, 2015). NCLB said very little about how teachers should be evaluated other than statements that "state assessment systems should be used to strengthen teaching" (Hibler & Snyder, 2015, p. 36). It was assumed that accountability would lead to better teaching, holding schools and teachers accountable for making adequate yearly progress, and high-quality teaching would automatically follow (Hibler & Snyder, 2015, p. 36). This made it pretty easy to equate effective teaching to high test scores. Under ESSA, states received the authority to decide how to assess teachers which led many states and districts to begin to redesign their existing evaluation systems (Close & Amrein-Beardsley, 2018). As other efforts have failed at getting the desired results, there has been a refocus on improving the main purpose of the school: teaching and learning, which has led to a focus on teacher evaluation (Hibler & Snyder, 2015). Very few evaluation systems are able to offer both opportunities for teachers to set goals and receive timely, constructive feedback, and a system that supports both learning and timely, effective personnel decisions (Darling-Hammond, 2014). The hope is that new approaches to teacher evaluations will be able to provide both

formative and summative evaluations, thus motivating teachers to improve their instructional practices as well as removing inefficient teachers from the classroom (Firestone, 2014).

The Dual Approach to Teacher Evaluation

The different approaches to evaluation are shaped by the emphasis they place on either measurement (accountability/high-stakes) or improvement (professional development and growth, Donaldson & Firestone, 2021; Ford et al., 2017; Ford et al., 2018; Guenther, 2021; Looney, 2011), and are informed by different theories of motivation (Firestone, 2014).

The first theory, rooted in economics and accountability, emphasizes the use of external rewards to motivate teachers and suggests offering varying incentives to enhance teaching (Firestone, 2014). Systems with an emphasis on accountability may include high-stakes incentives such as performance-based pay, salary increases, bonus pay, or the threat of losing a job (Looney, 2011). The second theory, based on psychology, focuses on internal motivation and aims to improve teachers by providing training and professional development. This approach seeks to empower teachers with the skills and resources they need to succeed (Firestone, 2014). In systems emphasizing improvement, evaluations are used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of teachers, to help develop appropriate growth goals, and identify potential sources of professional development (Looney, 2011). While some evaluation systems combine both summative and formative assessments into one evaluation tool, many professionals have expressed uncertainty about how to separate them in the context of their practices (Mette et al., 2020), and there is tension between the dual goals as it is often difficult to find an appropriate balance (Looney, 2011).

Ford (2018) was one of the first to use the Self-Determination Theory as a lens to explore the ways in which teachers utilize evaluation data to support their professional growth. His

findings indicated that most teachers demonstrated either controlled motivation or amotivation in response to their evaluations, which in turn contributed to minimal use of evaluation feedback for instructional improvement or professional growth. According to Ford and Lavigne (2024), teacher evaluation systems that favor teacher growth and development are more effective at fostering teacher motivation than systems that use extrinsic incentives to hold teachers accountable. While the use of extrinsic incentives may lead to small changes in instructional practices in order to "check the box" (Guenther, 2021), they tend to lead to decreases in teacher motivation (Ford & Lavigne, 2024). Systems that focus on accountability over growth and development can lead to damage to teachers' professional identities and reduced morale and motivation (Guenther, 2021). While teachers may make superficial changes to practices due to the external pressures to meet certain criteria, they do not make lasting changes that lead to professional growth. Formative feedback is required in order to see improvements in instructional practices; thus, it is not likely that systems that are focused on accountability over professional development will lead to any real changes in teaching practices that promote student learning (Guenther, 2021).

Components of Effective Evaluation Systems

The different forms of teacher evaluation focus on teaching performance (classroom observation, peer evaluation, student ratings), school context (external or internal school evaluation), and student outcomes (test scores). Most systems use some combination of these forms of evaluation to varying degrees. This is important as no form of evaluation can capture the full abilities of a teacher, and all forms are important for completing a complete picture of the teacher characteristics and how they influence student learning (Looney, 2011). When coupled with other supports and incentives for teachers, strong evaluation systems should provide a

measure of teacher quality by distinguishing between teachers at different levels. Additionally, they should help to recognize and retain strong teachers, encourage fewer effective teachers to leave the classroom, help all teachers improve instructional practices, and lead to gains in student achievement (Putnam et al., 2018). A valuable evaluation system should take into consideration teachers' practice related to the goals of the curriculum and the needs of students. Evaluators should consider evidence of how teachers contribute to student learning and the attainment of schoolwide goals (Darling-Hammond, 2014). With an emphasis on mentoring and peer evaluation and teachers collecting evidence about their practice and student learning, evaluation systems can be "teaching and learning systems" that support ongoing, collaborative, professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2014, p. 5).

Effective evaluation tools allow teachers to set goals and receive routine, practical feedback embedded in a system that supports learning and effective personnel decisions (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Putnam et al. (2018) identified common characteristics of six different, successful evaluation systems that were used in various schools and districts nationwide. The common characteristics included the use of multiple measures, student surveys, objective measures of student growth, at least three rating categories, annual evaluations for all teachers, professional development tied to the evaluation, and written feedback after the evaluation. This mirrors the criteria outlined by Darling-Hammond (2014) who describes an effective evaluation system as one that is based on standards, provides evidence of teacher practice and student learning, and places value on professional development and teacher collaboration.

Systems that focus on growth and development are comprehensive and specific, include developmental scales, and acknowledge and reward growth (Marzano, 2012). These models

include elements of teaching that have been shown by research to increase student achievement, and provide specific classroom strategies and behaviors that can be used to achieve those elements. Systems that are created strictly for measurement purposes may be missing elements relating to student/teacher relationships and classroom management as they do correlate with student achievement, but do not necessarily "discriminate well between teachers who represent a wide range of competence" (Marzano, 2012, p. 17). For example, classroom management does correlate with student achievement to a point, but once a teacher has reached a certain level of competence in this area, further skill development would not necessarily lead to greater gains in student achievement (Marzano, 2012). Including more elements of teaching allows teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and provides opportunities for growth and development. A system focused on development provides rubrics that allow teachers to pinpoint their current levels of performance, and gives strategies for obtaining higher levels of success. Evaluation rubrics provide a common language and framework for evaluation that allows teachers to become more involved in the evaluation process (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Scales in evaluation systems created for measurement would provide very little guidance on how teachers could improve to reach a higher score (Marzano, 2012).

The Role of the Evaluator

There must be more than just a good evaluation instrument in order for an evaluation system to be effective at both helping teachers grow, and helping admin make personnel decisions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). In addition to a good evaluation instrument, evaluators should be knowledgeable about instruction and provide feedback that can be linked to professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their instructional practice (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Ritter & Barnett, 2016). Hunter (2024) examined 14 teacher-reported

school leadership evaluation practices, and determined that six of these may represent high-leverage practices that may lead to teaching improvement. The six high-leverage evaluation practices were similar to those described in other research and included scoring teachers based on their performance, encouraging teachers to reflect on their practices, providing teachers access to professional development, ensuring that professional development is relevant to their growth goals, allowing teachers to engage with experts, and longer post-conferences. During post-conferences the evaluator and teacher reflect on the lesson and discuss a plan for ongoing growth and development in order to help the teacher meet the standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012).

Additionally, evaluators must also provide multiple observations that occur throughout the year where the evaluation looks at multiple sources of data before providing constructive feedback in a timely manner (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Ritter & Barnett, 2016). Multiple visits shows that there is a genuine interest in making the teacher better. When there is only one observation, the teacher is merely trying to achieve a score and there is less motivation for growth (Ritter & Barnett, 2016). Using multiple measures to evaluate teachers has an emphasis on growth, not measurement, and includes teachers in the process of developing and refining the evaluation system, thus creating buy-in and increasing motivation (Close & Amrein-Beardsley, 2018; Ritter & Barnett, 2016). Features of an evaluation system that is successful for personnel decision making include not only the evaluation instrument, but also a team of supportive/collaborative mentors, and a system of due process where evidence from evaluation results are used to make personnel decisions. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012).

Integrated Framework

For schools or districts who want an evaluation policy that integrates both summative and formative goals, it is important to consider how to integrate the two separate frameworks. According to Ford and Hewitt (2020), this combined framework should center on teacher growth and development (intrinsic incentives) instead of reward and punishment (extrinsic incentives). Additionally, evaluators should attend to how multiple measures are used, allowing teachers to have input and autonomy when possibly. If standardized test scores are used as part of the evaluation, they should be used in ways that support reflection, growth and development, not as a way to punish. The evaluation system should be continuously monitored and adjusted using feedback and input from teachers and other stakeholders. Feedback for teachers should be timely, frequent, specific, actionable and meaningful, and applicable to their instructional practice. Lastly, there should be explicit and clear expectations for on-going professional development (Ford & Hewitt, 2020).

Oklahoma Teacher Evaluation Requirements

The Oklahoma State Board of Education adopted a new statewide system of evaluation with components that were to be incorporated in all state schools by the 2017-2018 school year (Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System, 2023). The evaluation system was to include the following components: annual evaluations that provide feedback to improve student learning, a five-tier evaluation rating system, a qualitative assessment tool including observable teacher characteristics correlated to student success including organization and classroom management skills, effective instruction, professional growth, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills, and an individualized program for professional growth. Districts had an option of including a quantitative measure at their own expense. It was required that all districts include

conversations of student performance during evaluations, but it was not a requirement for student performance to be included in the evaluation rating. Career teachers who receive an evaluation rating of "superior" or "highly effective" may be evaluated once every three years. Evaluation data is to be provided to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and the Oklahoma Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability for the purposes of improvements and development of the teacher preparation system (Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System, 2023).

Additionally, each school district board of education is required to annually review and maintain a written policy of evaluation and professional development with the assistance of representatives selected by local teachers (Establishment of Written Policy of Evaluation and Corresponding Professional Development, 2023). The policy should provide for every probationary teacher to receive formative feedback at least two times per school year, once each semester. All other teachers, except for career teachers who are exempt, should be evaluated once a year. All certified personnel should be evaluated by a "principal, assistant principal, supervisor, content expert, department chair, peer committee or other trained persons or groups of persons designated by the school district board of education" (Establishment of Written Policy of Evaluation and Corresponding Professional Development, 2023). A district's professional development policy should provide for individualized and focused professional development that includes an annual growth goal developed collaboratively with an evaluator. The goal should be tailored to address a specific area of the qualitative component and should allow the teacher to actively engage with learning practices that are evidence based.

The members of the state Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (TLE) Commission created a rubric using criteria from state statutes and national best practices. They used this rubric to

review a number of qualitative evaluation instruments to determine which frameworks would be used in Oklahoma schools. Criteria required by state statute were the inclusion of a five-tier rating system, annual evaluations for all teachers, remediation plans for teachers in need of improvement, research based strategies, inclusion of rubrics and evidences for effectiveness, correlated to student success, and must minimally contain the following observable teacher characteristics: organization and classroom management skills, effective instruction, professional growth, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills (Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System , 2023). Additionally included on the rubric but not required by state statute were: accounting for years of service, supportive of deliberate practice and teacher growth, teacher and student evidences clearly defined, validation studies, emphasizes classroom instruction, and can be supported statewide. At the conclusion of the TLE Commission Selection, three evaluation frameworks were identified and approved for use in Oklahoma Schools (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2024).

All three evaluation frameworks are similar as they were chosen by the TLE Commission and reviewed using their created rubric. All three evaluation frameworks consist of the five-tiered rating system, and the rubrics defining teacher and student evidence and classroom factors are included for all three systems. While the frameworks do not specifically outline how often teachers should receive feedback, the State of Oklahoma does provide districts with guidelines on the frequency of feedback for teachers depending on years of service. All three evaluation frameworks are based on research of best practices, and describe their validation studies that link their evaluation system to increased student achievement. While each of the three frameworks are organized slightly differently with their domains consisting of varying indicators, dimensions, or elements (strategies), they all address in some way classroom organization and

management, instructional planning and implementation, interpersonal and leadership skills, and a focus on professional growth and improvement.

The Tulsa Model

The Tulsa Model was developed with teachers and is based on current research findings of best practices. During its development, a study group of evaluation experts, teachers, curriculum specialists, and principals reviewed and evaluated multiple evaluation models and research studies in order to recommend the principles that would guide the Tulsa model Evaluation rubric. This framework assesses instructional practices and contextual factors that have been found to be associated with increased student learning and achievement. Additionally, this framework measures a teacher's ability to successfully manage classroom behaviors, develop plans that align with standards, use strategies that engage learners with the content and encourage higher levels of cognitive thinking, use data to differentiate learning experiences, provide adequate and timely feedback, and create a learning environment that is inclusive of all students (Tulsa Public Schools, 2014b).

The evaluation model is made up of five domains with each domain consisting of additional dimensions of teaching. The domain of classroom management consists of six dimensions of teaching and contributes to 30% of the overall score. Within classroom management, evaluators provide feedback on the dimensions of preparation, discipline, contribution to building climate, lesson planning, assessment practices, and student relationships. The domain of instructional effectiveness consists of ten dimensions and accounts for 50% of the overall score. The dimensions within instructional effectiveness include specific instructional strategies that can be used to increase student learning including: a focus on literary and state standards, engaging learners with the content, using a variety of methods to explain and model

skills and processes, using clear instructions and directions, and adjusting instruction based on monitoring and the needs of individual students. The domain of professional growth and continuous improvements consists of two dimensions and accounts for 10% of the overall score. This domain assesses both professional development and professional accountability. Both the domains of interpersonal skills and leadership have one dimension and each contribute to 5% of the overall score**.** Each dimension has a provided rubric that evaluators can use to determine a score for that dimension. Each rubric is five-tiered with the following developmental continuum: Ineffective (1), Needs Improvement (2), Effective (3), Highly Effective (4), and Superior (5). Each tier of the rubric provides descriptions of teacher behaviors and/or classroom practices that fall within that tier (Tulsa Public Schools, 2014a).

Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model

The Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model is composed of four domains that guide the teacher through creating standards aligned plans to the implementation of the plan, accounting for the classroom environment and professional responsibilities. This framework was developed to not only measure teacher effectiveness by focusing on student results, but also to drive and support teacher growth and development by empowering teachers with supportive tools and resources. This framework consists of 4 domains: standards-based planning, standards-based instruction, conditions for learning, and professional responsibilities. Each domain consists of additional elements which are researched based instructional strategies that are "essential behaviors [used] to measure teacher effectiveness" (Marzano Evaluation Center, 2023, p. 2). A five-tired scoring rubric is provided for each of the 23 elements with a developmental continuum as follows: Not Using (0), Beginning (1), Developing (2), Applying (3), and Innovating (4). For each of the elements there is a focus statement describing the teacher behavior, and a desired

effect which describes the student behavior desired in response to the teacher behavior. For the domains that are based on classroom instruction, evaluators use student evidence to determine the score on the rubric (Marzano Evaluation Center, 2023). For each element, the framework provides examples of teacher and student evidence in order to achieve the focus statement and desired effect.

Oklahoma TAP Teaching Standards (OTTS)

The Oklahoma TAP Teaching Standards were developed to meet the criteria of the teacher evaluation framework set forth by the Oklahoma State Department of education. It is a modified version of the TAP teacher standards that are utilized by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. The TAP teaching standards were originally developed based on reviews of research on teacher performance and guidelines from professional teaching standards associations. The research continues to validate the connection between instructional practices, student outcomes, and the performance indicators of effective teaching as outlined in the rubrics of this framework. (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching [NIET], 2013).

This evaluation system is composed of three domains each consisting of additional performance indicators that are linked to effective teaching. The domain of Instruction includes the performance indicators of standards and objectives, motivating students, presenting instructional content, lesson structure and pacing, activities and materials, questioning, academic feedback, grouping students, teacher knowledge of content and students, thinking, and problem solving. The domain of Designing and Planning instruction includes the performance indicators of instructional plans, student work, and assessment. The domain of the Learning Environment encompasses the performance indicators of expectations, managing student behavior, environment, and respectful culture. A five-tiered rubric is provided for each performance

indicator including the expectations for teacher behaviors and classroom interactions required to meet each tier. The tiers include unsatisfactory (1), Below proficient (2), Proficient (3), Above proficient (4), and exemplary (5) (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2013).

Evaluation Feedback

School leadership is influential in the process of helping teachers make changes to their instructional practices by encouraging them to try new methods and approaches, monitoring practice and assessment outcomes (Forrest et al., 2019), and providing constructive feedback on how to improve practice (Ford et al., 2017). In a study conducted by Forrest et al. (2019), teachers reported that collaboration with leaders and active reflection on instructional practices had impacts on facilitating changes in teacher practices. Additionally, teachers indicated that time was needed to make the changes, learn and implement new skills, and to reflect on the outcomes of new instructional practices. In a study on how principals influence teaching and learning, Supovitz et al. (2010) concluded that principal leadership is a positive and significant predictor of a teacher's change in instructional practices, and that these influences on instructional practices also affect student performance. Prado Tuma et al. (2018) found that 76% of the teachers made improvements to their instruction based on the feedback they received during their evaluation. Teachers who were observed more frequently and who received feedback more often were more likely to make changes to their instructional practices (Prado Tuma et al., 2018). Conversely, in a seminal study of Louisiana's high-stakes evaluation system, Ford (2018) found very few teachers used their evaluation data to make changes to their instructional practices, and when they did, it was to target a specific evaluation element and not to make "broader, deeper changes to their practice" (p. 267). When asked how they used their evaluation data, they reported using it to boost their score on specific areas of weakness, and did

not discuss how they used the data to reflect on their teaching practices in order to make long term changes (Ford, 2018).

Teacher Perceptions of Feedback

According to Ryan and Deci (2020), the SDT argues that feedback can have varied functional significance, or meaning. Feedback can have informational significance when it provides input that improves efficacy and helps the person improve their competence. This type of feedback leads to increased intrinsic motivation and internalization when it helps teachers recognize their achievements and/or provides direction on how to enhance their instructional competence (Firestone, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Conversely, feedback can have controlling significance and lead to a decrease in motivation when it is felt to be pressuring towards a specific outcome or behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Examples of this would be when evaluation scores are used for making personnel decisions, when student achievement data is included in evaluation scores, or when scores are used for rating teachers and not growth and development (Looney, 2011). According to a study conducted by Cherasaro et al. (2016), teachers' responses to feedback are related to their perceptions of four characteristics of that feedback: the usefulness of the feedback, the accuracy of the feedback, the credibility of the evaluator providing the feedback, and the access to resources. This aligns with teacher interviews conducted by Ford (2018) where participants indicated the perception of the validity of feedback was derived from the perceived usefulness of the feedback, whether or not the feedback was a true representation of their practice, the knowledge (content and pedagogical) of the person performing the evaluation, and the equity of the student performance data.

Usefulness of feedback

Teachers perceive feedback to be useful when the feedback is both timely and specific (Cherasaro et al., 2015; Kraft & Christian, 2022). People are more likely to remember recent experiences best, so feedback is most valuable when it is provided immediately after an observation. This allows the teacher to remember the events of the lesson and more effectively determine how to use the feedback in future lessons (Wigert & Harter, 2017). Timely feedback is more likely to be helpful and constructive, while delayed feedback can feel more like evaluation and criticism. Timely feedback is more "situationally relevant and development-focused" (Wigert & Harter, 2017, p. 8). Specific feedback provides instructions, examples, or directions for how a strategy can be used more appropriately and effectively (Cherasaro et al., 2016; Lavigne et al., 2023). This type of feedback can lead to increased intrinsic motivation as it helps teachers recognize their achievements and provides direction on how to enhance their instructional competence in a way that does not hinder their autonomy (Firestone, 2014). Teachers who do not perceive feedback to be useful will often only make changes to their instructional practices in order to check boxes on a performance rubric to meet the criteria of "highly effective" (Guenther, 2021), and not due to deep reflection of their teaching practices (Ford, 2018). These teachers perceive their evaluations as being used for accountability and not for professional growth (Guenther, 2021).

Accuracy of Feedback

The perceived accuracy of feedback is the extent to which the teacher believes the feedback accurately portrays their teaching performance (Cherasaro et al., 2015; Ford, 2018). Teachers report that feedback is perceived as being more accurate when it is frequent, positive, and specific (Cherasaro et al., 2016; Kraft & Christian, 2022; Prado Tuma et al., 2018). Teachers

who were observed more frequently and who received feedback more often were more likely to make changes to their instructional practices than teachers who only received feedback during formal evaluations (Prado Tuma et al., 2018). More frequent classroom visits allow evaluators to pick up on patterns in behaviors or practices that they would not typically see if they were only present occasionally, thus being able to provide more accurate feedback (Bell, 2022). Positive feedback can lead to an increase in teacher self-efficacy (Wilhelm et al., 2019) which can affect teachers' intrinsic motivation to make changes to their teaching practices (Ford et al., 2017). Improvements in teacher self-efficacy lead to environments that are conducive to learning and student motivation (Soehner & Ryan, 2011).

The announced nature of some observations makes teachers skeptical of the fairness of the evaluation and thus of the accuracy of the feedback. Teachers will often dismiss what they perceive to be inaccurate feedback as important information to help improve their practice (Ford, 2018). Evaluators should provide actionable feedback based on observable evidence (Kraft & Christian, 2022) that is tailored to reflect what they expect from the teacher in order for them to prioritize what to do next (Wigert & Harter, 2017). Evaluations that are only rating scales and rankings that provide no feedback on performance can put teachers on the defensive and decrease their motivation to make changes to their practices. (Wigert & Harter, 2017).

Credibility of Feedback

The credibility of feedback is the extent to which the teacher believes that the evaluator is qualified to provide the feedback (Cherasaro et al., 2015). Teachers are more likely to find feedback useful, and respond, if they also believe their evaluator to be credible (Cherasaro et al., 2016). Teachers are more likely to benefit from evaluators who have a deep understanding of teaching and know what teachers want and need to learn in order to grow (Donaldson &

Firestone, 2021; Kraft & Christian, 2022). When evaluators provide feedback to teachers outside of their grade-level and/or content-level of expertise, it results in feedback that is content free and only focused on pedagogical practices. (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). This often leads to feedback that is not actionable and that does not move teachers to higher levels of improvement in pedagogy or instructional strategies (Vandermolen & Meyer-Looze, 2021). Teachers often find that discussions with administrators of test scores and content knowledge may not be as beneficial for instructional improvement because of the lack of context specific knowledge possessed by the administrator (Ford & Lavigne, 2024). Principals' own views on the purpose of evaluation can affect how they chose to carry out the evaluation process and how teachers experience the process (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016).

Kraft and Gilmour (2016) found many principals lack training on how to appropriately use the evaluation system, to rate teachers subjectively, and provide constructive feedback to teachers. This aligns with a study conducted by Levigne et al. (2023) who found that 75% of the principles interviewed stated they needed work on conducting formal observations, informal observations, and providing helpful feedback to low-performing teachers. Additionally, 100% of the principals interviewed stated they needed work on the knowledge of the teaching behaviors that are most associated with student progress on standardized tests (Lavigne et al., 2023).

According to Ford and Lavigne (2024), teachers are more likely to make changes to their instructional practices, as well as experience more positive feelings of motivation and satisfaction, when their evaluations are carried out by another teacher instead of an administrator. Teacher satisfaction tends to be higher when someone other than the principal is conducting the evaluation (Ford et al., 2018), and many teachers perceive feedback from coaches and mentors more positively than the feedback they received during formal observations (Prado Tuma et al.,

2018). This strengthens the argument that peer mentoring and instructional coaching can complement principal feedback, leading to a more comprehensive system of teacher support (Ford et al., 2018).

Post-Conferences

Traditional feedback tends to be one-way, infrequent, and focuses on the past. In order to be more effective, feedback should be open and honest two-way dialogue that builds relationships and focuses on the teachers' strengths and future potential (Wigert & Dvorak, 2019). Great leaders build conversations around teachers' strengths so the dialogue can be individualized, positive, and constructive (Wigert & Dvorak, 2019). In a study conducted by Kraft and Christian (2022), most teachers surveyed reported that while they did receive regular feedback, they did not receive evaluation feedback that contributed to the improvement of their instructional practices. While evaluators are often successful at evaluating teachers regularly, they struggle with finding the time to meet with teachers to provide constructive feedback after observations (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016).

Feedback seems to be most effective when provided multiple times, over a longer period of time, and when teachers can have one-on-one, reflective, constructive conversations with their evaluator (Vandermolen & Meyer-Looze, 2021). Ritter and Barnett (2016) found teachers reported the feedback resulting from observation post-conferences may be the most important contribution to improved instructional practices, and teachers benefit from the opportunity to reflect. Post-conferences provide opportunities for teachers to participate in productive conversations about their teaching performance. They can promote teacher reflection and goal setting, leading to professional growth through evaluation (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). In a study on teachers' perceptions of principals' supervision during pre- and post-conference, it was found

that 65% of the variability in principals' effectiveness in supervision is accounted for in their ability to build teachers' capacity to reflect on their own teaching during post-conferences (Mette et al., 2015). Post-conferences with timely feedback provide teachers with strategies that can be implemented to help them grow professionally, improve instructional practices, and increase student achievement (Ritter & Barnett, 2016).

Conclusion

The evolution of school accountability led to a focus on student achievement and a shift in the role of principals to that of an instructional leader. Within this new role, principals became responsible for fostering teacher growth and development, utilizing teacher evaluations as a key tool to support this process. The Self-Determination Theory helps us understand how the dual purposes of teacher evaluation can be integrated into a single framework that addresses both the formative and summative nature of evaluations while still supporting the basic psychological needs of teachers. An important component of these evaluation systems is useful, accurate, and credible feedback that teachers can use to self-reflect in order to make changes to their instructional practices and grow professionally.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Increases in state and federal accountability standards have led to a focus on increasing student achievement and a shift towards instructional leadership practices. While leadership practices have a mostly indirect effect on student achievement, research is clear that the practices implemented by leaders are invaluable in guiding schools towards meeting accountability standards (Leithwood et al., 2010). The purpose of this general inductive qualitative study is to better understand how teacher evaluations impact instructional practices and professional growth. This study aims to identify specific characteristics of feedback that lead to changes in instructional practices, and evaluate how administrators can provide more constructive feedback to teachers during evaluations. The intent is to provide research for district and site administrators to utilize to ensure they are providing teachers with constructive feedback that leads to changes in instructional practices, professional growth, and increases in student achievement.

Research Questions

The primary research questions framing this study are:

1. How do teacher evaluation processes impact teacher practices and professional growth?
2. What are the specific characteristics of feedback that lead teachers to make changes to their instructional practices?

Study Design

This study employed a General (or generic) Inductive Qualitative Model (GIQM) of research. Qualitative research is a method of study that seeks to elicit people's perceptions of real-life events; focusing on the meanings, experiences, and reflections of individuals (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018; Percy et al., 2015; Yin, 2016). Using purposeful sampling, participants were selected intentionally based on specific characteristics significant to the research question, ensuring that the data gathered was rich and relevant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2016). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' responses while ensuring key topics were addressed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harris & Holley, 2019; Percy et al., 2015). The responses were coded using emergent coding, a process where themes and patterns naturally arise from the data, rather than being imposed beforehand. This approach allows for inductive data analysis, synthesizing insights based on the identified themes to provide a deeper understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harris & Holley, 2019; Miles et al., 2020). Through this method, qualitative research uncovers nuanced, contextual insights that quantitative approaches might overlook (Harris & Holley, 2019).

Participants and Context

This study gathered the perspectives of 10 science, math, and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers from three urban high schools in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The teachers were purposefully selected based on their years of experience and their current teaching assignment. Participants in this study ranged from their second through fifth year of teaching. Three teachers had two years of teaching experience, two teachers had three years of teaching experience, four teachers had four years of teaching experience, and one teacher had five years of teaching experience. Nine of the ten participants were alternatively certified while only one of the participants was traditionally certified. Of the nine who were alternatively certified, teaching was their second career. For the one traditionally certified, teaching was their first career. Eight of the participants have only taught at their current school while two of the participants have taught at

other schools prior to their current school. Of the ten participating teachers, five teachers taught ELA, three taught math, and two taught science. Five teachers taught a single subject (ex: just algebra 2) and five teachers taught multiple subjects (ex: algebra 1 and algebra 2). Six of the participating teachers were female while four of the participating teachers were male.

Purposeful sampling was chosen because it allowed for purposeful selection of diverse participants who met the criteria, and it provided for rich data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2016). First-year teachers were excluded from this study because they likely did not have enough experience with teacher evaluations to provide comprehensive responses to the interview questions. Teachers with more than five years of experience were excluded from this study as teacher retention begins to drastically decrease after five years (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2021, p. 56). The ideal teaching assignments for participants were in science, math, or ELA, as these subjects are included on the ACT and are relevant to standardized testing. Participants were chosen based on the recommendation of their building assistant principal and on their willingness to participate in the study.

Before beginning this study, I identified the participating school district and reached out to their Chief of Staff requesting permission to speak to their teachers for this study. This district has their own Institutional Review Board (IRB) process that must be followed in order to carry out a study in their district. I completed the appropriate paperwork and emailed it to the Chief of Staff. The district IRB committee met to review and approve my study before I could begin. While I was waiting on this approval, I began working on the university IRB approval. Once both IRB committees approved my study (see Appendix D), I was able to begin finding participants.

I sent an email to an assistant principal in each of the three participating schools to ask them to identify potential participants for my study based on the study criteria provided. Using the list of teachers provided by each assistant principal, I contacted each teacher via email (See Appendix B) to share the purpose and research questions of my study, and determine their interest in participating. I sent a follow-up email after one week because I had no responses. After another week, I reached out to the assistant principals again asking if they would let their teachers know I had sent an email and that it was not spam. Teachers began to respond with interest to the study and interviews were scheduled.

Instruments and Materials

Participants took part in a semi-structured interview consisting of approximately 20 questions (see Appendix A). An interview was chosen because they are beneficial when participants cannot be observed directly, in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They offer historical context and allow the researcher to interpret meaning based on patterns and context arising from the participants' perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harris & Holley, 2019; Percy et al., 2015). However, the information gathered is influenced by the interviewee's perspective and may not reflect natural behavior since it occurs in a controlled setting. Additionally, the researcher's presence may introduce bias, and some participants may struggle to express themselves clearly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A semi-structured interview was chosen because they allow for open-ended questions which require participants to describe their experiences and perceptions using their own words. This also allows for an interview that is more relaxed, candid, and conversational (Yin, 2016).

The interview protocol was created by adapting questions from the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). The TALIS is composed of two questionnaires, one for

teachers and one for principals. The teacher survey consists of 49 questions and is divided into the following sections: background information, teacher professional development, teacher feedback, your teaching in general, your teaching in the target class, and school climate and job satisfaction. While the themes of the TALIS vary each time it is administered, the topics surveyed generally include: teachers' instructional practices and beliefs, school leadership and management, teachers' professional practices, teacher education and initial preparation, teacher feedback and professional development, school climate, job satisfaction (including motivation), teacher human resource measures and stakeholder relations, teacher autonomy and self-efficacy, and diversity (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). Questions for the semi-structured interview were adapted from the teachers' survey and from the sections identified as background information, teacher professional development, and teacher feedback.

Questions 1 and 2 of the interview were used to gather demographic information from the participant. From these questions I was able to determine their teaching assignment, years of teaching experience, and if they had any other experience in education. Question 3 asked the participants to discuss their journey to becoming an educator. This question aimed to gain insight into the teacher's motivation for entering the profession, as well as to explore what drove them to continually improve in their teaching. Question 4 asked teachers to discuss the purpose of teacher evaluations while question 5 asked teachers to describe their most recent evaluation process from start to finish. The purpose of questions 4 and 5 was to better understand teachers' perceptions of the evaluation process and to determine if their current evaluation processes are in alignment with these perceptions. Questions 6 -8 asked about the feedback teachers receive during their evaluations and how this feedback is interpreted. These questions aimed to determine if teachers found feedback useful, what makes it useful, and if delivery impacts its

usefulness. Question 9 asked teachers to speak about a time that feedback may have led to a meaningful change in their instructional practice. The purpose of this question was to identify the specific characteristics of feedback that may contribute to changes in teaching practices. Questions 10-12 had teachers discuss the current evaluation process, where it breaks down, and identify possible changes that could be made. These questions were used to identify flaws with the current evaluation system and determine modifications that could be made to enhance the current process. Question 13 was a discussion of an artifact that teachers brought with them. Teachers were asked to bring a current evaluation with them so we could discuss the feedback that was given. This discussion was used to identify potentially useful feedback that was given to the teacher during the evaluation process. Question 14 had teachers discuss potential barriers that they encounter to making changes to their teaching practices. This allowed them to address teacher motivation and their willingness to overcome barriers. Questions 15-16 asked participants to share their experiences with induction programs, mentoring, and professional development, and to reflect on how these experiences had influenced their teaching. The purpose of these questions was to gain a deeper understanding of what currently motivates them to adjust their instructional practices based on new insights, information, and/or techniques they encounter. Lastly, questions 17-19 were follow-up and closing questions that allowed participants to make any additional comments they felt may be pertinent to the study.

As this was a semi-structured interview, it was occasionally necessary to add additional follow up questions to gain clarification or additional information. This was based on participant responses and varied depending on the information provided by each participant.

Procedures

When meeting for the interview, I reminded the participant of the goals, purpose, and research questions of the study. I gained their consent to participate in the study as well as their permission to audio record the interview in order to create a transcription at the conclusion of the interview. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were in a semi-structured format using an interview protocol that was adapted from the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (see Appendix A). During the interview I took additional notes to document any thoughts or ideas that came from what was being discussed. I asked additional questions that were not in the interview protocol in order to gain clarification or additional information. At the conclusion of the interview, each recording was transcribed using an AI software.

Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded and transcribed using AI software. At the completion of each interview, I compared the recorded interview to the transcript to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Data analysis began by re-reading each of the interview transcriptions to familiarize myself with the thoughts and ideas of the teacher, and to begin identifying general themes and patterns. Then, keeping my research questions in mind, I read each interview line by line, and using NVivo software began coding key words and phrases that helped to provide answers to my research questions. I used emergent coding to open-code the interview transcripts based on patterns in the data. The coded data was then sorted based on common themes and patterns.

Limitations

While the intentional selection of participants allowed for rich data collection, the fact that participants consist solely of high school teachers from a single district limits the generalizability on the overall usefulness of teacher evaluations. More research should be done in various settings to see if the results of this study can be generalized to other schools, content areas, and/or grade levels. Another potential limitation of this study is researcher bias. My personal experiences as both a teacher and a teacher evaluator may influence how I interact with the data and shape the direction of the study.

Researcher Reflexivity

This study requires me to make interpretations and provide analysis of the perspectives and experiences of the participants, and these interpretations could potentially be influenced by my own experiences and biases. As a former teacher, instructional coach, and now an evaluator, I bring a unique set of experiences to this research, which may shape how I view the effectiveness and usefulness of teacher evaluations. My experience in supporting and mentoring teachers may make me more empathetic to the challenges they face, potentially influencing my analysis of the evaluation processes. Additionally, my current role as an evaluator could lead to bias, as I might unconsciously favor certain evaluation practices that align with my own preferences and experiences. Lastly, my personal experience with teacher evaluations has been exclusively with the Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model, whereas the participating district uses the Tulsa Model. I have made every effort to develop a deep understanding of the Tulsa Model, including following up with administrators in the participating district to ensure I am accurately representing its structure and intent.

Trustworthiness

During this process I used a reflexive journal to record notes in order to reflect on my own personal experiences and bias, and to consider how they may affect the interpretation of results. I also limited discussions about my own personal experiences so they do not override the importance of the content and meaning of this study. As I am responsible for conducting teacher evaluations myself, I chose to not conduct this study in my own district as to not have any undue influence on the answers during interviews, and to not potentially compromise the data.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and interpretations of the data, implications for practice and policy will be provided for site and district administrators to help ensure teachers are receiving constructive feedback that promotes changes in instructional practices, supports professional growth, and enhances student achievement.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this general inductive qualitative study was to better understand how teacher evaluation processes impact instructional practices and professional growth. This study aimed to identify specific characteristics of feedback that lead to changes in instructional practices, and evaluate how administrators can provide more constructive feedback to teachers during evaluations. The intent was to provide research for district and site administrators to utilize to ensure they are providing teachers with constructive feedback that leads to changes in instructional practices, professional growth, and increases in student achievement.

Research Questions

The primary research questions framing this study were:

1. How do teacher evaluation processes impact teacher practices and professional growth?
2. What are the specific characteristics of feedback that lead teachers to make changes to their instructional practices?

Study Design

This general inductive qualitative study gathered the perspectives of ten science, math, and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers from three urban high schools in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Teachers were purposefully selected based on their years of experience and their current teaching assignments. The intended target group was teachers in their third to fifth year of teaching, with the option to include second-year teachers to ensure an appropriate sample size. Ultimately, participants in the study ranged from their second through fifth year of teaching. Participating teachers were identified and recommended by their building principals and selected based on their eligibility and interest in participating. Data was collected through semi-structured

interviews and transcribed using AI. Their responses were coded using emergent coding allowing for inductive data analysis and the synthesis of insights based on identified themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harris & Holley, 2019; Miles et al., 2020).

Participants

When asked to describe their journey into teaching, participants often described experiences and desires that influenced their decision to become a teacher. Several spoke about the moment they realized they were meant to be teachers, with one participant stating, "I knew I wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember," while another explained, "I knew from the moment I stepped into the classroom that that's where I was supposed to be. So, my best day [in my former job] is still worse by far than my worst day as a teacher." Others spoke of early experiences working with children as an important factor in their career choice. One teacher said, "And I realized how much I really enjoyed teaching the kids that I had there and watching them grow. And it was all informal and play-based because it was daycare, but just watching them grow and change and the conversations that I got to have with them." In addition, participants described a general dedication to teaching, with one remarking, "I've always had a passion for education." These accounts demonstrate that many participants were intrinsically motivated to pursue teaching, viewing it as both a calling and a meaningful avenue for professional fulfillment.

While some participants spoke of how they had always known they wanted to be teachers, others described more indirect pathways that eventually led them to the profession. For example, one participant explained, "I knew I liked helping kids, but I didn't know what capacity. So, when I started working in higher education, I realized I like to help kids prepare for the future." Another reflected, "[I] went social work, realized I wanted to work with kids instead,

so I went teaching. I really like it. It's definitely where I think I'm supposed to be." These descriptions also highlighted that other careers often lacked the same sense of meaning, as illustrated by one participant who shared, "You are serving people in a way, but I don't find it the type of serving I'm looking for. I don't find it fulfilling and I don't find it purposeful." Together, these responses suggest that while participants' paths into education varied, their motivations were consistently tied to a desire to positively impact students' lives and to find purpose in their professional roles.

Themes

Perceptions of Teacher Evaluations



Figure 1 Perceptions of Teacher Evaluations theme cluster

The first theme focuses on how teachers perceive their evaluations. Their views on the purpose of evaluations, who conducts them, and when they are conducted help explain how they respond to the feedback they receive and the kinds of changes they may make to their instructional practices. This sets the stage for the next themes, which look more closely at the nature of the feedback itself and how it connects to changes in classroom practice.

Purpose of Evaluations

According to previously discussed research, there tends to be a dual-nature to the purpose of teacher evaluations that are shaped by the emphasis they place on either measurement (accountability/high-stakes) or improvement (professional development and growth, Donaldson & Firestone, 2021; Ford et al., 2017; Ford et al., 2018; Guenther, 2021; Looney, 2011). Teachers' perspectives were largely consistent with the view that evaluations serve two distinct purposes.

Two teachers detailed an evaluation system that they perceived as being used for accountability and to "check boxes." One characterized the purpose of evaluations as a way of "keeping people accountable" where "there's that level of watching, are you doing what you're supposed to do?" She went on to add," The only thing I could think of is the idea that it always kind of feels like it's just checking the box." Another teacher emphasized a similar function, noting that evaluations give administrators a sense of "the vibe of the building…how's it going? How are people being treated? What's the classroom feel like?" At the same time, she acknowledged their role in accountability, observing that "we have to answer to parents and answer to the state and all of that. And so, we have to have data to give to them."

In contrast, three teachers viewed evaluations as mechanisms for growth and improvement. One participant explained, "I think it's a good tool to help teachers grow, especially for new teachers to grow and see where they might need to improve things. And then for career teachers, it's a good tool to say, hey, are your methods still working or do we need to try new things?" Others spoke about the value of constructive feedback, framing evaluations as opportunities that inspire growth and development. One teacher reflected, "[Evaluations] allow teachers to receive constructive criticism about how they're relaying the message or operating in

their classrooms. I think in theory they were created so teachers have a scale to measure themselves on productivity and growth." Another added, "Ideally, they should be used as a learning tool. That's how I approach it when I go into an evaluation: how can I do better? I don't look at it as criticism per se; I look at it as this is what someone else is evaluating or is observing that I'm doing and how I can make it better?"

Most teachers recognized the dual nature of evaluations and spoke to both accountability and growth. One participant explained, "I think on the one hand, it is a checklist so that I am aware that I am being monitored," however "it also shows that people are focused on my career and they're helping me to improve my skills as an educator for the students." Similarly, another teacher observed, "I think the main point is to keep teachers accountable to teaching at a high standard, and then also to be able to give teachers feedback so that we have an avenue in which to improve." Accountability was described as ensuring teachers met expectations, as one participant noted, "[Evaluations] make sure you're an effective teacher, that you are reaching the students, and that you have a line of progress that you can track." Sometimes a teacher's perception shifted over time as they gained more experience. One teacher reflected, "Last year, I thought teacher evaluations were just part of a to-do list, but now I am starting to see how they can be more beneficial and help me improve where I don't realize there's a weakness." These responses illustrate that teachers understood evaluations as both a system of accountability and an opportunity for reflection and growth, with the balance between the two sometimes shifting as they gained teaching experience.

Evaluator Credibility

Sometimes a teacher's perception of their evaluation could be dependent on their evaluator. In some cases, a change in evaluator led to a shift in how the evaluation was

perceived. One participant reflected, “Last year, my first year, I thought teacher evaluations were something on the principal's checklist.” However, after being evaluated by a different principal the following year, he explained, “I think the purpose of the evaluation this year, after having [different principal], is to figure out where the holes are, [and] helping improve where you don’t realize there’s a weakness.” Similarly, another teacher described how the seriousness of the process varied depending on the evaluator when she said, “My first evaluator, the attitude towards it was like, this isn’t that serious. We just have to get it done. It was more of a checklist kind of thing because of how quick it was and his feedback was optional.” In contrast, her next principal was described as being “much more purposeful with her words and the way she carries herself about the observations.” These comments suggest that credibility was often established or diminished through the evaluator’s level of investment and professionalism.

Teachers also spoke about the difference in evaluator practices, ranging from random visits to more meaningful engagement. One participant described a prior evaluator as someone who “came in for two minutes and sat on his computer or his phone the whole time and left and then gave me all threes… it was always just the copy paste thing.” In contrast, he valued his next evaluator’s approach to giving feedback saying, “She scrolled through, talked about comments, talked about what she had seen and what she liked and what she had not seen, everything has just been fully positive.” Another teacher pointed out the difference between generic observational feedback and a more conversational process explaining, “When he came and did an evaluation, he’s in my classroom for 15 minutes and he seemed to just check boxes and then leave… I can’t do much with this.” By comparison, the next evaluator “talked to me about the evaluation before she did it… leaves comments on there so I know specifics… and we also had a meeting after it

where we could go over any questions I had." For this teacher, the credibility of the evaluator was tied to both the quality of the feedback and the willingness to engage in conversation.

Several teachers also reflected on the challenges of evaluations when there was turnover among administrators. One participant explained, "I've been evaluated my first year by one principal who moved on to become a head principal elsewhere. I was evaluated my second year by another principal who returned to middle school, and now I have a third principal evaluating me. So, there's not a through line with those evaluations." Another added, "Having that consistency, you know, because at the end of the day an evaluation is really just how someone else perceives you. Well, if you have a different person every time, how are they ever going to be able to truly perceive your growth?" These experiences show how changes in evaluators may impair the usefulness of feedback and the ability to track long-term growth and development.

Scheduling

Some teachers believed that how evaluations were scheduled affected their perceived usefulness and the value of the feedback that was given. Several expressed that having input into scheduling reduced stress and allowed them to demonstrate effective practice, with one participant stating, "Definitely having the power to schedule observations or having input into the scheduling of observations does impact the observation itself…even if it's not universally a good representation of a teacher's skills every day." Others preferred evaluators to visit during more challenging class periods, viewing those times as opportunities for meaningful support. One teacher explained, "There are times when I wish I could get a principal in. I have certain class periods where I have difficulties…that's when I want you to evaluate me, because that's where I want the help." Another teacher emphasized that scheduled evaluations were valuable because they allowed him to plan and demonstrate effective instruction. However, he noted that

when evaluators missed the scheduled time, the observation often failed to capture the lesson he had prepared. He stated, “I’m hitting home runs, but we don’t get the observation. And then the next week, we’re on the down slope…It’s just a different lesson.” These perspectives suggest that teachers value scheduled evaluations for reducing anxiety and enhancing feedback, but also see the timing of visits as critical in determining the fairness and relevance of the process.

While some teachers valued the ability to prepare for scheduled observations, others felt this approach produced a performance rather than an accurate snapshot of their daily instruction. One teacher shared, “I threaten my class before you come in…so it's not a fair and actual evaluation of what I'm doing in the classroom or what I'm doing daily, because I know when the evaluation is coming.” Another described scheduled observations as more of a staged performance when she said, “I don’t want it to be so scheduled because we’re actors at that point. You know, like you know they’re coming. Your students know they’re coming. So, it’s not a surprise.” For some, the issue was that scheduled visits gave evaluators only a narrow snapshot of instruction. One participant shared, “I just feel like it doesn’t give them a good example of what your classroom is like on a regular basis. It’s performatory almost” while another participant said, “It doesn't necessarily show you a full spectrum of what's actually going on in your classroom.” As one teacher put it, impromptu visits would feel “much more realistic than allowing us to just step up to the plate and hit a home run.”

Teachers often expressed that evaluations would be more useful if evaluators visited more frequently and observed for the entire class period. Short, unrelated visits were seen as giving only a partial view of instruction. As one teacher explained, “Sometimes I think that…the principal’s coming in and they’re observing you for 10 minutes, 20 minutes of a 40-minute class period, I feel like that’s hard to really get a true picture of what’s happening in the classroom.”

Another added, “It’s not a very long period of time. So, I don’t know that they’re getting a full picture.” Several teachers suggested breaking observations into multiple visits across different parts of the lesson or different days to provide a better perspective: “Maybe set it up so that…this time they’re seeing the very beginning of class…next time they’re getting the middle…then the final time they come in, they’re getting the very end of class…so that they’re seeing the full class period.” Others called for more informal visits beyond formal evaluations, noting, “It’s even better if the evaluating person drops in more often, like when they’re not evaluating, if they know their teacher…more than just the 15 minutes.” Together, these perspectives show teachers’ belief that consistency, frequency, and longer observations provide a more authentic and comprehensive view of classroom practice.

Standardization vs Flexibility

Teachers’ perceptions of evaluations varied, with some describing the process as rigid and standardized, and did not give a true representation of their classroom. One teacher reflected, “However, it seemed like there were some times where what was being evaluated wasn’t something anybody could do well. So, it’s almost like, okay, so I got a three because I needed to have a three so that later I could have a four.” Others noted that the evaluation system often felt like a checklist, rather than meaningful feedback: “They are evaluating me based on that strict list of topics and neither one of us can skip any…It was just something that had to be done. There was no meaning to it.” Similarly, another teacher explained, “I wish we could change some of the questions on the evaluation because I don’t feel like they’re relevant to every classroom. And I feel like they just have to check the boxes off on them.”

In contrast, some teachers described experiences where evaluations felt more flexible, individualized, and useful. One explained, “I have received evaluators who have been open to

discussing scores and even potentially altering them…it's nice to be able to discuss what constitutes a leap from one section to another." Another emphasized how the evaluator's approach shaped the experience: "Now I feel like I do have a say just because of the way she carried herself and the way the feedback is…the entire process makes it feel like I'm more of the focus of it, not the principal is the focus of it." Together, these perspectives highlight a tension between evaluations that feel standardized or "just something that had to be done," and those that are flexible and responsive to the needs of teachers.

Characteristics of Feedback

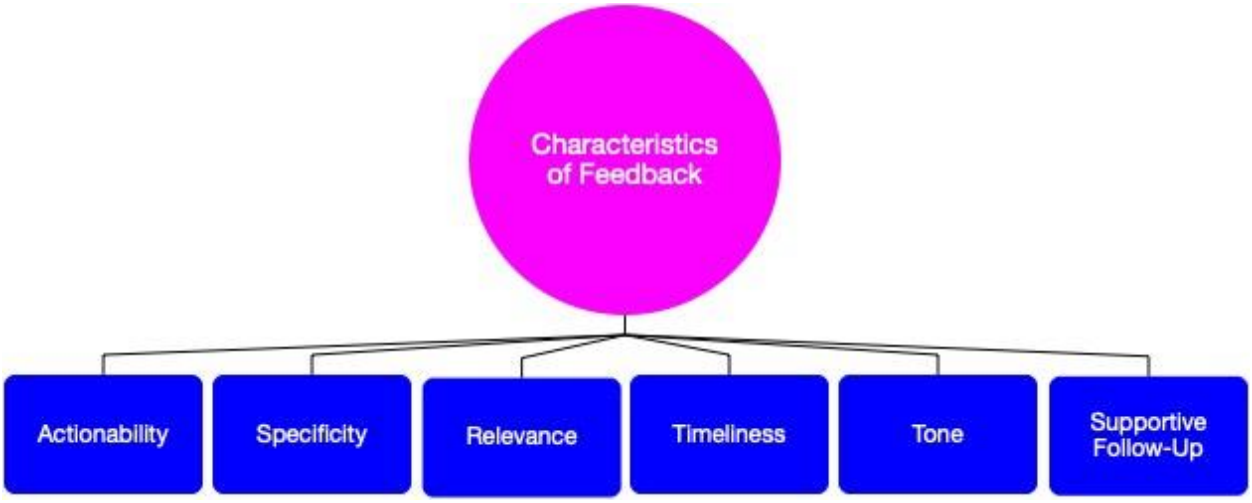


Figure 2 Characteristics of Feedback theme cluster

The second theme focuses on specific characteristics of feedback that teachers receive during their evaluations. Their perceptions of the usefulness of the feedback they receive help explain how they respond to the feedback and the kinds of changes they may make to their instructional practices. This theme discusses the specific characteristics of the feedback that teachers perceived to be more useful.

Actionability

The concept of actionable feedback surfaced as a critical factor in shaping teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of teacher evaluations and how they used them for professional growth. One teacher stated, "I don't find [the feedback] very actionable. I get a lot of "everything you do is great," which is nice, but there's nothing for me to take from that and make [my teaching] better. I appreciate positive feedback… but there's nothing for me to take and then grow with that." When describing the standardized choices the evaluation tool provides evaluators, another teacher explains, "a lot of the responses she gives on paper are straight from the handbook so if you haven't been teaching for a long time and don't know what it all means, they're not very actionable and useful." One teacher describes her feedback as lacking "call to action" while another says, "I need you to rip me apart and tell me what I'm not actually doing well so I can do better."

However, not all feedback experiences were negative. Some teachers recalled feedback that was more actionable and helped them make changes to their instructional practices. One teacher noted, "She was not very nice with her feedback ever. But I got feedback like this is what I should be doing to where I could make actual change." Another teacher commented on the usefulness of actual feedback outside of the standardized choices saying, "This year she's given actual good feedback, you know, like she makes comments in there that it's like, okay, I can fix this. Or, you know, hey, I'd like to see something different here." Another teacher shared, "The biggest part, it hasn't been copy and paste. She actually gives me something that I can work with that I didn't know I needed to improve on or skills that I kind of knew but now I have a better idea, an actionable plan to improve on those skills." In the end, what mattered most to teachers

wasn't just receiving feedback, but receiving feedback they could actually use to make real changes in their classrooms.

Specificity

Building on the discussions of how feedback can be actionable or not, another important factor influencing teachers' perceptions was the specificity of the feedback they receive. One of the first issues teachers identified regarding feedback specificity was the tendency for evaluators to rely on standardized or duplicated comments. One teacher remarked, "But it's all copy-paste, right? And I've read these before. So, at this point, I don't look anything into it." Another teacher commented, "I haven't received a lot of meaningful feedback, just stock feedback… copy and paste the rubric in there, so it wasn't really giving me anything." What teachers did indicate made the feedback more useful was when evaluators provided additional comments beyond the standardized comments. Teachers made comments addressing the "helpful[ness] of the additional commentary" that went "beyond just the stock response." They indicated this was beneficial because "it shows that there was some intention" and "I know specifics."

However, in addition to concerns about standardized or duplicated feedback, some teachers noted that even when comments were written individually, they often lacked depth or specificity. As one teacher noted, "The first evaluating principal I ever had, all of his comments were just good job, good job, good job. Well, if you're just telling me good job, that doesn't give me anything to work on." Another teacher commented, "You would be able to take action on what you're hearing or the feedback that you're getting, [but] without any specifics in the feedback, I don't know exactly what you're talking about." Some teachers believed that for feedback to be truly meaningful, it needed to be far more specific and directly connected to their instructional practices. One teacher, reflecting on her first year in the classroom said, "I feel like

it was her telling me to do it. It wasn't necessarily a suggestion. Because I was a first-year teacher so I really had no idea what I was doing." Another teacher gave a description of meaningful feedback provided by his evaluator when he said, "I observed this during your class. Maybe change this to this. So, she actually gives me something specific that I can work with." Two teachers even wanted specific examples of instructional behaviors aligned with each performance level. One of them stated, "I would want it to be more specific, like not saying, hey, you did great at this, you did great at this, but like maybe an example of what made that qualify." The other teacher commented, "I want to know not that I'm just doing fine in those areas, but what specifically is it so I can make sure I keep doing those things." These perspectives highlight that the usefulness of feedback largely depends on its specificity and that teachers value comments that translate into clear, actionable steps.

Relevance

While specificity was essential for making feedback actionable, teachers also emphasized that feedback needed to be relevant to their instructional context to be truly meaningful. Teachers again commented on the importance of providing individualized comments versus the standardized comments used by many evaluators. One teacher recalled being excited about her feedback saying, "But I got one from her that had actual typed feedback. And that was meaningful to me because I was like, okay, you saw something that you liked enough to type it in here. And so, it feels more like you actually fully saw this thing." Another commented that the standardized comments "make [the feedback] less meaningful" leading them to just "scroll through to see… what I got" and not even reading the standardized comments. One teacher even suggested the standardized comments "[do] not reflect what I did."

A few teachers suggested evaluators provide targeted feedback that includes guidance on where teachers can access relevant resources or professional learning opportunities to strengthen their instructional practice. One teacher commented, “If they had ways for the admin or somebody to plug in site-specific information, maybe that would be easier.” A second teacher mentioned it would be beneficial “if they said, you know, if you're looking to do this, here, check out this website or a link or something.” One teacher even felt it would be helpful if evaluators suggested colleagues they could observe to better understand how to implement specific strategies. She shared, “Even if they had a specific teacher, if they're like, go check them out or here's a video of them teaching… that would be helpful.” In the end, teachers valued feedback that was relevant to their instructional context, and valued comments that prompted reflection and change over those that felt generic or standardized.

Timeliness

While relevance influenced whether teachers viewed feedback as meaningful, its impact was also shaped by how promptly it was delivered. Most teachers valued feedback that was provided promptly after an observation, noting that timely delivery made it more impactful than feedback received after a delay. One teacher noted, “I like the idea of immediacy, of having that feedback when it is requested and when it is actually of use to someone who is being observed.” When asked how to improve the current evaluation processes, one teacher commented, “Maybe if I get observed second hour, she stays, we have a chat, and [feedback] happens right away.” Another teacher was appreciative of how the “feedback was face to face and kind of shortly after.” Conversely, one teacher felt the immediacy of the feedback made it seem like the evaluator hadn’t taken time to really think about his teaching and he doesn’t find that feedback as useful. He said, “When it happens immediately after an observation, I don't know if that's of any

use to me… It's like, okay, this was done hastily or… preemptively. So, I think that informs a lot. It definitely impacts the way I interpret the information." Ultimately, feedback seems to be most effective when delivered promptly after an observation, yet teachers caution that overly rapid feedback could potentially feel rushed and less thoughtfully constructed, possibly diminishing its impact.

Tone

While the timing of feedback was important, participants repeatedly noted that the tone of how the feedback was delivered often determined whether the feedback felt helpful or discouraging. Most even noted that they would be more open to in-person conversations with their evaluators than to receive written feedback. When discussing the tone of feedback, one teacher noted, "It's encouraging because it's nice" while another said, "I imagine if it was very scolding or mean or rude, I would be abrasive to that. So yeah, I think how it's written definitely affects how I receive it. I'm more open if it's just a conversation." To address misunderstandings in tone, one participant suggested in-person meetings with evaluators stating, "Just reading the words, you're not getting the full context. But if you're having that one-on-one meeting and able to discuss it, then it kind of helps with the tone." What most teachers could agree on is that the standardized nature of many of the comments made the feedback seem impersonal and not really about them. One stated, "It all feels a very copy and paste dry blend of what I feel like the State Department would want to see. I feel like we all got the same exact words and we're not all the exact same teachers."

Supportive Follow-Up

Teachers highlighted the importance of follow-up meetings after their observations, which provided opportunities to interpret feedback accurately and plan actionable next steps.

Reflecting on her first year teaching, one teacher said, “Every time we had an official post-conference meeting it took my whole plan. And honestly, as a first-year teacher, that was great. I gained a lot from it.” Another teacher commented, “I fully believe that conversing with my administrator has borne more fruit than anything else.” The face-to face feedback is invaluable to most teachers providing them with feedback that is both actionable and specific. Another participant shared, "I like having that face-to-face. Her feedback has been real direct. I like her style of critiques. So, it's been actionable feedback and stuff I can actually build on. It's that follow-up meeting where she gives her best feedback.” Teachers believed the post-conference meetings are when they received the most “beneficial information.”

One benefit of follow-up meetings was that evaluators were able to provide teachers with concrete examples for improving their instructional practices, along with resources to support those changes. “It's really that meeting at the end because then if you know there's an area that she says I need improvement on, we can talk about ways for that improvement to happen rather than it just being like, hey, improve this,” explained one participant. Another participant appreciated the extra examples he received during follow-up meetings in addition to the written feedback. He said, “But she goes on to provide examples like this is how you could do it. I really appreciate that because if she didn't provide that extra step of walking me through it and what it means, then I wouldn't know how to get that in the future ones.” Some evaluators take the time to offer additional resources during the follow-up meetings. As one teacher explained, “When I say, what about this? Can we try this? And they say yes, or you should see this person, and especially when they can connect you to resources, that's helpful.” A different teacher described how their evaluator said, “Here's some ideas on how to go for it. Here's what I want to see next time, that kind of thing.” She explained that kind of feedback often happened face-to-face and

was not always written. What another teacher valued most about the follow-up meeting was that "[he] could then take that observation, have an exit interview, refer back to it, talk about ways to improve it, and then implement that and be observed again to see if any change [had] been made." For teachers, the combination of specific, actionable feedback and accessible resources made follow-up meetings one of the most useful parts of the evaluation process.

Teachers also benefited from follow-up meetings as an opportunity to share additional context about their instruction, providing evidence of practices or interactions that evaluators may not have observed during formal evaluations. One teacher explained that these meetings were more effective because "she actually had a conversation rather than stopping in my room for 15 minutes and then leaving without even saying anything." During these discussions, teachers were able to explain parts of their teaching that evaluators had not seen, such as specific interventions or routines. As one participant shared, "she didn't observe any RTI stuff, so I explained my process of doing that." Another described how their evaluator "asked about the things she had not observed and just asked me how I'm implementing those things." These conversations allowed teachers to offer context, evidence, and reflection that helped evaluators better understand their professional practice, making the evaluation process feel more accurate and collaborative. For some teachers, these follow-up meetings also created space to question or clarify evaluation ratings. Teachers appreciated when evaluators were open to reviewing additional evidence or reconsidering a score after further discussion. One participant noted, "If there's anything maybe that I disagreed on, then we talked about it. And, hey, here's some evidence of this. And she can make those adjustments." Another shared that their evaluator "would listen to me and let me send her things she hadn't seen and would be willing to consider changing the [score]." This increased the trust teachers had in the evaluation process and

highlighted the importance of follow-up conversations. When evaluators showed a willingness to adjust scores based on new information, teachers perceived the scores as a more authentic reflection of their actual instructional practice.

Changes in Teaching Practices

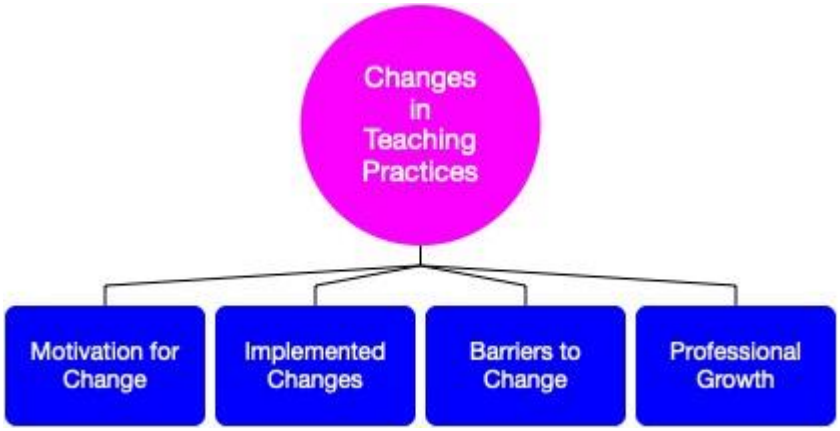


Figure 3 Changes in Teaching Practices theme cluster

Beyond how feedback was delivered and interpreted, teachers discussed how it influenced changes in their instructional practices. These reflections revealed what motivated them to make changes, the barriers they faced to making changes, and the growth that resulted.

Motivation for Change

The majority of teachers demonstrated a strong motivation to grow as educators, actively seeking opportunities to improve through collaboration with mentor teachers, instructional coaches, and through professional development. These teachers found value in receiving specific feedback and engaging in follow-up conversations with their evaluators, which allowed them to gain clarity, access additional resources, and more effectively implement changes to their instructional practice. One teacher stated, “I do what I'm supposed to do. Obviously, everyone can always get better and we should always be trying to reach and strive.” When discussing how he responded to evaluation feedback, another teacher explained, “The areas that I paid most

attention to are in professional growth and continuous improvement. That's what I wanted to improve on. I knew I wasn't mastering education yet. I wasn't doing everything as well as I wanted to for students, and the learning wasn't connected. So, I knew I had areas to grow." Even when teachers received high scores on evaluations, they still spoke of the need for improvement as one teacher reflected, "And while I have some good marks throughout these, I just think this is an area I need to continually work on and continually improve. I know I can do better."

Even though most teachers were motivated to seek out improvement on their own, some spoke of how they were still motivated by their evaluation scores. When discussing the importance of her evaluation scores, one teacher noted, "I'm anal and I want my score to be really high." Another teacher spoke directly to how high scores impacted his instructional practices sharing, "So when you get a four or five, it makes you think, okay, that's what I did right. I will act on this. I will continue to do this. That shows what worked." Echoing this perspective, another participant expressed, "I think the big thing was when she hit me with one of those [highly effective] and I went, are you sure? So, a lot of times I'm getting higher ratings than what I think I deserve… So, I start making little adjustments and wading a little deeper into the water. So, it gives you confidence to try new things or do new things that you maybe typically didn't have the confidence to do."

While high scores did occasionally motivate teachers to make changes to their instructional practices, some teachers reflected on how mid-range scores without additional, specific feedback could lead to confusion about how to change teaching practices stating, "When you get threes or below, it's very open. Which way should I go? Should I pull back on this? Am I getting a three because I'm not trying hard enough, or is it because I'm trying too hard?" In this case, some teachers felt specific feedback was needed in addition to the score in order to make

meaningful changes. Additionally, some felt that giving all high scores or failing to score an element was actually "doing a disservice" to teachers who want to grow professionally. They would rather have an evaluation score that was a true indication of classroom practices even if that meant receiving "needs improvement" instead of "not observed." One teacher stated, "I'm happy not getting a needs improvement, but also if I'm going to be the best teacher I'm going to be then I need to know how that not observed factors in. And I feel like that should be reflected on the evaluation." Another teacher reflected, "I would rather have one like that [lower scores] because I learn more from that. And it helps me grow as a teacher." Collectively, teachers occasionally viewed evaluation scores as a source of motivation with high scores reinforcing their instructional strengths and providing confirmation of effective practice, while lower scores offered direction and clarity on areas for growth and improvement.

In addition to finding motivation in their evaluation scores, teachers were also driven by the validating comments and specific, actionable feedback provided by their evaluators, which helped them understand not just how they were performing, but how they could continue to grow and refine their practice. When reflecting on feedback given by his evaluator, one teacher commented, "I thought this was encouraging because I thought this was a cool lesson and it worked well and I was glad for her to see it and also think it was a cool lesson. It was more like validation than actual guiding." When talking about evaluation scores, another teacher explained, "Scores mean nothing to me. The comments hold all the value. I need to focus on the comments they leave. And a lot of that comes from conversations I have with them outside of the evaluation." Another teacher described the importance of positive feedback stating, "I think most of my positive evaluations have come in the form of reinforced behavior. They noticed that I had done something and they congratulated it or gave a shout out to it."

Not only do teachers desire positive feedback that reinforces their current teaching practices, they are also motivated by feedback that is specific to their classroom context and beyond the standardized feedback. One teacher reflected, “Well, after the first one, when it was just the canned comments, I tracked her down and I was like, hey, what does this mean? Give me some more. What can I do?” Many teachers indicated they wanted feedback that clearly outlined the specific steps or strategies they could take to improve their instruction. One shared, “It's hard because my evaluating principal right now is so sunshine and rainbows… but I need you to rip me apart and tell me what I'm not actually doing well so I can do better.” Another teacher remarked, “I actually want criticism. I want to do better. I want to be a great teacher. You’ve got to tell me what I need to do better.” Teachers wanted to know “not that I'm just doing fine in those areas, but what specifically is it so I can make sure I keep doing those things.” Overall, teachers felt specific feedback was essential to their professional growth, as it not only clarified expectations but also provided concrete direction for improving instructional practices.

Implemented Changes

Teachers often viewed feedback and the accompanying resources from evaluators as motivation for meaningful change in their instructional practices. Many teachers described how specific, actionable feedback prompted them to reflect on their methods and make intentional adjustments in the classroom. One teacher reflected, “So the additional feedback that goes beyond just the stock response helps immensely because it shows that there was some intention. It does give you a basis for moving forward and actually enhancing perhaps your score or maintaining it.” When discussing changes made to his classroom procedures based on feedback, one teacher commented, “And all she had to do was call it out, like just tell me, hey, this is what I saw. And that's really helped how I managed disruptions and redirections in the classroom. So,

it's all been really good advice. It's very direct. It's been good." Another teacher pointed out the importance of personal comments over standardized comments when he said, "And this was one of the instances where she actually put a personal comment. So, she was actually following along with the lesson and she was engaged with the lesson while she was there. That's been helpful to know that I'm on the right track." When interpreting the feedback given, one teacher said, "I look at it and kind of reflect and think about, okay, what did they see? What did they not see?... If it's something I need to improve on or something that I can change, then I try to figure out, okay, how can I change it? How can I do it better?" Another teacher was self-reflective and commented, "Okay, well, she has a point. So, I'll Google ideas, suggestions, as well as whatever feedback I've been given. I'll just do more research and then try to fit it in how I can."

In addition to the feedback they received, teachers emphasized the importance of having access to relevant resources that could help them put suggested changes into practice effectively. A participant reflected, "All of my principals have been really good at facilitating growth. And if they can't help me, pointing to somewhere or something that can." Even when teachers are not accustomed to asking for help, evaluators provide timely resources that help teachers be reflective of their teaching practices. When discussing a follow-up session, a teacher recalled, "She does always end the session with how can I help? What do you need from me? And that is very helpful. I'm not good at asking for help, but she is good at forcing me to ask for help and sending me resources when I can't do it on my own." Other teachers find resources by accessing mentor teachers or the instructional coach. One remarked, "I would just ask her questions on designing lessons and how to handle classroom discipline, and it was really nice to have somebody I could go to before I had to go find a principal when I needed to ask questions." This was especially true for the emergency and alternatively certified teachers who had less classroom

training. One explained, “For not having gone to school for teaching and learning these things [classroom management and pedagogy], I appreciated the step-by-step check-in, feedback, and resources.” Generally speaking, teachers demonstrated that when feedback was specific, actionable, and supported with relevant resources, it led to meaningful changes in instructional practice and continuous professional growth.

Barriers to Change

While some teachers were able to implement changes based on feedback, others encountered barriers that limited their ability to fully apply new strategies or sustain improvements in their practice. Some participants identified a key barrier to making instructional changes was the lack of specificity of the feedback they received indicating it was not actionable enough to guide meaningful improvement. When discussing feedback given by an evaluator, one teacher explained, “I don't find it very actionable. I get a lot of like everything you do is great… but there's nothing for me to take and then grow with that.” Another teacher commented, “I haven't received a lot of meaningful feedback, just stock feedback.” This was not the only teacher who made comments about a lack of meaningful feedback and standardized comments. Another teacher stated, “You know there's a rubric that they're specifically going with, and just copying and pasting that in there doesn't give me much. And so, I read through it, but he didn't leave very many comments. And I was like, I can't do much with this.” One teacher felt that the standardized comments and feedback conveyed a sense that all teachers were the same, overlooking the individuality of their teaching and the unique contexts of their classrooms. He remarked, “It all feels a very copy and paste dry blend of what I feel like the State Department would want to see. I feel like we all got the same exact words and we're not all the exact same teachers.”

Another barrier teachers identified was the limited amount of time evaluators could dedicate to observing classrooms and providing thoughtful, detailed feedback. One teacher commented, “I don't know that just coming in for a little bit would be enough to go, hey, I really feel like you could grow your teaching if you did this. I just don't think they have the time to be in the room enough to see those minutiae.” Another teacher remarked, “I don't know if they're necessarily always being used effectively because a lot of times, I feel like you end up with a principal that comes in, she makes her rounds, and she's out. And she couldn't have observed anything in the amount of time she was in my class.” When recounting evaluations from a previous school year, a teacher stated, “I saw him maybe once a month in person. So, when he came and did an evaluation, he seemed to just check boxes and then leave. So, I read through it, but he didn't leave very many comments, and I was like, I can't do much with this.” Teachers did indicate they understood the time restraints that are placed on evaluators. When discussing how to revamp the current evaluation process, a teacher suggested, “It would be nice if there was a way to make it meaningful, but I think that admins are pulled in a thousand directions all the time. And so how do you make it meaningful for 120 faculty?” Another teacher reflected, “I think where it breaks down is that there are just too many obligations on the evaluator because they must go into numerous classes and potentially, they must do so across different disciplines… I think where it breaks down is in the expectation of the evaluator to be able to manage all of that in addition to all other roles that they need.” Generally, teachers felt that the usefulness of feedback was closely tied to the amount of time evaluators were able to dedicate to spending in the classroom.

A third barrier teachers identified involved the difficulty of implementing strategies from professional development sessions due to a lack of time and resources. One teacher commented,

“The problem is they send me to these things and then they don't do anything with it… So, I got some info and it was cool but also what's the point if we're not doing anything with it?” Another teacher stated, “It's mostly a lack of time and resources, so I'll find something new that I would like to implement, but it costs money or it's going to take too much time to set up.” Other teachers are just overwhelmed with all the opportunities, and without proper guidance, they do not know how to implement new strategies. One teacher reflected, “I'm not a career teacher so there's a lot of tools out there that I haven't learned about and might want to try that. And then I get into it and I get overwhelmed and go, nevermind.” Teachers expressed a need for additional support and guidance to effectively implement the strategies introduced during professional development sessions.

Professional Growth

Changes in teaching practices often originated from teachers seeking out professional development opportunities and outside resources that complemented the feedback they received from evaluators. Some teachers found outside resources on social media platforms or the internet. One teacher shared her experience with Facebook saying, “I'll see what people are doing in there, and a lot of times I'll take their ideas and then change it around so that it meets my style more.” Another teacher spoke of how they would use the feedback given by their evaluator and “Google ideas [and] suggestions…and then try to fit it in how I can.” Some teachers took advantage of opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in their building, drawing on one another’s ideas and experiences to enhance their instructional practices. One teacher explained, “I constantly reevaluate what I'm doing and try to emulate others or incorporate little bits of what they're doing. I do think that while we all have different approaches, what everyone's doing is fantastic.” Another teacher reflected, “Last year, I was able to observe more veteran teachers'

classes because my mentor teacher and I had the same plan. We would schedule classroom visits, and we would find class covers while I would go watch her class." Most teachers also identified the instructional coach as a valuable resource, providing meaningful feedback and helping them locate professional development opportunities aligned with their specific instructional needs. One teacher commented, "She's helped facilitate a one-hour sub cover, getting me into classrooms and watching teachers outside of the math department… so I can see people using more technology and other teaching styles." Another teacher explained, "Our instructional coach is really good at scheduling these meetings during plan or you just come by at the end of the day. She's really good at showing us new softwares, AI softwares that can make templates for us, and then even with our PLC, just kind of talking with each other." Primarily, teachers viewed ongoing feedback, collaboration, and access to targeted resources as important motivators of their professional growth, allowing them to continue to refine their teaching practice.

Conclusion

This study gathered the perspectives of ten science, math, and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers from three urban high schools in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The teachers participated in a semi-structured, in-person interview in order to better understand their perspectives of teacher evaluation processes and how those processes impacted instructional practices and professional growth. Their interview responses indicated most teachers recognized the dual nature of teacher evaluations. However, their perceptions of the purpose of evaluations were affected by the attitude of the evaluator towards the evaluation process, how evaluations were scheduled, and how much input the teacher had into the process.

Teachers identified several key characteristics of feedback that they perceived as most useful in guiding changes to their instructional practices. Teachers appreciated feedback that was

actionable, specific, and relevant to their teaching context. Many teachers noted that the standardized comments provided by evaluators were unhelpful and lacked relevance to their individual teaching practices. In addition to these characteristics, teachers also commented on the timeliness and tone of the feedback provided. For teachers, the most valuable component of evaluation feedback was the follow-up meeting, which provided an opportunity to discuss their evaluation, gain additional clarity, and address any questions or concerns.

While many teachers had a strong motivation to improve their instructional practices, some of them were still driven to make instructional changes by evaluation scores and positive feedback comments. Teachers continued to implement changes based on specific, actionable feedback and the resources that were provided during evaluations. They often experienced barriers to making changes when the feedback comments given were standardized or when evaluators did not have enough time to dedicate to the evaluation process. Regardless of these barriers, teachers continued to access other resources in order to continue to develop and grow professionally.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

Summary of Study

The evolution of school accountability led to a focus on student achievement and a shift in the role of principals to that of an instructional leader (Watkins et al., 2021). Within this new role, principals became responsible for fostering teacher growth and development, utilizing teacher evaluations as a key tool to support this process (Jenkins, 2009). The Self-Determination Theory helps us understand how the dual purposes of teacher evaluation can be integrated into a single framework that addresses both the formative and summative nature of evaluations while still supporting the basic psychological needs of teachers (Ford & Hewitt, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020). An important component of these evaluation systems is useful, accurate, and credible feedback that teachers can use to self-reflect in order to make changes to their instructional practices and grow professionally (Cherasaro et al., 2016; Ford, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to better understand how teacher evaluations impact instructional practices and professional growth. This study aims to identify specific characteristics of feedback that lead to changes in instructional practices, and evaluate how administrators can provide more constructive feedback to teachers during evaluations. The intent is to provide research for district and site administrators to utilize to ensure they are providing teachers with constructive feedback that leads to changes in instructional practices, professional growth, and increases in student achievement.

The primary research questions framing this study are:

1. How do teacher evaluation processes impact instructional practices and professional growth?

2. What are the specific characteristics of feedback that lead teachers to make changes to their instructional practices?

This study gathered the perspectives of ten science, math, and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers from three urban high schools in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The teachers participated in a semi-structured, in-person interview in order to better understand their perspectives of teacher evaluation processes and how those processes impacted instructional practices and professional growth.

Summary of Findings

Their interview responses indicated most teachers recognized the dual nature of teacher evaluations. However, their perceptions of the purpose of evaluations were affected by the attitude of the evaluator towards the evaluation process, how evaluations were scheduled, and how much input the teacher had into the process. Teachers identified several key characteristics of feedback that they perceived as most useful in guiding changes to their instructional practices. Teachers appreciated feedback that was actionable, specific, and relevant to their teaching context. Many teachers noted that the standardized comments provided by evaluators were unhelpful and lacked relevance to their individual instructional practices. In addition to these characteristics, teachers also commented on the timeliness and tone of the feedback provided. For teachers, the most valuable component of evaluation feedback was the follow-up meeting, which provided an opportunity to discuss their evaluation, gain additional clarity, and address any questions or concerns.

While many teachers had a strong motivation to improve their instructional practices, some of them were still driven to make instructional changes by evaluation scores and positive feedback comments. Teachers continued to implement changes based on specific, actionable

feedback and the resources that were provided during evaluations. They often experienced barriers to making changes when the feedback comments given were standardized or when evaluators did not have enough time to dedicate to the evaluation process. Regardless of these barriers, teachers continued to access other resources in order to continue to develop and grow professionally.

Implications for Teacher Evaluations

The results of this study offer several implications for improving teacher evaluations and the feedback process. Specifically, they point to the critical role evaluators play in fostering teacher growth and the conditions under which feedback becomes most effective in motivating teachers to make changes to their instructional practices.

Motivation for Change

The teachers in this study already exhibited a high motivation for making changes to their instructional practices. When describing their journeys into education and their desires that influenced them to become teachers, they were positive, commenting on the passion they have for educating children and the sense of meaning that it brings to their lives. Teachers also demonstrated a natural inclination towards growth and learning. They were actively seeking opportunities to improve through collaboration with mentor teachers, instructional coaches, and professional development. They found value in receiving feedback and having follow-up conversations with evaluators. This would suggest their engagement was driven more by internal commitment than by external pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020). While this may not always be the case for all teachers, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides us with guidance on motivating and/or maintaining the motivation of teachers by tending to their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020).

Autonomy refers to the idea of one's ownership of and ability to initiate their own actions. It is best supported through experiences of interest and value, and is hindered when there are feelings of external control (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the context of teacher evaluations, this looks like providing teachers with choices, acknowledging their perspectives, and allowing opportunities for self-direction (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020). Competence is best supported in environments that offer challenges, meaningful feedback, and opportunities for growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to this study, this can be accomplished by providing specific, actionable feedback in addition to the standardized comments that are provided by the evaluation system. This also means evaluators should communicate with teachers during follow-up meetings, and share information about relevant resources that align to teachers' individual goals. This is in alignment with other studies that indicate teachers' responses to feedback are related to their perceptions of the usefulness of the feedback, access to resources, and the opportunity to reflect with their evaluator (Cherasaro et al., 2016; Kraft & Christian, 2022; Ritter & Barnett, 2016; Vandermolen & Meyer-Looze, 2021). Relatedness refers to being connected and belonging. It is best supported when one feels respected and like they belong (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This is done by promoting a collaborative culture and building trusting relationships built on mutual respect between the teacher and evaluator. This is supported by Donaldson and Firestone (2020) who note that schools with ongoing instructional dialogue and strong teacher–administrator relationships are more likely to create conditions where evaluations support learning and professional growth.

Evaluators

School leadership is influential in the process of helping teachers make changes to their instructional practices by encouraging them to try new methods and approaches, monitoring

practice and assessment outcomes (Forrest et al., 2019) and providing constructive feedback on how to improve practice (Ford et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers are more likely to find feedback useful, and respond, if they also believe their evaluator to be credible (Cherasaro et al., 2016). Findings from this study highlighted the importance of the evaluator's role in making the teacher evaluation process meaningful. When evaluators approach their work with intentionality, consistency, and respect for teachers' expertise, teachers tend to view the process as a tool for growth rather than a tool of accountability. Teachers identified some important practices of evaluators that made the evaluation process more meaningful and the feedback more impactful for making changes to their instructional practices. When evaluators enter the classroom, their attention should be focused on the lesson being taught, the teacher's instructional strategies, and the student behaviors in response to those strategies. They should always be aware of distractions such as their cell phone, email or computer. This ensures evaluators can provide feedback that is specific to the classroom context and that is reflective of instructional practices and their impact on student learning.

Teachers also expressed concern about follow-up meetings and feedback being optional. There was an understanding that these meetings could not always happen when the classroom visits were brief, but felt the meetings should not be optional for formal observations. Teachers felt this was when they received their most valuable feedback, especially since the written feedback was mostly just standardized comments. According to Kraft and Christian (2022), almost every teacher in their study who felt their feedback was unhelpful said the feedback they received was not actionable, and their evaluator did not require them to reflect on their teaching. However, follow-up meetings with timely feedback provide teachers with strategies that can be implemented to help them grow professionally, improve instructional practices, and increase

student achievement (Ritter & Barnett, 2016). Additionally, during these meetings, evaluators should be open to discussing scores and the potential of revising them if teachers are able to provide evidence of meeting a standard for a given dimension or indicator. This flexibility reinforces fairness and acknowledges the complexity of instructional practices that may not be fully captured in a single observation.

Lastly, teachers emphasized the importance of having the same evaluator across consecutive years, noting that consistency allows for a more accurate measurement of growth and progress over time. It is understood that this is not always possible due to staffing changes, reassignment of roles, or other organizational changes that may lead to a change in evaluators. There are safeguards in place with evaluator training on the evaluation instrument that is supposed to ensure a consistency of scores between evaluators. However, it is recommended that the administrative team that will be conducting evaluations spend some time engaging in collaborative walk-throughs early in the year and debriefing after each visit to promote inter-rater reliability to ensure consistent feedback is being given to teachers.

Scheduling

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2012), successful evaluation instruments use multiple classroom observations throughout the year, and provide timely feedback that is meaningful for the teacher. In alignment with Ford (2018), the teachers in this study believed that how observations were scheduled affected their perceived usefulness and the value of the feedback given. While some did express that having input into scheduling reduced their stress level and allowed them to demonstrate effective practices, others argued that the scheduled nature of the observations led to a more performative lesson and did not reflect their actual

teaching practices. Despite these differences, teachers were able to agree on some key scheduling issues which have led to some recommendations for improving the evaluation process.

Teachers would like to have a general idea of when evaluators will be visiting their classroom for a formal observation. They do not need to know the exact day or class period that the evaluator will be in their classroom, but it would benefit them to have a tentative timeline for when that classroom visit is going to occur. Once the schedule is set, evaluators should make every effort to honor the schedule to ensure fairness in the evaluation process. Because teachers often plan lessons around their scheduled observations, missing a planned evaluation can result in evaluators observing an unintended portion of instruction rather than the teaching strategies or student interactions the teacher intended to highlight. This limits the opportunities for evaluators to provide meaningful feedback on the teaching and learning interactions that are occurring in the classroom. The caveat, however, is that observations should not be scheduled so precisely that teachers anticipate the exact visit, as this can result in performative rather than authentic instruction.

In addition to scheduled, formal observations, teachers requested more frequent, informal classroom visits as well. Multiple visits show that there is a genuine interest in making the teacher better (Ritter & Barnett, 2016), and allow evaluators to pick up on patterns in behaviors or practices that they would not normally see if they were only in the classroom for formal observations (Bell, 2022). In previous studies, teachers who reported feedback as useful were observed by their evaluators twice as many times as those who did not feel their feedback was useful (Kraft & Christian, 2022). Teachers in this study suggested making additional visits at different times in the class periods so evaluators could get an accurate representation of an entire class period. Not only does this practice allow evaluators to provide additional feedback outside

of their formal observations, it also provides an opportunity for them to see what is happening in the classroom on a typical day when the teacher is not expecting a visit. This may be a more authentic representation of instructional practices and student interactions. This aligns with the research of Prado Tuma et al. (2018) who state teachers who were observed more frequently and who received feedback more often were more likely to make changes to their instructional practices than teachers who only received feedback during formal evaluations.

Lastly, teachers requested that evaluators make time in their schedules to visit their most challenging classes, even for short periods of time. Teachers noted that these are the settings in which they would most benefit from targeted feedback and support. However, these class periods often coincide with the evaluator's busiest part of the day (e.g., lunch duty or supervision), resulting in limited opportunities for evaluators to observe and provide assistance, even when teachers specifically request it. Evaluators should make arrangements with other administrators to cover their duty or supervision in order to be present during the requested class period. This would allow evaluators to provide the targeted, specific feedback teachers are requesting and better support them in making meaningful changes to their instructional practices.

Feedback

According to Ryan and Deci (2020), the SDT argues that feedback can have varied functional significance, or meaning. Feedback can have informational significance and lead to increases in motivation when it provides input that improves efficacy and helps the person improve their competence. Conversely, feedback can have controlling significance and lead to a decrease in motivation when it is felt to be pressuring towards a specific outcome or behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Teachers in this study viewed feedback and the accompanying resources from evaluators as motivation for meaningful change in their instructional practice if the

provided feedback met a certain criteria and was in addition to the standardized comments that were provided by the evaluation tool. Teachers wanted evaluators to issue scores that were reflective of their instructional practices, even if those scores were low. Some requested evaluators issue "needs improvement" rather than "not observed" if a strategy was not observed but was actually called for during the lesson. Teachers believe that this provides a more accurate representation of their instructional practices and results in feedback that is more useful for their professional learning and growth. However, teachers emphasized the importance of these scores being paired with supportive, actionable feedback that they can use and implement to make meaningful changes to their instructional practices. This is in alignment with Ritter and Barnett (2016) who note that in order for the system to operate effectively, there must be feedback linked to the evaluation score.

The written feedback provided to teachers after a walk-through or formal observation should be both actionable and specific. Evaluators should provide actionable feedback based on observable evidence (Kraft & Christian, 2022) that is tailored to reflect what the evaluator expects from the teacher in order for them to prioritize what to do next (Wigert & Harter, 2017). The written feedback provided should go beyond the standardized comments and provide teachers with a call to action or an actionable plan they can follow to make meaningful changes to their instructional practices. Additionally, the feedback should be specific, providing instructions, examples, or directions for how a strategy can be used more appropriately or effectively (Cherasaro et al., 2016; Lavigne et al., 2023). Teachers noted that the standardized comments provided by many evaluators were not useful and lacked relevance to their specific classroom context. Effective feedback should go beyond generic phrases such as "Good job" and instead include specific details about what aspects of instruction were successful, what could be

improved, examples that justify the score, and actionable steps teachers can take to reach a higher score. Specific feedback could include but is not limited to concrete suggestions, directions, or examples of how to modify or use an instructional strategy; breaking down teacher and student behaviors to a "granular level" (Cherasaro et al., 2015; Lavigne et al., 2023; Marzano, 2012).

Teacher evaluations can motivate growth when paired with resources such as targeted training and professional development, using feedback to build capacity and improve instructional practice (Firestone, 2014). Teachers in this study requested feedback that was relevant to their specific classroom context. Many believed that the standardized comments were not a true reflection of their instructional practices or classroom environment, and preferred individualized comments that made them feel seen and their efforts recognized. They valued feedback that was relevant to their instructional context and comments that prompted reflection and change over those that were generic and standardized. In addition to individualized comments, evaluators should provide guidance on where teachers can find relevant resources to assist teachers in making meaningful changes to their instructional practices. This might include specifying locations within the building (e.g., library, resource room, curriculum materials), identifying other teachers or mentors, recommending relevant websites with instructional materials, sharing links to videos or tutorials, or directing teachers to other professional learning communities.

Evaluators should provide timely feedback, as it becomes less impactful and less likely to be used effectively the longer teachers must wait (Cherasaro et al., 2015). Teachers are more likely to remember recent experiences best, so feedback is most valuable when it is provided immediately after an observation. This allows the teacher to remember the events of the lesson

and more effectively determine how to use the feedback in future lessons (Wigert & Harter, 2017). It is recommended that feedback be provided within five days after a formal observation. If a follow-up meeting is planned, it should occur within this same timeframe. Evaluators are also cautioned against delivering feedback too quickly, as doing so may give the impression that it was hastily prepared and not thoughtfully considered. This is especially true when only standardized comments are provided and not individualized comments that are specific to the teacher and their classroom instruction.

There is always a possibility for a misunderstanding of tone when reading feedback that was written by an evaluator. To ensure this does not happen, it is suggested that evaluators meet with teachers for follow-up conversations in order to clarify the meaning of the feedback that was provided in writing. When a follow-up conversation with teachers is not possible, evaluators should ensure that feedback is specific, actionable, and directly relevant to the teacher's instructional context, rather than relying on the standardized, impersonal comments.

Current research agrees that follow-up meetings may be the most important contribution to improved teachers practices as teachers benefit from the opportunity to reflect during one-on-on conversions around instruction (Bell, 2022; Ritter & Barnett, 2016; Vandermolen & Meyer-Looze, 2021; Wigert & Dvorak, 2019). Traditional feedback tends to be one-way, infrequent, and focuses on the past. In order to be more effective, feedback should be open and honest two-way dialogue that builds relationships and focuses on teachers' strengths and future potential (Wigert & Dvorak, 2019). While evaluators often viewed follow-up conversations as optional, teachers consistently reported that these meetings were where they received their most meaningful and impactful feedback. It is suggested that these follow-up meetings not be optional and be held within five days of any formal observation. During these meetings, the evaluator and

teacher should interpret the feedback together and collaboratively determine an actionable plan with specific next steps for improvement. Teachers should ask clarifying questions about the written feedback, and evaluators should guide teachers through reflecting on their teaching and setting goals for professional growth. During these meetings, evaluators can even provide teachers with relevant instructional resources that may be helpful in making meaningful changes to instructional practices.

Implications for Oklahoma Evaluators

The Oklahoma State Board of Education provides for a statewide system of evaluation. State statutes require teachers to have annual evaluations that provide feedback to improve student learning. School districts should use a qualitative assessment tool that assesses observable teacher characteristics correlated to student success including organization and classroom management skills, effective instruction, professional growth, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills. Districts may include a qualitative measure at their own expense (Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System, 2023). Each school district Board of Education is required to annually review and maintain a written policy of evaluation and professional development. Each probationary teacher should be evaluated at least two times per school year. All other teachers, except for exempt career teachers, should be evaluated at least once per year. Career teachers with high ratings may be evaluated once every three years instead of annually (Establishment of Written Policy of Evaluation and Corresponding Professional Development, 2023).

The members of the state Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (TLE) Commission used criteria from the state statutes and national best practices to create a rubric to identify three potential evaluation frameworks that could be used by Oklahoma schools (Oklahoma State

Department of Education, 2024). All three evaluation frameworks are similar as they were chosen by the TLE Commission and reviewed using their created rubric. All three evaluation frameworks consist of a five-tiered rating system, and rubrics defining teacher and student evidence and classroom factors are included for all three systems. While the frameworks do not specifically outline how often teachers should receive feedback, the State of Oklahoma does provide districts with guidelines on the frequency of evaluations for teachers depending on years of service. All three evaluation frameworks are based on research of best practices, and describe their validation studies that link their evaluation system to increased student achievement. While each of the three frameworks are organized differently with their domains consisting of varying indicators, dimensions, or elements (strategies), they all address in some way classroom organization and management, instructional planning and implementation, interpersonal and leadership skills, and a focus on professional growth and improvement.

The Tulsa Model

The Tulsa Model was developed with teachers and is based on current research findings of best practices. During its development, a study group of evaluation experts, teachers, curriculum specialists, and principals reviewed and evaluated multiple evaluation models and research studies in order to recommend the principles that would guide the Tulsa Model Evaluation rubric. This framework assesses instructional practices and contextual factors that have been found to be associated with increased student learning and achievement. Additionally, this framework measures a teacher's ability to successfully manage classroom behaviors, develop plans that align with standards, use strategies that engage learners with the content and encourage higher levels of cognitive thinking, use data to differentiate learning experiences,

provide adequate and timely feedback, and create a learning environment that is inclusive of all students (Tulsa Public Schools, 2014b).

The Tulsa Model allows evaluators to be efficient and complete evaluations in a timely manner. Each indicator has a specific rubric that evaluators can use to score the teacher as well as copy into the comment section of their evaluation. Feedback could be ready to provide to the teacher before the evaluator even leaves the classroom. The organization of the evaluation instrument allows evaluators to stay on task during an evaluation and maintain attention to the instructional practices and student behaviors exhibited in the classroom. If evaluators are using this model, they have the ability to schedule observations and evaluations with teachers at their convenience. Follow-up meetings are recommended to occur within five days with this evaluation instrument. Districts can choose if these meetings are required, and if they are required to happen in person or if they can happen electronically. Even after scores are finalized, they may be revised based on follow-up conversations with teachers who can provide evidence demonstrating that they have met the requirements of a specific indicator. The specific rubrics that accompany each indicator do allow for inter-rater reliability. While the number of formal evaluations a teacher is to receive each year is mandated by state statutes, districts may choose to increase this above the state minimum. They may also choose if the scores from observations are averaged to produce a final overall evaluations score, or if the higher score for each indicator is used for the final evaluation score.

If evaluators are using this evaluation instrument, they are most likely using the standardized comments provided or copying the rubric for the indicator into the comments section. It is likely they are providing very little individualized, written feedback to teachers that is relevant to the teaching that was occurring during their observation. Also, this evaluation

instrument only provides a rubric and does not provide specific examples of instructional strategies that teachers could implement or student behaviors exhibited in response in order to achieve the goal of the indicator. If evaluators are using the standardized comments, they will need to ensure the follow-up meetings are not optional and that they occur in person. This will be the best way to ensure teachers are receiving actionable, specific, and relevant feedback. Unfortunately, this evaluation instrument does not contain embedded instructional resources to support teachers in implementing the identified strategies. As a result, teachers must rely on external materials or platforms to locate resources that align with the indicators of the evaluation tool.

Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model

The Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model is composed of four domains that guide the teacher through creating standards aligned plans to the implementation of the plan, accounting for the classroom environment and professional responsibilities. This framework was developed to not only measure teacher effectiveness by focusing on student results, but also to drive and support teacher growth and development by empowering teachers with supportive tools and resources.

This evaluation tool provides examples (desired effects) of not only effective teacher instructional strategies but also of the corresponding student behaviors that should result from those strategies. In addition to this, there is guidance on how teachers can monitor student responses for each element that is evaluated within this model. While there are rubrics that help evaluators determine how to score teachers on each element, there are no standardized comments that can be copied. Thus, any feedback apart from the examples included as check boxes must be

written as individualized comments. Because of this, the feedback provided is often not as timely as it may be with other evaluation instruments where the feedback can be copied from the rubric. The organization of the evaluation instrument allows evaluators to stay on task during an evaluation and maintain attention to the instructional practices and student behaviors exhibited in the classroom. If evaluators are using this model, they have the ability to schedule observations and evaluations with teachers at their convenience. Follow-up meetings are optional but recommended with this evaluation instrument. Districts can choose if these meetings are required, and if they are required to happen in person or if they can happen electronically. Even after scores are finalized, they may be revised based on follow-up conversations with teachers who can provide evidence demonstrating that they have met the requirements of a specific indicator. The specific rubrics that accompany each indicator do allow for inter-rater reliability. While the number of formal evaluations a teacher is to receive each year is mandated by state statutes, districts may choose to increase this above the state minimum. They may also choose if the scores from observations are averaged to produce a final overall evaluations score, or if the higher score for each indicator is used for the final evaluation score. A unique feature of this evaluation tool is that it provides teachers with access to additional resources within the program. Teachers can search for specific instructional strategies and locate articles, videos, and sample lessons designed to support their professional growth and instructional practice.

Because this evaluation model does not have standardized feedback comments that can be copied from a rubric, this instrument is not as efficient and feedback may not be as timely. It is also possible that, because each element requires individualized written comments, evaluators may leave some elements blank or provide minimal feedback by simply checking the evidence

boxes for that element. Even if written feedback is provided, there is no guarantee that the feedback is actionable, specific, and relevant to the teacher's instructional context.

Oklahoma TAP Teaching Standards

The Oklahoma TAP Teaching Standards were developed to meet the criteria of the teacher evaluation framework set forth by the Oklahoma State Department of education. It is a modified version of the TAP teacher standards that are utilized by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. The TAP teaching standards were originally developed based on reviews of research on teacher performance and guidelines from professional teaching standards associations. The research continues to validate the connection between instructional practices, student outcomes, and the performance indicators of effective teaching as outlined in the rubrics of this framework. (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching [NIET], 2013).

While this is currently an option for Oklahoma schools, no districts in the state use this evaluation system at this time (J. Perez, personal communication, April 16, 2025).

Policy Implications for Districts

The state statutes provide general guidelines for how teacher evaluations in Oklahoma should be carried out. However, they also require each district's Board of Education to annually review and maintain a written policy of evaluation and professional development. This allows individual districts to implement additional policies or procedures that extend beyond the state requirements. Based on this study, it is recommended that districts in Oklahoma consider the addition of some of the following procedures to their teacher evaluation policies. If the district is using The Tulsa Model, it is recommended that evaluators provide specific, individualized feedback instead of or in addition to the standardized rubric that can be added to the comments. If the standardized rubric is used, it is recommended that in person follow-up meetings are

required after each observation and evaluation. If the district is using Marzano, it is recommended that the district require specific, individualized comments be written for each element that is scored. Evaluators may also choose to check boxes for the teacher and student desired effects that are observed during the classroom visit, but this should not be the only feedback teachers receive. It is also recommended for this model that teachers receive in person follow-up meetings after each formal observation. For each of these models, the follow-up meetings should not be optional, and there should not be an option for the meetings to be held electronically.

It is also recommended that districts increase the minimum number of times an evaluator provides feedback to teachers each year. At this time, the state statute requires probationary teachers to be evaluated twice per school year, and non-exempt career teachers to be evaluated once per year. Exempt career teachers only have to be evaluated once every three years. The Tulsa Model requires that each evaluation be supported by two classroom observations. Therefore, these probationary teachers are receiving a minimum of four classroom visits per year. Evaluations on the Marzano model take the scores from all the classroom observations (formal, informal, and walk-throughs) and combine them together to get a single evaluation score. These probationary teachers could potentially only be receiving feedback twice per year. In order to increase the amount of actionable feedback teachers receive, it is recommended that evaluators increase the number of informal classroom visits. Districts should consider what is preferable and reasonable for their staff when making this decision as evaluators do have other responsibilities as well.

Recognizing that policy changes are not always feasible, this study includes a checklist designed to help evaluators ensure they are implementing the recommendations from this study.

This checklist is designed to serve as a quick reference for evaluators as they conduct teacher observations and provide feedback. It summarizes key recommendations from this study and can help evaluators ensure they are applying best practices consistently across classrooms. It is not intended to add another layer of compliance, but rather to serve as a guide for evaluators during their preparation, observations, follow-up meetings, or during alignment meetings with other administrators.

Observation/Evaluation Checklist Teacher Name: _____

Tulsa Model □ Observation □ Evaluation Evaluator Name: _____

Marzano □ Formal □Informal □ Walk-Through

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Evaluator - Full attention given to class - Follow-up meeting required - Flexibility in scoring - Inter-rater reliability	 □ □ □ □	 □ □ □ □	
Scheduling - Tentative schedule for classroom visit - Schedule honored - Scheduled around teacher's needs	 □ □ □	 □ □ □	
Feedback - Scores reflective of instructional practices - Written feedback - Actionable - Specific - Relevant to the instructional context - Timely (Within 5 days) - Provide Relevant Resources - Follow-Up Meeting - Required - In Person - Review Feedback - Clarifying Questions - Determine Action Plan - Timely (Within 5 days)	 □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	 □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study has implications related to how evaluators can better support teachers through teacher evaluation processes, it does have limitations. The sample group consisted of secondary educators in the Oklahoma City, OK metro area. Future research can expand this sample to include teachers at the elementary level and/or teachers in rural or suburban areas. Additionally, nine of the ten teachers in this study were alternatively certified teachers. A future study could determine if a variation in teacher certification pathways may influence how evaluations are perceived and utilized. Lastly, the school district in the study utilized The Tulsa Model. It would be interesting to examine if teachers using the Marzano model, where standardized comments are not available, have the same perceptions of teacher evaluations and the feedback that is provided.

Conclusion

Teachers in this study demonstrated a strong intrinsic motivation to be effective educators, expressing a genuine desire to succeed and continually improve their instructional practices. They responded positively to feedback that was specific, actionable, and relevant to their classroom context, as it provided clear direction for growth and reinforced their professional competence. However, this was often undermined by standardized comments that lacked personalization and contextual relevance. Such generic feedback failed to support meaningful reflection or instructional change, leaving teachers feeling disconnected from the evaluation process and less motivated to engage in continuous growth. In order to support meaning growth, ongoing reflection, instructional improvement, and increased student achievement, evaluators need to provide teachers with feedback that is specific and actionable, and support them with relevant resources. Additionally, they should always follow-up their

observations with in-person meetings that allow teachers to review their feedback, ask clarifying questions, and create a collaborative plan of action.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

All participants will participate in a semi-structured interview that will be recorded both visually and audibly. During the interview, I will be taking additional notes in my research journal. The interviews will last approximately 60 minutes, and will be transcribed using a third party, AI software. Participants will have the opportunity to read over the transcript in order to check it for accuracy and completeness. Additional interviews may be set up for follow up and clarification.

Interview Script/Questions

Hello, I am Carla Young and I am working on a qualitative study examining how teacher evaluations impact teacher practices, and the specific characteristics of feedback that lead teachers to make changes to their practices. This interview is being recorded and will be transcribed using AI. The interview should last approximately an hour and there may be a follow up interview if needed. Do you have any questions so far? (Allow time to answer questions.) Great. Let's begin.

1. What subject area do you teach and how long have you been teaching?
2. Do you have any other experience in education other than teaching?
3. Briefly tell me about your journey to becoming an educator.
4. What do you believe the purpose of teacher evaluations are? (*Prompts: Why do we do evaluations? What are they used for?)*
5. Can you describe what your most recent evaluation process looked like, from observation to feedback? (*Prompts: How often does it happen? Who gives feedback? What format is it in?*)

6. In what ways do you find the feedback you receive from your evaluations to be actionable? (*Prompts: Are there clear next steps? Do you know what to change or improve?*)
7. How do you typically interpret the feedback you receive? (*Prompt: Do you see it as helpful, critical, vague, motivating, confusing, etc.?*)
8. In what ways do you feel your interpretation is shaped by your relationship with the evaluator or the way the feedback is delivered?
9. Can you share a specific moment when evaluation feedback led to a meaningful change in your teaching practice? (*Prompt: What made that feedback helpful or impactful?*)
10. How much say or input do you feel you have in the evaluation process? (*Prompt: Are there parts of the process where you wish your voice was included more?*)
11. Where do you think the current evaluation process breaks down, or could be improved? (*Prompt: Timing, format of feedback, follow-up, etc.*)
12. If you could change one part of the evaluation process, what would it be and why?
13. Use of artifact: Was there a document or piece of feedback you brought with you today? Looking at this, was there anything that sticks out as being particularly impactful? (*Prompt: Can we look at it together? What does it reveal about how feedback is delivered or interpreted?*)
14. What barriers do you encounter to making changes to your teaching practices? How do you think the evaluation process could help you overcome those barriers?
15. Tell me about any induction programs or mentoring programs that you have been a part of as a teacher. How have these programs contributed to or impacted your current teaching practices? (Was this at your current school or a different school?)

16. What types of professional development does your school and/or district offer? How do you feel these professional development opportunities contribute to and/or impact your teaching practices?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?
18. Do you have any additional questions, concerns, or comments?
19. If needed, are you willing to be contacted again to complete a follow up interview in order to provide additional clarification?

Thank you so much for participating in this study. I plan to use a third-party software to transcribe this recording. Once the transcription is complete, I will share it with you in order for you to verify its accuracy. If you have any follow up comments or if you would like to provide any additional clarification, please reach out to me and we will set up another time to talk. If there is nothing you would like to add at this time, I will end the recording.

This is an adaptation of an original work by the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this adaptation should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its member countries

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

March 24, 2025

Dear Educator,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Carla Young, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Oklahoma. I am conducting a qualitative research study on the impact of teacher evaluations on teaching practices and professional growth. As part of this study, I am inviting educators like yourself to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview, where we will discuss your experiences with teacher evaluations in your district.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how teachers perceive their evaluations and whether they believe these assessments influence their teaching methods, professional development, and overall growth as educators. Your insights would be invaluable in shedding light on this important aspect of teaching and education policy.

If you choose to participate, the interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you in April or May. The discussion will be centered on your personal experiences and perspectives, and your responses will be kept confidential.

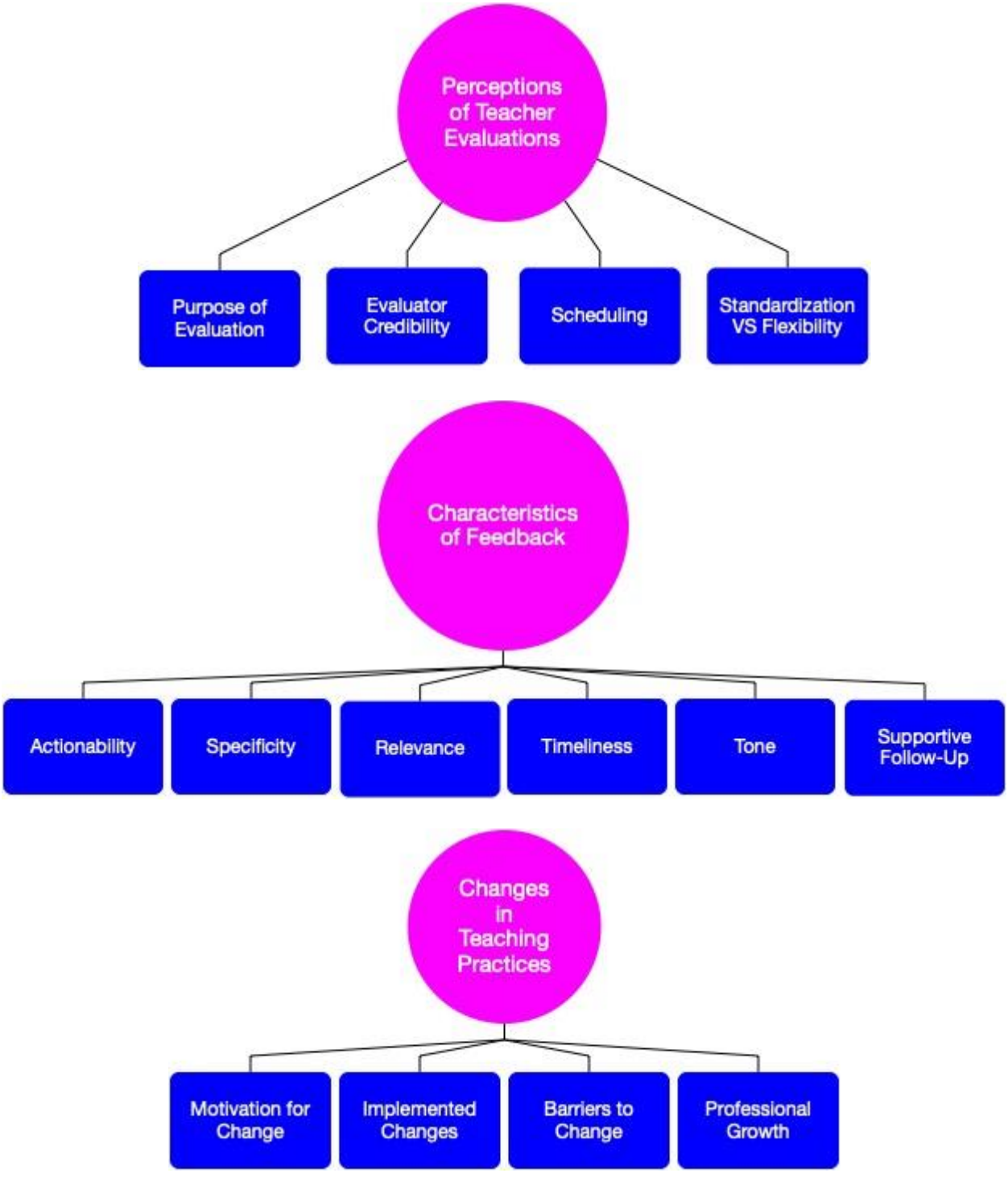
If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email by April 4, 2025.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. I would greatly appreciate your contribution to this important research.

Warm regards,

Carla Young

Appendix C: Code Chart



Appendix D: IRB Outcome Letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: March 12, 2025 **IRB#:** 18314

Principal Investigator: Carla D Young

Approval Date: 03/12/2025

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Teachers' Perceptions of Evaluation Processes and Characteristics of Feedback that Lead to Change- A Qualitative Study

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Lara Mayeux

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board