

A Study of Feedback Practices to Enhance Teacher Performance

A Capstone Project
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University of Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
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APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

This capstone project, “A Study of Feedback Practices to Enhance Teacher Performance,” has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This capstone focused on a problem of practice that is common to many schools and one that has persisted for decades: providing effective feedback to teachers. Some of the most important roles an administrator plays in education include evaluator, mentor, and coach to teachers, and, of these, their ability to provide constructive feedback to teachers is critical. This project examined the characteristics of effective feedback, how leaders plan for and deliver feedback, and what conditions exist for teachers to be receptive to receiving feedback. The research took place in three middle schools in a large, mid-Atlantic suburban school district. The study considered school leadership in the roles of the school principal and assistant principals. The literature reviewed included works on school leadership, feedback characteristics, and teacher evaluation systems.

This qualitative study was conducted from March - May 2019. Data were collected through reviewing school documents related to evaluation and feedback, interviews with assistant principals and teachers, and observing leader/teacher feedback sessions. Findings from this study yielded confirmation of the literature on effective feedback, the importance of planning for feedback sessions, the critical role of relationships in the feedback process, and how tenets from instructional coaching improve teacher receptivity.

Based on these findings and drawing on the literature, the following recommendations were made. 1) The evaluation process needs to be streamlined and differentiated. 2) Leaders would benefit from professional learning on effective feedback processes; and 3) School districts should work with principals to develop a protocol and tools to help to evaluate the feedback structures in their schools. **Keywords:** feedback, leadership, teacher evaluation

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that effective school leadership is “second only” to teacher effectiveness as the most important school-based determinant of educational outcomes (Hattie, 2003; Leithwood, 2004, p. 3; Rowe, 2003). Leithwood et al., (2004) found that leaders impact student learning through three key practices: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization. As expectations for improved student performance continue to rise, increasing emphasis has been placed on the leader’s role in developing people. Indeed, research indicates that some of the most important roles an administrator plays in education include evaluator, mentor, and coach to teachers, and, of these, their ability to provide constructive feedback to teachers is critical (Ovando, 2005).

This capstone focuses on a problem of practice that is common to many schools and one that has persisted for decades: providing effective feedback to teachers. Chapter one opens with a short vignette illustrating an all too familiar scenario. Subsequently, I articulate the specific problem of practice upon which this capstone focuses as well as its educational importance. The chapter then previews the literature on feedback and introduces the reader to the conceptual framework and research approach utilized to explore the focal problem of practice. The chapter concludes with limitations and delimitations of the study as well as the role of the researcher.

Meet Jenn

Jenn is an eight-year veteran mathematics teacher in a suburban middle school with a challenging, diverse population. After her first year, her administration expressed how pleased they were with her skills. She embraced technology, had great classroom management, and her students performed relatively well on the state standardized tests. Jenn was issued a continuing contract and was not evaluated again for three years.

Leading up to her second evaluation cycle in her fourth year as a teacher, Jenn felt confident in her instructional abilities. She had become the math 7 team leader and other teachers loved to use her materials. She enjoyed the praise, but there was always the nagging worry about the 15 – 20% of her students who were not passing state exams despite her best efforts. At the initial pre-conference kicking off her second evaluation cycle, Jenn expressed this concern to her evaluating administrator. He assured her that he would look for ways to support her. As the year continued, Jenn kept waiting for the administrator to come into her room to see what she was doing and provide the support he had promised. Right before the winter break, the administrator popped in for an observation. At the time, Jenn was circulating as the students worked in groups. Before she could transition to more active instruction, the administrator had left. At the end of the week, the administrator emailed her a hastily written summary of his observation, which was full of praise and included only one suggestion. During his visit, he had observed one group joking around when she was at the other end of the room and suggested she find ways to make sure all students were on task. She was asked to print out the form, sign her name as acknowledgement of the midyear review and place a copy in his mailbox. Near the end of the year, another email arrived from the administrator documenting an observation of Jenn during a March team meeting citing her professionalism and ability to collaborate. The final evaluation was also included proclaiming Jenn a wonderful teacher in which she met or exceeded all standards.

As her 8th year approached, Jenn was notified by the new administrative team that she was in her 3rd evaluation cycle. Even though she should have been evaluated the previous year, the turmoil following the ousting of the former administration prevented it from happening. Jenn wondered if the new leadership would be able to provide the effective feedback she craved.

Utilizing some district professional development courses, she had adjusted her instructional techniques and experienced small gains in reaching the most challenging students but knew she could do more if someone more experienced and knowledgeable worked with her on a regular basis. If things did not change this year, Jenn would start looking at transferring to another school as a way to grow and learn.

Problem of Practice

The typical administrator spends about 10% of their time on teacher observations and professional development (Hornig, Kalogrides, and Loeb, 2010). When administrators do observe teachers, they typically produce a brief factual summary of the events that took place, provide kudos, and perhaps offer a few suggestions for improvement. Very little time is dedicated to this process (Grissom, Loeb, and Master, 2013). Providing high quality feedback is essential to improving teacher performance, while a failure to provide substantive feedback is not only a wasted opportunity but can also have negative consequences.

Research shows feedback increases learning outcomes, self-regulation, and the efficiency of the learner (Shute, 2008). In a study of K-12 students, Shute (2008) concluded “that feedback generally improves learning, ranging from 0.40 *SD* . . . to 0.80 *SD* and higher” (cited in Khachatryan, 2015, p. 176). Similarly, Hattie and Timperley (2007) found their meta-analysis of feedback to elementary and secondary students yielded an average effect size of 0.79, depending on its features and how it is delivered. There is evidence that adult learning shares similar effect sizes but the lack of empirical studies involving adults highlights a gap in the current body of feedback literature.

Hattie (2003) examined all of the variables that have a major impact on student

achievement including home life, peers, teachers, principals, and even considered student perceptions as a factor. His findings were clear: effective feedback matters. Hattie went on to argue that educational leaders “should focus on the greatest source of variance that can make the difference – the teacher” (p. 3). Further, Shute (2008) found that “good feedback can significantly improve learning processes and outcomes, if delivered correctly” (p. 154).

Hattie and Timperley (2007) posit, “Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative” (p. 81). The impact is most likely to be positive when feedback is specific, timely, and focused on the task rather than the learner. The impact is most likely to be negative when it is broad, corrective, and inconsistently delivered. Thus, if administrators do not provide consistent professional development and technical feedback, inconsistent implementation of effective teaching practices is likely (Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee, 2004).

Clearly, attention needs to be given to developing teachers by providing them with effective feedback. The focus of this capstone is the delivery of effective feedback from leaders to teachers. I have collected data to gauge both teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions about what feedback they think improves instruction. Specifically, I am interested in understanding what effective feedback from leaders to teachers looks like, how leaders plan for and engage in providing effective feedback, and what conditions promote teacher receptivity and changes in their practice as well as what conditions impact the receiver negatively.

Defining Feedback

Feedback is defined by Kluger and DeNisi (1998) as “providing people with some information regarding their task performance” (p. 67). Similarly, Butler and Winne (1995) (as

cited in Hattie, 2007, p. 82) assert that “feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies” (p. 5740).

Hattie and Timperley (2007) elaborate further by offering the following definition of feedback:

(F)eedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding. A teacher or parent can provide corrective information, a peer can provide an alternative strategy, a book can provide information to clarify ideas, a parent can provide encouragement, and a learner can look up the answer to evaluate the correctness of a response. Feedback thus is a “consequence” of performance (p. 81).

Although the previous definition refers to feedback delivered by teachers to students, many researchers extrapolate these findings to educational leader-teacher feedback processes. For example, Khachatryan (2015) posits that “(w)e can expect to see changes in teaching performance if feedback directs a teacher’s attention to learning or motivational processes” (pp. 169-170). While there are likely strong similarities between the characteristics of feedback provided by teachers to students and by leaders to teachers, the scarcity of literature on this topic represents a significant gap in the existing literature on feedback.

In their oft cited seminal meta-analysis of over a century of feedback theories and research, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) developed a deeper understanding of what is meant by feedback. Drawing on two different psychological theories, goal theory (Locke and Latham, 1990) and control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981) which are both goal-oriented theories in

which an individual wishes to achieve a standard, Kluger and DeNisi argue that a gap exists between the realization of the goal and the individual's actual performance. In order "(t)o achieve goals or standards, people use feedback (whether provided by an intervention or not) to evaluate their performance relative to their goals" (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996, p. 259). In other words, feedback is the means by which we can close the existing standard-performance gap and achieve goals (Erez, 1977).

So where does feedback fit into instruction? Although there is a broad research base regarding effective instructional practices, research indicates that many teachers are not able to successfully apply best practices in the classroom (Schuler, Ruhl, and McAfee, 2004). There are a variety of reasons for this. Johnson (2006), for example, cited technical, political, and cultural barriers to teacher's change in practice. Additionally, teachers may not have the skills, opportunity, support, or confidence to enact changes. Administrative support and guidance can help teachers overcome these barriers (Johnson, 2006).

It is clear feedback is important in changing teacher effectiveness and researchers have defined the conditions for effective feedback. Practices supporting the delivery of effective feedback versus ineffective feedback is explored in chapter two. What is less clear, however, is what role leaders play in providing feedback and what actions they can take to help teachers improve their craft. The next section explores these issues.

The Leader's Role in Providing Effective Feedback

Teachers crave quality feedback but unfortunately the feedback leaders provide often has little or no impact on classroom instruction (Khachatryan, 2015). Research on schools where student achievement gains have been sustained across demographic groups confirm that teachers valued and practiced continuous improvement largely through professional interactions with

fellow teachers and administrators (Little, 1982). Darling-Hammond (2013) found improving instruction is best accomplished when the teaching is assessed, concrete and timely feedback is provided, and teachers take time to reflect on the data. Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) found that “time spent on teacher coaching, evaluation, and developing the school’s educational program” were linked to student achievement gains (p. 433). Thus, in the ideal school the evaluation process would provide an opportunity for teachers to be observed and provided instructive feedback. However, this ideal is rarely realized. Blase and Blase (1998) captured one teacher’s thoughts on the topic: “The evaluation process does not provide any feedback to change instructional methods.... I feel *frustrated* and in some ways angry. I want to improve” (p. 46).

Although instructional leadership is a term often used in the literature, there is very little research on how administrators provide feedback to teachers and how teachers reflect on what they are told (Khachatryan, 2015; Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee, 2004). As part of a Rand Corporation study in the 1980’s, Darling-Hammond (2014) asserted that she and her colleagues “searched the country for effective evaluation systems and found ourselves rummaging for the proverbial needle in a haystack. We discovered only a very few that offered opportunities for teachers to set goals and receive regular, useful feedback” (p. 5). She states little has changed since then. Hallinger, Heck, and Murphy (2014) called the last few decades a “period of relative neglect and pessimism” (p. 6) when it comes to research on effective teacher evaluation systems but also note an increasing call for more work in this area.

Marshall (2005) cited 10 reasons why conventional evaluation models are ineffective. The reasons included the large number of responsibilities of administrators, lack of judgmental feedback, lack of time in classrooms, and the fact that high stakes evaluations can shut down

adult learning. “Most principals are too busy to do a good job on supervision and evaluation” (p. 731). If individuals do not perceive the feedback they receive to be meaningful and useful, they will not change their practices (Kinicki, Prussia, Wu, & McKee-Ryan, 2004).

Much of the research about leadership and schools focuses on the many other roles administrators must play. Although this is not too surprising given the multiple roles and responsibilities of building level leaders, it is terribly unfortunate. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) suggest one reason for the dearth of research on feedback to teachers is a lack of an agreed upon feedback theory. In chapter two, I discuss multiple feedback theories, the differences and similarities between these theories, and research on feedback that reflects and supports these theories as scholars have explored the conditions and types of feedback that are most likely to improve instruction. In the next section, I provide a preview of a conceptual framework that informed my research and makes the connection between the actions of leaders and effective feedback practices.

Preview of Conceptual Framework

This capstone draws its conceptual framework from two different research domains, leadership practices and the tenets of effective feedback. Leithwood et al., (2004) highlights the importance of a leader’s ability to develop people, and Ovando (2005), Darling-Hammond (2013), and Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) found that the best way to develop teachers is through providing effective feedback. Van Houten (1980), Kluger and DeNisi (1996), and Hattie and Timperley (2007) collectively outline the dimensions of effective feedback. These include environmental considerations such as timeliness, frequency, and the method in which the feedback is delivered as well as the content of the feedback to include specificity and whether the feedback is focused on the teacher or the task observed. In chapter two, the distinction between

actions that contribute to effective feedback and those that do not is explained.

These two areas of research are woven together in an intentional way, allowing me to explore my problem of practice from a perspective informed by both effective leadership and feedback practice. The conceptual framework is further discussed in chapter two, where I share the research from both domains, describe how they were woven together, and explain how they are used within this capstone research project.

Research Questions and Preview of Methodology

This capstone focuses on two key elements in the provision of effective feedback: the specific actions taken by the leader delivering the feedback, and the factors that influence the feedback interaction, such as the context in which feedback is provided and the content of the feedback delivered. Building on the work of Van Houten (1980), Hattie and Timperley (2007), Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004), and Kluger and Denisi (1996) outlined in the conceptual framework, the following research questions emerge concerning the delivery of feedback from an educational leader:

Question 1: What is the nature of effective feedback from leaders to teachers?

Question 2: How do leaders plan for and engage in providing effective feedback?

Question 3: What conditions promote teacher receptivity and changes in their practice as well as what conditions impact the receiver negatively?

These questions stem from the conceptual framework and drive the research study I conducted. The next section previews how the actions I took help me in answering these questions in my capstone research.

Research Design

Since the role of feedback in changing instructional practice is one of the most important components of a leader's role, I researched existing conditions in a large, suburban school district to gauge both administrators' and teachers' perceptions of its effectiveness. I worked with school district leadership to identify administrators through a combination of their professional knowledge and standardized survey data. This is known as purposive sampling.

The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants (Tongco, 2007, p. 147).

The school administrators identified teachers willing to participate in an observation and post-observation conference. I observed the conference and the interaction was audio recorded. I then conducted interviews with the administrators and teachers to gauge their perceptions on what leadership actions had the most impact on the effectiveness of the feedback. There are three primary data sources: the observation of the administrator-teacher conferences, the perception data from the administrators' and teachers' interviews, and an analysis of artifacts relevant to the feedback process from the district and school. Using three sources of data equates to triangulation, which uses different sources of observers and interviews to balance out the potential subjectivity of qualitative research methods (Flick, 2004)

After the data were collected, it was coded in two ways: open coding to determine the themes that arise from the data and closed coding using the constructs derived from the conceptual framework. With regard to the latter, the study compares what actually occurred

during the post-observation debrief with what the research says about effective feedback. Additionally, the interview data compare teacher and administrator perspectives regarding effective feedback as well as their perceptions regarding the feedback session observed. An analysis of the results in chapters four and five provides analysis, recommendations, and areas of future study.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of this study lie mostly in the small sample size. A limited number of teachers and administrators were interviewed and observed across a large, suburban district. Further limitations of the study is the short amount of time over which data were collected. Because of these limitations, generalizing the findings across multiple contexts is not the intent nor applicable.

The delimitations of this study include focusing on one grade band (middle school) in one large suburban district. This is an exploratory study and as such is not focused on a variety of very important issues, such as the experience levels of the administrator and teacher. These are noted in the analysis but they were not included in the study design. Similarly, the study design did not take into account school demographics (diversity, poverty, and special education population).

Role of the Researcher

Northouse (2012) describes a leader as someone who influences a group of individuals to accomplish a common goal through active relationships with followers. As a leader, a core belief I hold is that professional learning plays a critical role in enhancing competence in others. There are no more important duties of a leader than to hire competent people and develop them

to their fullest potential. This study has been influenced by my belief in developing people and that providing effective feedback is a primary avenue to teacher development.

Organization of the Capstone

This chapter introduced the problem of practice through a vignette about a mid-career teacher seeking effective feedback from her administrator. It serves to preview the study of administrators and teachers during the observation process. The purpose of the study is to answer research questions seeking to understand the nature of effective feedback practices, the role of the leader, and how this influences teacher responsiveness. This has been accomplished through observations, interviews, and examination of school-based artifacts. The next chapter takes a deep dive into the existing body of research on effective feedback identifying both what it is and what it is not. A conceptual framework merges the literature on leadership actions and the nature of effective feedback into a single model that shapes the research. Chapter two sets the stage for chapter three which utilizes the conceptual framework to create the study's methodology. The final chapters present the research data, discuss the findings, and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing feedback to individuals across multiple contexts has been studied extensively (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996); however, sparse attention has been devoted to understanding how leaders provide effective feedback to teachers. This literature review explores two key areas of research: effective feedback and the role of leaders in providing feedback. The review begins by examining several feedback models that set the stage for a discussion of what constitutes feedback and what does not. Next, I examine what the literature deems as effective feedback. Subsequently, the focus shifts to the role of educational leaders in supervising, evaluating, and developing their teaching staff. The chapter concludes by highlighting the research gaps that exist and opportunities for further exploration.

Feedback Models

In 1980, Van Houten contributed to the literature by conducting multiple empirical studies on the feedback teachers were providing to students. In 2004, Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee took Van Houten's work and organized the attributes of his findings into three broad categories: (a) the nature of the feedback (content), (b) the temporal dimensions of feedback (frequency and timing in relation to the event), and (c) who delivers the feedback (peers, supervisors, or "agent" (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996, p. 296; Hattie and Timperley, 2004, p. 81)). This work, although focused on how teachers use feedback in the instruction of students, provides a useful framework but does not yield results specific to effective feedback practices when observing teachers. There are many areas of overlap but the shortcomings of this framework must be noted.

Kluger and DeNisi (1996) introduced the idea of Feedback Interventions (FIs) which they "defined as actions taken by (an) external agent (s) to provide information regarding some

aspect(s) of one's task performance” (p. 256). They further developed Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT), a conceptual framework from organizational psychology theorizing about the intervention itself in addition to the recipients of the intervention.

FIT posits that feedback interventions work by providing new information that redirects recipients' locus of attention either away from the task (*e.g.*, toward ourselves or toward irrelevant tasks) or toward the details of the task. Information that redirects attention toward the details of the task tends to strengthen the feedback's effect on task performance; information that shifts attention away from the task tends to weaken this effect. Consequently, Kluger and DeNisi proposed that three factors determine how effectively this attentional shift occurs: characteristics of the feedback itself (or “feedback intervention cues” in FIT parlance), task characteristics, and situational variables (Hysong, et al., 2006).

Since Kluger and DeNisi published their conceptual framework for FIs in 1996, many researchers have used their model as a lens to understanding the feedback process. An example by Hysong, et. al. (2006) can be found in Appendix A. This example takes the three variables and creates a flow chart outlining a series of yes/no questions on the feedback process along with likely impact. Although FIT provides a solid framework for research, it tends to ignore many other important variables such as timing, frequency, and the interplay of positive versus correctional feedback.

Narciss and Huth (2004) proposed a model that connected the instruction, learner, and feedback. They “asserted that designing and developing effective formative feedback needs to take into consideration instructional context as well as characteristics of the learner to provide effective feedback for complex learning tasks” (Shute, 2008).

The feedback factor consists of three main elements: (a) the *content* of the feedback (i.e., evaluative aspects, such as verification, and informative aspects, such as hints, cues, analogies, explanations, and worked-out examples), (b) the *function* of the feedback (i.e., cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational), and (c) the *presentation* of the feedback components (i.e., timing, schedule, and perhaps adaptivity considerations) (p. 172).

Hattie and Timperley (2007) present a more learner centric model for feedback which can be found in Appendix B (p. 87). The model draws on the work of Kluger and DeNisi (1996) to expand their view that feedback “reduce(s) discrepancies between current understandings and performance and a goal” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 86). Closing this performance-standard gap is accomplished by thinking about feedback being provided in four levels: task, process, self-regulation, and self.

To explain the four levels, it is helpful to provide examples. The first level is about the task or product an individual is working on. For example, an administrator may examine a teacher’s lesson plan and suggest building in strategies for English learners. The second level aims at the process in which a teacher creates or completes a task. An administrator may suggest to a teacher that working collaboratively with another teacher on creating a lesson plan may enhance the final product. The third level focuses on self-regulation. An administrator may ask a teacher to use an engaging strategies checklist to gauge if the lesson plan she created will keep the attention of her students. Butler and Winne (1995) called “attention to the significant role of internal feedback in enabling self-regulated learning, where a high amount of self-regulation is tied to an effective and economic learning process. Such learners monitor themselves and their process of engagement by creating and analyzing internal feedback” (Krenn, Würth, and

Hergovich, 2013, p. 79). The fourth level of feedback can be personal and often times is unrelated to performance on the task itself. An administrator may say, “You were great today during the Algebra lesson!”. Hattie and Timperley (2007) concede the last level, self, is the least effective and can even be detrimental. It may draw the attention of the learner away from the task or process. They include this level not for its effectiveness but because it is often present in the feedback process.

Taken together, these models can be synthesized to create a comprehensive inventory of the components of feedback. Using the three broad categories of nature (content), temporal dimensions (timing and frequency), and agent (who/what is providing the feedback) as an overarching umbrella, the next section breaks down the components.

What Is Feedback?

This section explores the aspects of feedback by grouping practices into three broad categories (nature, temporal dimensions, and agent). The intent of this section is to explore the aspects of feedback but not try to portray attributes as either positive or negative. Aspects presented here are referred to because they are present during the feedback process. Further discussion about effective feedback processes is explored in the next section.

Nature of feedback.

The nature of feedback, as it is referred to in the literature, encompasses the content of what is delivered (Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee, 2004). “Feedback content includes such attributes as whether it is corrective or non-corrective, general, positive, or specific” (Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee, 2004, p. 397). Included in this component is both generic and specific praise – whether directed at the individual or the task. This distinction is important to feedback

effectiveness, which is discussed in the next section. Each of these components can work in tandem or independently in the feedback process. The research is still mixed on the correct combination, particularly when it is applied to feedback provided to a teacher from an administrator.

The nature of feedback also includes the medium in which the feedback is provided. Is the feedback written or delivered face-to-face? The context in which feedback is delivered has been cited as an important component of the process (Cavanaugh, 2003; Narciss and Huth, 2004). This discussion begins to broach the subject of the timeliness in which feedback is received because the medium may play a major role on how quickly the recipient gets feedback. For example, if an administrator is typing up notes from an observation, they can be shared with the teacher electronically immediately following the session. More on this topic is discussed below.

A final component germane to the discussion about the nature of feedback relates to the connection feedback has to goal acquisition. Carver and Scheier (1990) promoted “the idea that expectancies about one's eventual outcome are an important determinant of whether the person responds to adversity by continuing to exert effort at goal attainment or, instead, by disengaging from the attempt” (p. 20). Connecting feedback to goals is an important part of the discussion in determining if feedback is effective or not.

The nature of feedback research, particularly as it applies to administrator-teacher interactions, lacks significant empirical evidence.

Empirical studies of the impact of principal actions and policies on teacher thinking are rare. In research on teaching, the portrayal of students as active interpreters of teachers' lessons represented a noteworthy advance. However, most studies of principal leadership

do not portray teachers as active interpreters of principals' actions or policies. When teachers are surveyed, they typically are asked questions aimed at identifying school-level variables such as teacher perception of school climate. However, they are rarely asked what sense they have made of the principal's policies or actions (Stein & Spillane, 2005, p. 35 as cited in Khachatryan, 2015, p. 167).

To truly understand the nature of feedback as it relates to school leaders supporting teachers' improvement, more research needs to be conducted. The next section discusses the temporal dimensions of feedback, specifically timing and frequency.

Temporal dimensions.

When examining the body of research regarding feedback, temporal dimensions have dominated the literature because it is concrete, can be controlled, and relatively easy to measure. Van Houten (1980) found with school-aged children, the more frequently feedback is given, the better. When measuring how frequently feedback was occurring in classrooms, several studies found the occurrence to be low (Bond, Smith, Baker, and Hattie, 2000). Hattie and Timperley (2007) compared immediate feedback versus delayed feedback and concluded the complexity of the task and the level of feedback (product and process compared to self-regulation and self) determined the optimal timing when delivering feedback. Shute (2008) also noted conflicting findings when studying the topic of timing. These are discussed later in the chapter when the components of effective feedback are explored.

Agent.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) along with Kluger and DeNisi (1996) introduce the idea of the source of feedback to be called the "agent". Quite often it is the observer and in the case of

teachers, often times an administrator acting as an evaluator. Blase and Blase (2000) gave 800 teachers a survey on feedback. One of their major findings showed that effective principals are critical friends who can provide thoughtful discussions with their teachers.

Brinko (1993) cites that the source of feedback does not always have to be a living person. Video recordings, student achievement scores, educational journals, and attendance records all provide information to the subject and therefore can be considered an agent. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that feedback from a trustworthy source is sometimes considered more seriously than other feedback. “Computer-based feedback is often thought to be better than human-delivered in that perceived biases are eliminated” (Shute, 2008, p. 177). Cavanaugh (2013) reported that “performance feedback was effective when delivered in a variety of formats including self-monitoring of audio or video, visual display of data using graphs, and e-mailed descriptions of teachers’ use of effective practices” (p. 124).

Taken together, these three categories (nature (content), temporal dimensions, and agent) constitute the components of feedback. Within the literature, other topics are often closely associated with feedback. The next section reveals, for the purposes of this literature review, what is not considered feedback.

What Is Not Feedback?

Praise and rewards.

A meta-analysis on teacher praise by Wilkinson (1981) found an insignificant relationship to student achievement. In fact, it often distracted students from the task at hand. Hattie and Timperley (2007) found “praise, punishment, and extrinsic rewards were the least effective for enhancing achievement” (p. 84). They conclude

Feedback at the self or personal level (usually praise), on the other hand, is rarely effective. Praise is rarely directed at addressing the three feedback questions and so is ineffective in enhancing learning. When feedback draws attention to the self, students try to avoid the risks involved in tackling challenging assignments, to minimize effort, and have a high fear of failure to minimize the risk to the self.

Providing praise and tangible rewards such as stickers and awards are considered contingencies to activities rather than feedback because they contain such little task information (Deci, Koestner, and Ryan, 1999).

Control.

Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) explored the connection between control, rewards, and self-regulation. They found that controlling an individual can have short term success in changing behavior, but unlike effective feedback, it ultimately has negative implications on intrinsic motivation.

Although rewards can control people's behavior—indeed, that is presumably why they are so widely advocated—the primary negative effect of rewards is that they tend to forestall self-regulation. In other words, reward contingencies undermine people's taking responsibility for motivating or regulating themselves. When institutions—families, schools, businesses, and athletic teams, for example—focus on the short term and opt for controlling people's behavior, they may be having a substantially negative long-term effect (p. 659).

Hattie and Timperley (2007) further found “when the feedback was administered in a controlling manner (e.g., saying that students performed as they “should” have performed), the effects were even worse (-0.78)” (p. 84). When feedback is used as a control mechanism, it can lead to greater surveillance, evaluation, and competition. This environment has been found to lessen engagement and self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

For educational leaders, the next section may be the most important and relevant. What are the conditions and attributes that make feedback effective? Shute (2008) completed a meta-analysis of what is known to date and produced a set of guidelines about feedback that improves learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) also offer important findings from their meta-analysis. The next section synthesizes major findings and incorporates the relevant literature.

What Constitutes Effective Feedback?

It has been established that teachers want feedback and further shown that feedback can improve instruction. Improved instruction leads to enhanced learning. But as Shute (2008) points out, only “if delivered correctly” (p. 154). In this section, the most notable findings from the literature about delivering effective feedback is presented.

Feedback is more effective when it is positive and focused on the task, not the learner.

Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) findings show that feedback is more effective when it provides information on correct rather than highlighting incorrect responses. Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004) found that feedback that is positive and specific results in positive changes in teacher behavior. They further claim that positive feedback increases the use of positive reinforcers, the number of questions asked by teachers to check student understanding, the verbal

interactions with students, and promotes effective classroom management behaviors. Kluger & DeNisi (1996) and Cavanaugh (2013) note that performance feedback was found to be most effective when it focused on the task and not the person.

Feedback is more effective when it is specific.

Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004) found that specific feedback resulted in an increase in the amount of time teachers spent on targeted direct instruction teaching behaviors. They posit “supervisors should provide feedback that is positive, focused on specific teaching behaviors and provides clear and concise directions for desired behavior change” (p. 405). Shute (2008) noted the feedback needs to be specific and clear but warns it must be delivered in manageable chunks. Leaders should keep feedback as simple as possible.

Blase and Blase (2000) concluded that feedback was most effective when principals focused on “observed behavior, was specific, ..., established a problem-solving orientation, responded to concerns about students, and stressed the principal's availability for a follow-up talk” (p. 133).

Feedback is more effective when it is given frequently and in a timely manner (with a caveat).

Cavanaugh (2013) found that feedback should be given frequently, as soon as possible, and when it is still relevant for the learners. Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004) found that targeted teaching behaviors were acquired faster and more efficiently when feedback was immediate. Further, they found the target for feedback timing should be as close to the instructional event as possible. However, if immediate feedback interrupts the learner and appears intrusive, negative results may occur. Shute (2008) makes the case for delaying

feedback at times. She found “that *delayed feedback* may be superior for promoting transfer of learning, especially in relation to concept-formation tasks, whereas *immediate feedback* may be more efficient, particularly in the short run and for procedural skills” (p. 165).

Feedback is more effective when it is paired with goal setting.

Shute (2008) recommends promoting a learning goal orientation through the use of feedback. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that goal setting is linked to task performance. Specific and challenging goals along with appropriate feedback contribute to higher and better task performance. Performance feedback can change behaviors as long as it is based upon appropriate goals (Smither, London, & Reilly, 2005). Cavanaugh (2013) notes goal-setting was found to be particularly effective when used in conjunction with performance feedback. Brinko (1993) found that feedback is meaningful when the teacher chooses the improvement goal and is actively seeking feedback.

Feedback is more effective when the learner and the context are considered.

Cavanaugh (2003) found characteristics of the learners should be taken into account and the learners should be supported and respected. Narciss and Huth (2004) also noted that the instructional context and learner characteristics must be considered beyond the content, purpose, and format of feedback. “Feedback has no effect in a vacuum; to be powerful in its effect, there must be a learning context to which feedback is addressed” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 82).

Thurlings et al., (2013) conducted a study that examined the relationship between feedback and learning theories. The study employed the following three research questions: (a) To what extent does a learning theory influence characteristics of considered effective feedback? (b) To what extent does a learning theory influence feedback processes in pupil and student

learning? and (c) To what extent does a learning theory influence feedback processes in (student) teacher and adult learning? (p. 11). Their conclusions provided the following four guidelines to ensure a learner-focused and respectful approach to providing feedback:

1. Feedback receivers should have an opportunity to engage in dialogue with feedback providers.
2. Feedback should elaborate on errors that have been made: an indication of whether learners made a mistake or not is not enough.
3. Feedback should contribute to further improve learning.
4. Feedback should be given frequently, as soon as possible, and when it is still relevant for the learners.

These guidelines serve to provide a way for the learner to be included in the process consistent with the body of research on learning theories. When providing feedback, the learner's characteristics should be taken into account (Thurlings, et al., 2013).

Feedback is more effective when it includes reflection.

Anseel, Lievens, and Schollaert (2009) conducted several empirical studies examining the importance of reflection in the feedback process. Their results indicated that reflection combined with feedback enhanced performance improvement better than feedback alone. Reflection without feedback did not lead to improved performance. They found that “employees take too little time and effort themselves to actively engage in subsequent reflection due to the unrelenting pace and the orientation towards action of the current environment” (p. 23). This is consistent with the findings of Thurlings et al. (2013) on the connection between learning

theories and feedback. However, neither article offers a solution to this dilemma. It is merely accepted as a common occurrence.

The body of research surrounding effective feedback is complex and multi-layered. In an effort to synthesize the research, Table 1 provides a comprehensive summary of effective feedback characteristics. This table becomes an important tool in chapter four when I connect the existing body of literature to my findings.

Table 1

A Comprehensive Summary of Effective Feedback Characteristics

Researchers	Non-Content Factors			Content Factors			
	Frequency	Timeliness	Agent	Specificity	Focus	Positive or Corrective	Goal Setting
Anseel, Lievens, & Schollaert (2009)							Reflection important to the process
Blase and Blase (2000)				Observe specific behaviors			
Brinko (1993)			Does not need to be a living person				Teacher driven
Carver and Scheier (1990)							Encourages persistence in achieving goals
Cavanaugh (2013)	Frequently; regular, non-evaluative	As soon as possible	Medium plays a role; variety of formats acceptable		Task focus		Effective when used with feedback
Hattie & Timperly (2007)	Frequency matters	Depends on the complexity of the task		Learning context taken into account		Focus on correct over incorrect	
Kluger and DeNisi (1996)			Source of feedback		Task focus		Linked to task performance

Marshall (2005)	Regular basis	Prompt	Face-to-face				
Narciss and Huth (2004)			Medium plays a role	Learning context taken into account			
Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004)		As close to instructional event as possible		Specific leads to change		Positive leads to change	
Shute (2008)		Delay if appears intrusive to instruction	Delivery matters	Specific but manageable chunks			
Smither, London, & Reilly (2005)							Catalyst for change
Thurlings (2013)		As soon as possible					

The research on the tenets of effective feedback has been well developed in the previous sections. However, there is another important component that needs to be further explored through the lens of effective feedback – the role of the leader.

The Role of Educational Leaders: Where Does Feedback Fit?

The goal of this capstone is to improve feedback and how it is delivered so that improves instructional practices and learning. Therefore, we need to look at the literature on current leadership practices in general as well as how it relates to feedback. This section also includes a discussion of the teacher evaluation process, often the primary vehicle for providing feedback.

Instructional leadership.

The more traditional view of a school administrator is one who manages the financial, organizational, and political aspects of a school (Firestone & Reihl, 2005). However, the last several decades have signaled a shift in the research from examining management practices and

leadership styles to how administrators lead instructional practices. “School leaders should not only run efficient, safe and caring learning environments - they should also be leaders of teaching and learning” (Robinson, 2006, p. 62). In this section, I discuss the evolving literature on instructional leadership, why it is important to student achievement, and how feedback is often left out of the discussion.

Research on instructional leadership has its roots in leadership theories. Northouse (2012) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 5). He and many of his colleagues engage in what Leithwood has termed “leadership by adjective” literature (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 8). Some examples include servant leadership, transformational leadership, and authentic leadership. As indicated previously, several researchers have pushed the discussion beyond what Robinson (2006) terms “generic leadership literature.”

Generic leadership research provides important guidance about the influence processes involved in leadership and about the character and dispositions required.... It provides little or none of the knowledge base needed to answer questions about the direction or purpose of the influence attempt. In short, while generic leadership research can inform us about how to influence, and about the values that should inform the influence process (e.g. democratic, authoritative, emancipatory) it is silent about what the focus of the influence attempt should be. It is the research base on student and teacher learning, and on effective teaching in particular, that can give content to otherwise abstract leadership processes. There is a need for stronger linkages between this knowledge base and the research on principal and teacher leadership (Robinson, 2006, p. 63; Stein & Spillane, 2005, p. 29).

In his seminal work on leadership, James Burns (1978) stated, “Leaders can also shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of followers through the vital *teaching* role of leadership” (p. 425). Promoting the understanding that the leader is a teacher and the teacher is a learner is a vital role of leadership.

Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) further clarify the “instructional leadership concept implies a focus on classroom practice” (p. 6). It further identifies four core leadership practices: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional program (p. 59). If these practices have emerged so clearly in the literature, then why do school leaders have so much difficulty implementing them? Richard Elmore (2004, p. 46 as cited in Robinson, 2006, p. 71) explains this mismatch as follows:

Detailed decisions about what should be taught at any given time, how it should be taught, what students should be expected to learn at any given time, how they should be grouped within classrooms for purposes of instruction and, perhaps most importantly of all, how their learning should be evaluated - resides in individual classrooms, not in the organizations that surround them.

Robinson (2006) cites the research on a principal’s heavy workload, time spent reacting to change initiatives, and an overly burdensome teacher evaluation system that does little to change practices – a topic that is explored in more detail in the next section.

So what is the connection between instructional leadership and feedback? Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) summarized both the benefits and barriers that leaders face in delivering feedback to teachers.

The main underlying assumption is that instruction will improve if leaders provide

detailed feedback to teachers and include suggestions for change. It follows that leaders must have the time, the knowledge, and the consultative skills needed to provide teachers in all the relevant grade levels and subject areas with valid, useful advice about their instructional practices. Although these assumptions have an attractive ring to them, they rest on shaky ground at best. The evidence to date suggests that few principals have made the time and demonstrated the ability to provide high-quality instructional feedback to teachers (p. 6).

If it is known that feedback from administrators to teachers can impact instruction, is it just a case of principals making the time and effort to do so? There is more to it than just that.

Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that feedback helped “regulate performance” (p. 661) but a major barrier to implementation is the “level of abstraction that does not fully explain the processes responsible for their particular effects” (p. 669). In other words, more research around the specific processes associated with delivering effective feedback to teachers need to be understood or “practitioners will have difficulty creating the conditions required to achieve the desired effects” (p. 669).

Hallinger (2003) identifies three dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. A major component of the second dimension is “supervising and evaluating instruction” (p. 332) through the teacher evaluation system. It seems like the ideal structure through which school leaders can provide feedback to teachers is the evaluation process. The next section explores the existing evaluation systems and the research gap that exists between current practices and what is known about effective feedback.

Teacher evaluation systems.

Teacher evaluation systems across the nation often claim to aid in the development of teachers. Danielson (2011) found that most evaluation systems used outdated evaluative criteria, simplistic rating comments (outstanding, satisfactory, does not meet), the same process for novice and veteran teachers, and demonstrated a broad lack of consistency among evaluators. The process provides very little development of teachers mostly due to the lack of specific and customized feedback provided during evaluation cycles and the infrequency in which feedback is given.

Millman (1982), who researched teacher evaluation processes, identified several areas of concern. First, there is confusion about its purpose. Is the evaluation process summative for accountability purposes or formative for staff improvement? Second, there is a lack of clarity concerning how teacher evaluation systems impact the organization, working relations, and the climate of schools. Millman (1982) questions the utility of types of evidence presented to the teacher after an observation. Cavanaugh (2013) summed up the issue as follows.

(M)ost teachers receive performance evaluations from supervisors and administrators without clear intent to improve practice versus evaluation for teacher tenure or promotion. Given that many teachers may only receive infrequent performance evaluations in this format, the use of regular, non-evaluative feedback may be a more effective tool for improving performance (p. 129).

If teachers are provided with effective feedback during the evaluation process, the research suggests it can lead to improved instruction. Unfortunately, that rarely happens under current evaluation systems (Danielson, 2011).

Marshall (2005) offers twelve steps to a more effective teacher evaluation system that

will improve instruction. Many of the leadership actions identified by Marshall map directly to the tenets previously discussed around the research for what constitutes effective feedback.

Table 2 below aligns his recommendations to feedback practices.

Table 2

Mapping Feedback Practices to Leaders Actions

Feedback Practice	Leadership Action
Frequency	Systematically visit all classrooms on a regular basis (p. 732).
Timeliness, Agent, Delivery Method	Give teachers prompt, face-to-face feedback after every classroom visit (p. 733).
Content, Specificity, Task-oriented	Arrange for high-quality feedback on lessons for teachers (p. 734).
Goal Setting	Arrange for teams to plan collaboratively and report progress toward what they consider success regularly (p. 734).

What is currently missing is the research that connects the two bodies of knowledge around effective feedback practices and leadership actions. The next section presents a conceptual framework to illustrate the relationship between the two theories and the research questions that guide the data collection proposed in this capstone.

he conceptual framework for this capstone brings together leadership actions and the tenets of feedback into one model designed to create a better understanding of how each part connects to influence administrator and teacher utility of the feedback process. When woven together these two bodies of research provide a way for viewing and thinking about the role of leaders in providing effective feedback.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) state “(a) conceptual framework first specifies who and what will (and will not) be studied” (p. 21). This study focuses on the administrator, the teacher, and the components of effective feedback. Essentially, when leaders pay attention to the

two overarching components of feedback (non-content and content), they are setting up conditions that lead to improved instruction and increased student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Grissom, Loeb, and Master, 2013). Figure 1 on the following page illustrates the interconnectedness of the relationship between deliberate leadership actions and the two feedback components.

Figure 1

Leadership Actions to Develop People Through Deliberate Application of Effective Feedback Practices



The figure consists of one oval and two circles. The large, overarching oval represents the core leadership action to develop people (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2012; Ovando, 2005). The two smaller intersecting circles represent the components of feedback (Brinko, 1993; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999; Eraz, 1977; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Kluger and DeNisi, 1998; Shute, 2008). Each of the components is explained in greater detail below.

Leadership. Providing teachers with effective feedback stems from the deliberate and explicit actions taken by the leader to create the conditions to effect change. Leithwood (2004) discusses three components of the core leadership action of developing people: offer intellectual stimulation, provide individualized support, and modeling the way. The observation and feedback process provides the opportunity for leaders to influence teachers through these components. The overarching circle represents the leadership actions relating how a leader develops teachers through feedback. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) state a

...(leaders') primary aim is building not only the knowledge and skills that teachers and other staff need in order to accomplish organisational goals but also the dispositions (commitment, capacity and resilience) to persist in applying the knowledge and skills.

The more specific practices in this category are providing individualised support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation (p. 30).

After completing an observation of a teacher, the administrator must consider how they are providing the individualized support that Leithwood and his colleagues describe above. Leaders must consider what conditions will maximize the impact on teaching and learning. Therefore, the leader must first examine non-content factors such as the timeliness of providing feedback, the manner in which the feedback is delivered, as well as the agent. How frequently

observations occur and subsequent feedback is provided also factor into the effectiveness of the process. Since the feedback environment is shaped by two different categories of characteristics, non-content and content features of feedback, they are represented by the two smaller intersecting circles within the larger leadership circle. The circles intersect as the aspects of non-content and content features do have some overlap and influence each other.

Non-content features.

Non-content features include temporal considerations, how the feedback is delivered and by whom. First, the instructional leader must consider temporal aspects such as the timeliness of the feedback session after an observation has occurred. Second, the leader determines how frequently observations and feedback conferences occur. Finally, the leader considers how the feedback is delivered. Is it through email or face-to-face? The agent can be a shared reading of a scholarly article or a short conference. These non-content features impact the effectiveness of the content of the feedback.

Content features.

Once the stage is set and the feedback session begins, the leader must consider the content of their conversation. This is represented by the second embedded circle. Leaders dictate the specificity, focus (person or the task observed), whether the feedback is positive or corrective, and how the feedback relates to pre-determined goals. Decisions made by the leader regarding this content influences the effectiveness of the feedback delivered. As shown previously, effective feedback was generally specific (but not nit-picky), focused on the task rather than the individual, and overall positive in nature. Finally, feedback is most effective when connected to pre-determined and mutually agreed upon goals.

Discussion and the Need for Future Exploration

Although, studies of the technical aspects of providing feedback are lacking and require further investigation (Garza, 2001), there is consensus that feedback given to teachers that is timely, specific, and focuses on the task details will help improve instructional practices.

“Breaking down the steps in instructional moves and communicating them to teachers would make clear which components of their practice many need attending, refining, and improvement” (Khachatryan, 2015, p. 183). This is what the research shows to be true about effective feedback that enhances learning (Blase and Blase, 2000; Brinko, 1993; Kluger and DeNisi, 1996; Scheeler, Ruhl, McAfee, 2004; Shute, 2008).

Khachatryan (2015, p. 165) notes, “Though feedback given to students has been studied, we know little about what kind of feedback is useful to teachers for improving practice.” Researchers have shied away from empirical studies on feedback to teachers. Cavanaugh (2013) expressed a desire for an area of future research to examine the feedback processes using observations instead of perceptions. Additionally, he posits feedback processes are complicated and many components are inextricably linked and cautions that future research will need to acknowledge the complexity and research will need to be designed to account for this. This capstone acknowledges the complexity and seeks to answer the questions he poses by triangulating the data collection through interviews, observations, and artifact examination.

The literature also indicates that understanding effective leadership actions in the delivery of feedback could provide insights on how to best prepare and train instructional leaders.

Khachatryan (2015) notes

A further step in this endeavor is improving the training and ongoing professional development of classroom observers to provide effective feedback and engage teachers in

reflection around the feedback. All these would address the limitations that existed with my exploratory study (p. 184).

As indicated above, the characteristics of effective feedback need to be studied in the context of leader-teacher scenarios. There needs to be a greater focus on what explicit actions leaders take to create the conditions for the feedback to be effective rather than just knowledge of the characteristics of effective feedback. The research on leadership as it connects to teacher evaluation and supervision show many barriers that get in the way of administrators providing effective feedback. Does their many responsibilities impact the amount of time they have to devote to providing feedback? In other words, are the biggest barriers non-content features of feedback such as timeliness and frequency? Or, do administrators struggle more with the content of what feedback they are delivering which indicates a lack of skills or training? The answers to these questions are needed to improve the process. District leaders need this information to be able to make more informed decisions on how to allocate resources to solve such a pervasive problem. Should money be spent increasing the number of teacher supervisors (Marshall, 2005)? Or should there be more money spent on training school leaders in the best practices of effective feedback delivery? The implementation of best practices for feedback delivery to teachers from leaders is the focus of this capstone and where the research is missing.

Conclusion

Studying feedback given to teachers and its impact on instruction is complex and difficult (Cavanaugh, 2013; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Kachatryan, 2015). There are many variables working in concert and future research should focus on how they work in tandem and not by analyzing individual parts (Thurlings, et al., 2013). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) advocate for more research to uncover the particular qualities and processes that will improve student

achievement. Studying how educational leaders can provide effective feedback to teachers is an important and worthy topic. Since the teacher is the most important factor in student achievement, finding ways to improve a teacher's craft will continue to be the most important responsibility of school leaders.

The next chapter takes the conceptual framework and uses it to explain and align the research questions to the methodology in order to conduct the study and add to the body of research. The remainder of the chapter presents the process for collecting data, instruments used and specific information is provided to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This capstone project explores the role of school leadership in providing effective feedback. Specifically, I am interested in understanding what effective feedback from leaders to teachers looks like, how leaders plan for and engage in providing effective feedback, and what conditions promote teacher receptivity and changes in their practice as well as what conditions impact the receiver negatively. As seen in the literature review, there is limited scholarship on the role of leadership in understanding effective feedback, the intentional planning and engaging in providing effective feedback, and what leaders do to create an environment conducive for teachers to receive effective feedback. A comprehensive search of the literature found no studies that examine this leadership work from the perspective of the actions taken by school leaders. This study aims to address this limitation in the literature.

In this chapter, I begin with a brief overview of the conceptual framework and the role it plays in this capstone research. It is placed intentionally at the beginning as it has informed the development of my research questions and methodological design, though its interaction with the development of this study has been iterative in nature. Subsequently, I review the research questions, methodology, and instruments used to conduct this capstone research. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how the data collected from the research has been coded and steps taken to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

The Role of the Conceptual Framework and Emergence of Research Questions

This capstone seeks to solve a problem of practice commonly found across the nation: teachers are not consistently receiving effective feedback from their leaders. There is extensive literature around the nature of feedback, particularly as it applies to the teacher-student relationship (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding

the connection between leadership actions as they relate to providing teachers with feedback. In chapter two, I presented a conceptual framework connecting the research on effective feedback to the core leadership action of developing people. This conceptual framework directly impacted the design of the study and the research questions I seek to answer. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014),

(r)esearch questions represent the facets of inquiry that the researcher most wants to explore. Research questions may be general or particular, descriptive or explanatory.

The formulation of research questions may precede, follow, or happen concurrently with the development of a conceptual framework (p. 25).

For this capstone, the following research questions emerged from the conceptual framework described in chapter two.

- 1) What is the nature of effective feedback from leaders to teachers?
- 2) How do leaders plan for and engage in providing effective feedback?
- 3) What conditions promote teacher receptivity and changes in their practice as well as what conditions impact the receiver negatively?

In the next three sub-sections, I will take each question and elaborate on what the question is asking, what I am hoping to learn, and what sub-questions are implied.

The nature of effective feedback from leaders to teachers.

In chapter two, the nature of feedback as described in the literature was subdivided into two overarching categories: content and non-content factors. The content factors included whether the feedback was directed at the teacher or what the teacher did, the specific or general nature of the feedback, and whether the feedback was positive in nature or corrective (Scheeler, Ruhl, and

McAfee, 2004). In research question one I am seeking to bridge the gap in literature between the current body of research focused on effective teacher-student feedback and extrapolate it to what constitutes effective feedback in the context of leader-teacher interactions. I explore the role of non-content factors in research questions two and three. In research question one, I am trying to determine if both administrators and teachers perceive feedback to be effective if: the content is focused on what the teacher did, has the right level of specificity, and is generally positive in nature. Moreover, I am seeking to see if other factors, not found previously in the literature, are also present. This will be accomplished through observations of the feedback sessions as well as interviews with both the administrators and the teachers.

Leaders who plan for and engage in effective feedback to teachers.

The second question focuses on the specific leadership actions taken by administrators prior to feedback sessions. These non-content features include the timeliness, frequency, and delivery method of the feedback (Cavanaugh, 2003; Narciss and Huth, 2004). I am seeking to understand whether leaders account for these non-content factors while at the same time whether they consider the content of the feedback they deliver. Through artifact reviews, observations, and interviews with leaders, I am seeking to understand how leaders prepare for feedback sessions and the conditions necessary for effective feedback to be delivered. Additionally, I am seeking to find if other factors, such as conditions specific to the school leader/teacher context, emerge that may not have been previously considered.

The conditions promoting teacher receptivity, changes in practice, and negative consequences.

The third question seeks to find answers to what teachers perceive as conditions that help or hinder their receptivity of feedback and what leads them to change their practices. I am seeking to determine if teachers can articulate what factors influence their receptivity to feedback. For example, is it the quality of the feedback? Is it their relationship with the school leader? Or is it a combination of factors? It is my assumption that feedback can only change practices if teachers are receptive to hearing what is being said. I am seeking to understand what barriers may hinder the acceptance of feedback and what conditions encourage it. Through interviews with the participating teachers, I hope to gain insight into these conditions and compare these findings with what is reported in the research literature.

Research Design and Methods

To answer these questions, I used a qualitative research design. Butin (2009) states “qualitative research is about words and stories” (p. 74). Miles, Huberman, and Saldano (2014) state that in a qualitative study, “the researcher’s role is to gain a holistic...overview of the context under study” (p. 9). Qualitative research utilizes inductive thinking to explore a social phenomenon to find patterns that may lead to the beginning of a theory (Boeije, 2009). I am seeking through observations, interviews, and artifact reviews to determine the leadership actions and conditions necessary in the specific context of school leaders and teachers that produces effective feedback as outlined in the literature. This is an “explorative” study seeking to allow the participants to “describe” their experiences with the feedback process that leads to an “interpretive rendering” of what actions leaders take that promotes improved teaching and learning and what actions do not (Boeiji, 2009, p. 32). The study was designed to understand the

“how” and the “why” of effective feedback practices in educational settings. The next section describes the setting and selection of participants in the study and then describes the methods used to answer the above research questions.

As previously discussed, I utilized a qualitative approach to this study. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) this method “...uses two basic principles: (1) questioning rather than measuring, and (2) generating hypotheses using theoretical coding” (p. 16). Qualitative hypothesis-generating research involves collecting interview data from research participants concerning a phenomenon of interest, and then using what they say in order to develop hypotheses” (p. 17). In this section, I discuss how participants were selected and then how the data were collected. Finally, I discuss hypothesis generating through coding design.

Setting and participants.

The study took place in three middle schools in a large, suburban school district on the east coast of the United States with an enrollment of over 180,000 students, which I refer to as Chesapeake County Public Schools (CCPS). Pseudonyms have been used to protect confidentiality in my research. I have strong personal and professional ties to many principals and leadership team members of CCPS. The school division consists of five distinct regions called “Areas”. Each Area is unique and comes with differing characteristics. Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in two of the five sub-districts. The Areas are not commensurate in size or number of schools but each enroll over 25,000 students. Several of the Areas have considerably more affluent families and communities. The intent of the researcher is to minimize the impact these factors have on the results by working with the sub-district known as Area 5. This Area consists of students and schools that perform on average or above average in achievement with populations coming from middle to upper middle class families.

As stated previously, Area 5 contains middle schools with very similar demographics. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) term this approach as homogeneous sampling which “focuses on people with similar demographics or social characteristics” (p. 32). They further advocate for qualitative researchers to employ clear parameters on the scope of a study. Being purposeful in the selection of the sample to be research is “crucial for later analysis” (p. 31). The next section describes how I identified participants from Area 5.

Each year the school district administers a survey to all 25,000 employees to gauge employee satisfaction and engagement. It particularly focuses on district leadership and school-based administrators. The instrument, called the “Satisfaction Survey”, provides information to each of the Area Assistant Superintendents about how the district leaders and school-based administrators are perceived to be performing. Each Area Assistant Superintendent has one or two Principal Supervisors who help with day to day operations of the Area as well as school-based administrator evaluation. I partnered with the Area 5 Assistant Superintendent and Principal Supervisor to review the Satisfaction Survey data to identify three (3) administrators from three different middle schools within their Area. Area 5 has five middle schools within its boundaries. The schools are very similar in size, demographics, and socioeconomic characteristics. Each middle school has two to three assistant principals generating a pool of approximately 15 to 20 administrators responsible for observing and evaluating teachers. The administrators are known by the Area 5 leadership team as quite effective in their role. Once identified and willing to participate, the administrators enlisted the participation of two teachers from each of their schools. “Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth – unlike quantitative researchers who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance” (Miles, Huberman, and

Saldana, 2014, p. 31). By focusing on a total of nine individuals (three administrators and six teachers), this study was able to deeply explore the connection between the actions leaders take to set up the conditions for teachers to receive effective feedback.

Ethical issues.

The first consideration of any study is worthiness. Does the problem of practice warrant the time and effort of the researcher and participants? This is certainly a question that has been asked by both the University and the school district's institutional review boards (IRB). Fortunately, as illustrated in chapter one with the story of Jenn, the topic of providing teachers with effective feedback often arises in both practice and the literature. Administrators often lament about their regret of not providing enough feedback.

The second consideration is that all participants had full information about what the study involved. All participants provided informed consent. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) encourage researchers to "be an open book" and "acknowledge participants are doing...a great favor" with their "gifts of time, insight, and privacy" (p. 60). They go on further to make the important point that data is not collected but rather given in a qualitative study. Their final point is that receiving permission from a participant is not a single hurdle to overcome but an ongoing dialogue and exchange of information throughout the process. The researcher's ultimate task is to ensure no harm comes to the participants in the form of "self-esteem, threats to one's interests, position, or advancement in the organization" (p. 61). Therefore, much consideration has been taken in how the results are reported out so as to retain anonymity and confidentiality.

Methods.

The design of the study consists of three different data sources. Wolcott (1992) identifies three methods of qualitative data collection in educational settings: examining the instructional practices through observation, gaining participants' perceptions through interviewing, and examining relevant artifacts. To begin, each administrator conducted a classroom observation of a participating teacher. Afterward, a post-observation conference, which I refer to as a "feedback session," was held. I attended the feedback sessions, making observations as my first data source. In order to capture a more comprehensive set of data, the session was audio recorded providing a transcript to be coded. To provide the second set of data sources, a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C) was conducted within 24 hours of the feedback session with both the administrator and the teacher (separately) to investigate their perceptions of the feedback process they just experienced. The interviews were also audio recorded. Finally, artifacts relating to the feedback process were collected and analyzed. These came in the form of administrator's observation checklists, district guidelines on evaluation, and software programs designed to assist in the evaluation process. Specific artifacts were identified prior to the study in coordination with the Area 5 assistant superintendent. The study began in March 2019 and concluded in May 2019 spanning three months. Table 3 provides an overview of the research methodology that utilized in the study.

Table 3

Overview of Research Methodology

	Rationale	Implementation	Sample
Observations of feedback session	Provide observation of leader/teacher interactions during feedback sessions to gain insight on effective feedback practices to answer RQs 1, 2, and 3.	Feedback sessions occurred after teacher classroom observation utilizing the Observation Template and audio recording.	6 feedback conferences of leader/teacher.
Interviews with leaders and teachers	Provide insight into participants' concepts, perceptions, and practices regarding effective feedback to answer RQs 1, 2, and 3.	Open-ended questions using semi-structured interview protocol. Same protocol for both leaders and teachers. Conversation audio recorded for coding. Interviews occurred within 24 hours after post-observation conference.	9 separate interviews with leaders and teachers were conducted.
Artifact review (observation forms, templates for evaluation, software utilized)	Provide insight into structures and documents that may influence content and non-content characteristics of feedback to answer RQs 1 and 2.	Collection of observation templates, district guidelines, and/or evaluation software packages.	Artifacts identified collaboratively with leaders.

In the next section, I discuss in more detail the protocols and instruments for the interviews, observations, and artifact reviews that were used for this study.

Observations.

After the leader observed a teacher, the administrator set up a feedback session with the teacher. I was a silent observer during each feedback session utilizing an Observation Template (see Appendix D). I took note of where the feedback session occurred, the seating arrangements, how the session began, the opening and closing remarks, how the feedback was delivered, the length of the session, and other data. The notes are both descriptive and reflective (Cresswell, 2007). This allowed for a factual account of what occurred but also captured my reflections as they related to answering the research questions. The notes or memos are often grouped into three categories: observational, methodological, and theoretical (Boeiji, 2009). Observational or field notes describe what was observed. Methodological memos connect what was observed to the methods used to collect the data. Perhaps parts of the protocol were not yielding the desired data and slight tweaks needed to be made. Theoretical memos are intermediate steps toward connecting the data to findings. Are patterns emerging that need to be captured during the process so as not to be lost over the course of the study? Boeiji (2009) advises writing memos so as not to lose “relevant impressions, spontaneous ideas, evaluations, solutions, and thoughts often forgotten because field work and analysis demand so much attention” (p. 70).

Interviews.

After the feedback sessions, I interviewed both teachers and leaders within 24 hours. The purpose was to gain participants’ insight and perceptions of the conditions and environment in which feedback is delivered. Schostak (2005) defines the interview in qualitative research as critical for learning of the participant’s views:

the process of constituting and de-constructing world views – it is the inter-view, the place between worlds. Without the ‘inter-view’ no dialogue and no alternatives as a basis

for difference, change, and development would be possible. The inter-view as conceived in the book is fundamental to qualitative research (p. i).

Through the interview process, I was able to gather data valuable in answering the research questions previously outlined, particularly the perceptions of the participants. I focused on how they viewed the process and if teachers felt it impacted their practice.

The interview protocol began with some background on the purpose of the study and the informed consent. The interview questions and probes began with questions about non-content features of feedback to include the following:

- the respondent's understanding of the purpose of the feedback process
- the role of how frequently one should receive feedback
- how timeliness may impact effectiveness

The second part of the interview delved deeply into the content of the feedback conference in order to ascertain the following information:

- whether focusing on the person or what the person did impacts the effectiveness of the feedback
- how the respondent perceived the feedback as either positive or corrective and if that makes a difference
- the role of specificity and its impact on feedback
- the respondent's perception of the usefulness of the feedback
- the relationship pre-determined goal setting plays in the feedback process
- how the method in which the feedback is delivered can or cannot make a difference

The questions in the interview protocol were crafted using the conceptual framework as the

underlying guide. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) emphasize that conceptual frameworks and research questions should be used to focus instrumentation such as surveys and interview questions within a study.

During the interviews, I observed the participants and took field notes to collect data on those things not captured through the audio recording. Observations allowed me to gauge how feedback was delivered or received that could not be captured through the transcript. The purpose of this process is to gain perspective on the entire process and not allow small variances to skew the outcomes.

Artifact review.

As shown in chapter two, the feedback process is often linked with the teacher evaluation process. As such, many schools and districts have created (or even mandated) observation tools such as checklists or software to assist school leaders in the observation process. I examined these artifacts to see how they fit into the feedback process. I was interested in understanding whether and how they either supported or hindered a leaders' ability to provide effective feedback to teachers.

The exact artifacts were identified in collaboration with school leaders as district or Area artifacts do not currently exist. All three of the schools used their own self-created forms for the observation process. I used the conceptual framework to examine the artifacts and see what parts influenced the feedback process. Table 4 provides an overview of each research question and the data sources used to answer those questions.

Table 4

Summary of Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question	Data Source
What is the nature of effective feedback from leaders to teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artifact review of feedback templates, evaluation tools • Observation notes of feedback session • Answers to semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders
How do leaders plan for and engage in providing effective feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artifact review of feedback templates, evaluation tools • Observation notes of feedback session • Answers to semi-structured interview with school leaders
What conditions promote teacher receptivity and changes in their practice as well as what conditions impact the receiver negatively?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation notes of feedback session • Answers to semi-structured interview with teachers

The next section discusses how the data collected from the artifact review, feedback session observations, and the interviews were coded. The coding allowed for theories to be generated to help explain what leadership actions lead to teachers receiving effective feedback from administrators. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) state a “theory is a description of a pattern that you find in the data” (p. 35). From these theories, implications for practice can be extrapolated.

Data Analysis

Miles, Huberman, and Saldano (2014) cite three main considerations for data analysis and management. Researchers must ensure high quality, accessible data; documentation of what analyses occurred; and retention and analyses of data after the study is completed. The next several sub-sections will discuss the analysis of the data collected through interviews, observations, and artifact reviews.

Interview analysis.

Upon completion of data collection, the audio recordings were transcribed. In total, there were 15 transcriptions, including: post-conference recordings (6), administrator interviews (3), and teacher interviews (6). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) break the coding process down into manageable chunks by starting with relevant text that leads to a theoretical narrative.

- Relevant text – text related to your specific research concern
- Repeating ideas – when participants use the same or similar words or phrases to describe the same idea
- Themes – groups of repeating ideas with something in common
- Theoretical constructs – grouping of themes into abstract ideas
- Theoretical narrative – a summary of what was learned

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) further explain their concept of a theoretical narrative as connecting theory to participant experience.

It tells the story of the participants' subjective experience, using their own words as much as possible. However, it also includes the researchers' theoretical framework by including the theoretical constructs and themes in parentheses throughout the narrative. Weaving together subjective experience and abstract concepts brings together the two very different worlds of researcher and participant (p. 43).

To ensure a thoroughness, I read through the transcripts multiple times including a review of the notes taken during each of the sessions. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) recommend an electronic system of filing data with several backups. They further advise that an Excel file for the coding allows for searches across interviews and sorting by key terms. The key is making

sure findings are supported by evidence. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) provide the advice “...that you must be able to support your interpretation with data (i.e., examples of text), so that other researchers can understand your way of analyzing it. If your interpretation is supported by the data, then it is valid, even if there are other ways to interpret the same data” (p. 36).

Observation analysis.

The use of observations during the feedback session provided another dimension to the research. I took careful field notes identifying the environment in which the feedback was given recording my perceptions of how the feedback was received. Non-verbal clues such as facial expressions and body language was observed. The notes taken during the observation served to help answer research question three about the receptivity of the teacher. It was helpful for me to note the time elapsed during the interview next to specific notes to make a match with the transcript so a complete picture was documented.

Artifact analysis.

I reviewed artifacts before and after the observations and interviews. Prior to visiting each school, I asked the administrators to forward a copy of any tools they used during feedback sessions. Each school had created their own form for the administrator to take notes during observations. I reviewed the content of each form and determined they all reflected the school specific goals and/or district wide initiatives through conversations with administrators. Table 5 describes the content of blank feedback forms at each school and notes any connections to district initiatives.

Table 5

The Content and Structure of Feedback Forms

School	School A	School B	School C
Content and Structure	Features an engagement wheel incorporating a learning model; emphasizes learning targets	A checklist of best practices; student-centered; focus on learning targets	Less structured format to collect anecdotal information; focus on learning targets
Connection to District Initiatives	Engagement wheel derived from a district initiative created by a consultant.	No connection to district initiatives noted.	No connection to district initiatives noted.

The artifacts were used by administrators during feedback sessions to guide the discussions. In the chapter four, I discuss how the feedback contribute or detract from the effectiveness of the discussions.

Coding the Data

After the all the data was collected, I developed a coding schema using an Excel spreadsheet. I began by reviewing all the transcripts along with the audio recordings of the teacher feedback sessions and interviews. I wanted to complete one thorough pass through all of the data to see how it related to my conceptual framework. Certain themes did seem to emerge aligned to the framework I had established through my literature review (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). These themes helped me to create theoretical constructs and provided a process for examining the data. Through a series of multiple analytic reviews of the data, I used the constructs to organize the findings as reported in chapter four. This process also yielded new ideas and possible areas of future research. The review of artifacts, interviews, and observations provides a necessary triangulation to ensure I fully understand the perceptions of the

administrators and the teachers (Flick, 2004). In the next few sections, I will discuss the limitations of the data collection process and my analysis.

Limitations

There are several limitations to my study. These include researcher bias, the small sample size, and the short time frame. Each of these areas is explored below.

Researcher bias.

Qualitative research is subject to bias. Drisko (1997) warns that researchers must guard against bias through reflexive efforts:

(s)ubstantial self-reflection and self-analysis are needed because the researcher's ability to perceive and interpret participants' views and to clarify unique, situation-specific events is central to the accuracy and credibility of a qualitative study (p. 194).

Miles, Huberman, and Saldano (2014) warn that allowing bias to creep into research can “weaken or invalidate findings. (p. 294). They identify four types of bias and offer tactics to avoid the pitfalls.

- The holistic fallacy – seeing patterns or congruencies that do not exist
- Elite bias – giving more credence to participants with high status
- Personal bias – the researchers personal beliefs drive theories
- Going native – the researcher loses her own perspective and adopts that of the participants

To avoid these biases and others, the authors suggest triangulating data, checking out rival explanations, exploring outliers, and avoiding drawing inferences from non-representative cases.

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) offer a different perspective on bias. They believe a

researcher's point of view can add value to the qualitative research process.

Qualitative research views the issues differently. It assumes that subjectivity and values are a necessary part of human interaction and therefore cannot be eliminated or controlled. It requires, instead, that researchers acknowledge their own subjectivity and values, and reflect on them in a systematic and disciplined way. In addition, qualitative researchers believe that their own subjective experience can be a source of knowledge about the phenomenon they are studying. (p. 32)

To help combat bias, I reflected on my own beliefs entering into the research study and made sure I used all three data sources ensure the findings were valid.

Sample size.

The study I conducted is small in size. It only included three middle schools, three administrators, and six teachers. The middle schools are only comprised of two grade levels – seventh and eighth. However, given the nature of interview process, there was quite a bit of data generated across the 15 interviews and observations. Further studies could expand the scope based on what has been learned.

Time frame.

This study is limited by its short time frame. It was conducted across three months. Drisko (1997) promotes “saturation” referring to both the comprehensiveness of both collection and analysis of the data. The short time frame is a limitation as the time to go back to ensure the participants have provided all they can has not been allotted.

Summary

This chapter describes a qualitative study that took place in three middle schools in a large, suburban public school district. Initially, district leadership was utilized to identify three administrators from three different middle schools through a combination of personal knowledge and Satisfaction Survey data. Once consent was granted, the three administrators identified two teachers each to engage in an observation of a feedback conference. The post-observation conferences were audio recorded and the dialogue transcribed. The researcher conducted separate interviews with both the administrator and teacher within 24 hours of the conference. The interviews were audio recorded and transcripts were created. Once all of the conferences and interviews were completed, the researcher employed a coding strategy as described previously. The findings, discussions, and further implications will be presented in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This capstone focuses on a common problem of practice in most schools: administrators providing effective feedback to teachers to enhance their practices. The data resulted in findings related to three research questions crafted to determine: the nature of effective feedback, how leaders plan for delivering feedback effectively, and the conditions necessary for teachers to be open to receiving feedback. This chapter includes a presentation of the findings relevant to these three questions. The final chapter provides a discussion of how the findings do or do not correlate with current research and offers recommendations based on the findings focused on improving the feedback process.

The Nature of Effective Feedback from Leaders to Teachers

The first research question, “What is the nature of effective feedback from leaders to teachers?”, sought to understand how administrators and teachers defined “effective feedback,” what “effective feedback” was composed of, and whether or not their perspectives were complimentary. In other words, do administrators and teachers talk about effective feedback in similar ways? What characteristics do they identify in their descriptions? Do their descriptions reflect the literature on best practice (e.g., feedback focused on what the teacher did, feedback with the right level of specificity, feedback that is generally positive in nature, etc.). Throughout this section, I use the responses from the administrators and teachers to explore their thoughts on the nature of effective feedback.

The purpose of feedback.

I began each interview by asking the participant what they thought was the purpose of feedback. Among the reasons identified for providing feedback, participants named reflection,

growth, and relationships. For example, administrators unanimously saw the activity as “an opportunity to reflect.” The administrator from School B defined the feedback process as “an activity in order to encourage reflection and thinking”. Another stated that providing feedback “has the potential to build the relationship between the person who is giving the feedback and the person who's receiving it”. The role of feedback in fostering administrator/ teacher relationships will be explored further later on in this chapter. The School C administrator viewed the feedback session as an opportunity to support teachers’ growth.

In contrast to administrators, the purposes that teachers named for feedback were more focused. Teachers used words like “growth” and “improvement” when describing the purpose of feedback. One teacher from School B stated, “the purpose is to help me grow as a teacher and basically to improve my instruction.” Another teacher from School B said, “I appreciate hearing things that I can improve on, constructively, of course.” A teacher from School C said she wanted “some constructive feedback as ways to improve.” A teacher from School C had a negative association of receiving feedback due to an experience in a previous school district in which she felt the evaluation process was used as a “gotcha” to get rid of teachers. One School A teacher liked the process because it “provided encouragement”. None explicitly named reflection or relationship building.

The focus of feedback.

When asking participants about whether the content of the feedback should focus on the teacher or the observed actions of the teacher, the administrator from School A commented, "I think it's mainly their actions because I think that's what you have an opportunity to support and for them to adjust or change, modify or continue." School C administrator said, "I don't ever

believe the focus is about the teacher. Teachers have finished school, they've been educated.” Teachers expressed similar opinions. A teacher in School A said that administrators do "a lot better job of giving me feedback on my instruction as opposed to me as a person." All the teachers expressed that feedback should be on their actions and that anything specific to them should be addressed in a separate manner.

The specificity of feedback.

The topic of the right level of specificity seemed to be an important topic to participants. I noted in my observations, participants seemed animated and were able to cite examples from their feedback conferences. There seemed to be a range of just the right level of specificity. One teacher captured her thoughts about when administrators aren't specific and say things like, "Oh, well, you did a good job. Well, I mean that doesn't mean anything. So, I think specific feedback is necessary for anybody to grow or even just maintain what they're doing and be reminded." Teachers expressed appreciation when administrators were able to point to specific examples from their observation and even quote things they had said to illustrate a point. I observed administrators and teachers reference exact quotes from the feedback forms as evidence during the conferences. According to one teacher at School B, "specificity works in supporting more general comments". A teacher from School A shared the following about the observation that she described as helpful,

I felt like it was very specific. She wrote down quotes that I said that I don't always remember saying, I noticed that I was like, Oh, I did say "I jumped the gun". She noticed that and it was very specific and I appreciate that she noticed that. I've never had an administrator get too specific.

One teacher from School B articulated the relationship between the notes taken on the observation form and how it relates to receiving specific feedback.

I think it's more (about) the write-up you get after the observation. I like, for example, the feedback that I got from this observation was very detailed. I can tell that my administrator was really paying attention to what was going on. He was really paying attention to my lesson. He wasn't just kind of popping in just to say he did. So I think his feedback made me value this meeting because I knew he kind of knew what he was talking about.

However, another teacher from School B noted, “it becomes specific when admin is wanting to change a type of behavior.” The connection between specificity and corrective feedback became obvious during the interviews. As a researcher, I often went back and forth between these two characteristics of feedback in deciding how to code these comments.

Positive versus corrective feedback.

The final aspect I examined with regard to the nature of feedback focused on the difference between positive feedback and corrective feedback. My observations noted a positive tone in all of the conferences. Teachers and administrators confirmed that a positive tone is important to the conversation. One administrator said, “you don't want to come down completely harsh on somebody because that will be very off putting to them and turn them away.” However, almost all participants noted that empty praise is not at all helpful. One teacher’s statement illustrates the point very well. She shared that of the “ones that have not been very helpful have been the ones where administrators say, “Oh, yup, that was great.” That's nice to hear, but it's not true and it's not helpful to me.” Another teacher from School B said, "I

definitely like being told that what I'm doing is good, but I also like to improve what I'm doing.”

With regards to corrective feedback, the same teacher from School B noted, “I think the only thing I would say is if it had to be corrective feedback, just making sure the delivery is professional and not based on opinion.” The School B administrator cautioned, “correcting (feedback) must be very specific or creates confusion and possible resentment.”

In this section I examined data related to the first research question, which focused on the nature of feedback which includes the purpose, content, specificity, and tone. While administrators identified multiple purposes for providing feedback, teachers focused primarily on the role of feedback in supporting their professional growth. Feedback was considered to be particularly helpful when it was specific, positive instead of corrective, and focused on the actions of the teacher. In the next section, I discuss the findings related to the preparation and delivery of feedback.

How Leaders Plan for and Engage in Effective Feedback to Teachers

The second research question, “How do leaders plan for and engage in providing effective feedback?,” focuses on the specific leadership actions taken by administrators prior to feedback sessions. This question explores what administrators can do to ensure the right conditions are in place for teachers to be receptive to receiving feedback. These non-content features may include the timeliness, frequency, setting, agent, and delivery method of the feedback. Do the participants’ descriptions reflect the literature on best practice (e.g., feedback provided as close to the observation as possible, frequently delivered, face-to-face, etc.)? In my research, I explored whether leaders accounted for these non-content factors and purposely planned to set up successful feedback sessions. In those cases where they did, I sought to

understand how they understood such preparation to impact how their teachers received feedback.

Frequency of feedback.

The frequency in which teachers received feedback from their administrators was explored during the interviews. Reflecting on their last few years of experience, the general consensus was twice a year among the teachers. However, there appeared to be agreement that a standard number of feedback sessions for all teachers in a school was ill advised. Over half the teachers, for example, suggested that observations and feedback sessions should be more frequent for novice teachers and/or that the frequency of observations should increase when a teacher is under evaluation or there were concerns about performance.

Administrators were less likely to specify a standard number of feedback sessions. Instead, they appeared to share the belief that frequency should be based on as often or “as much as you can get in their classrooms.” All three administrators expressed a desire to be in classrooms as frequently as weekly and the administrator from School A stated, “that for new teachers in the beginning of the year, I was in their room every other day.” Nonetheless, they all recognized the barriers to achieving this. The administrator from School B stated, “It's easy as an administrator to get kind of caught up in the administrivia of stuff when really our priority should be instructional leadership.” Teachers recognized the challenge that administrators have in getting into classrooms. One stated: “I am sympathetic to the plight of the administrator.” Two of the administrators spoke to more frequent, shorter observations. One offered: “We sometimes do a mini observation model where we'll pop in two or three times in a week and then do one summative feedback from that.”

All administrators spoke of the importance of providing feedback every time they were in a classroom or team meeting as exemplified by the following quote: “It's important to give feedback every time you're in there.” Teachers echoed this sentiment, indicating that if an administrators came to their room they wanted to hear from them. One teacher from School B vocalized this by saying, “Because the worst feeling in the world is not knowing.”

Timeliness of feedback.

The conversations with teachers about frequency of observations naturally led to a discussion of timeliness in creating a setting to promote the reception of feedback. The general consensus of teachers and administrators was within 24 hours and that anything beyond 24 hours is subject to the law of diminishing returns. One teacher from School C summed it up:

Probably within 24 hours. I don't think you would necessarily expect them to stay after and immediately give you feedback, but maybe just something either written or sometimes you'll get a written summary and sometimes there'll be a conversation or sometimes it'll be a little bit of both depending on how formal of an observation it is. But I would say within 24 hours would be nice. 24 to 48.

Another teacher at School C agreed, “After a few days, I think it's too late because we deal with 120 students pretty much daily and I think we need to have it as soon as possible.

According to one administrator at School B, “I think that if I were to do an observation and then not give the teacher any feedback for a week, the purpose of that feedback falls on deaf ears.”

Location of feedback.

During my observations, I noted all of the feedback conferences took place in the administrators' offices. At two of the schools, the administrators used a small round table located in their office for the feedback conferences. In one of the schools, the administrator sat at the desk and the teacher sat on the other side. With regard to the latter, the physical barrier did appear to have an impact on the tone of the meeting. One teacher at School B expressed that she enjoyed the fact that she and the administrator, "were sitting together at a table versus him at his desk and (me) sitting over here." Observational data revealed that in the first two schools, the physical settings appeared to promote a coaching session atmosphere. Participants leaned forward and were engaged. However, at the third school, both administrator and teachers both leaned back in a more defensive posture, sometimes with arms crossed.

Feedback delivery mode.

The literature discusses what many authors call the "agent", which represents how the feedback is delivered via a face-to-face meeting, written feedback, or even videos. Overwhelmingly, the participants preferred face-to-face meetings. However, several teachers expressed that they valued having some form of written feedback immediately following the observation. It could come in the form of the notes the administrator took or an email. One teacher said, "She gave me a sheet which is so helpful." pertaining to the written notes the administrator had taken during the observation which were provided to her prior to the feedback session. Another teacher expressed what he felt was an advantage to receiving written feedback prior to the meeting after the observation.

I personally don't mind getting it in an email first so that I can look over it and see what

they're saying so that when I come down to the meeting I have a little bit better idea of what to expect and maybe have some specific questions for them about what they observed or the feedback that they're giving.

As noted in chapter three, all three schools had created their own observation forms based on their school-based and/ or district initiatives to use when conducting formal observations. The administrator in School A provided her teachers with a folder of her notes and as well as pictures she had taken. Here's the transcript of the exchange between her and one teacher.

Administrator: So I actually have a little folder that I put together for you.

Teacher: Yay. Oh, nice.

Administrator: Those are the pictures that I snapped in your room. So when I first walked in, that's what I saw. I'm going to give you a chance to look at them. So I'll tell you what I saw. I saw that the learning target was right there, very obvious, and it said that students will be learning about life processes.

Teacher: Great!

The combination of the written feedback and an opportunity to discuss what was written was also key to another teacher at School A:

I like getting a copy of the feedback so I can read through it and reflect on it and then have a meeting after. Having written feedback is great, but having a discussion about it after is also important just so you can kind of clarify anything and make sure maybe if something was taken the wrong way that that's cleared up.

In this section, I presented the findings on how administrators can plan for and engage in feedback conferences to positively impact teachers' instruction. Participants desire more frequent observations with face-to-face conferences within 24 hours. Written documentation

was highly valued when paired with discussions. When conferences were not scheduled in a timely manner, the teachers described feeling devalued and left with uncertainty. In the next section, I present the findings as they relate to factors on how positively or negatively receptive teachers are to receiving feedback.

The Conditions Promoting Teacher Receptivity, Changes in Practice, and Negative Consequences

The third question, “What conditions promote teacher receptivity and changes in their practice as well as what conditions impact the receiver negatively?”, was posed to uncover what teachers perceive as conditions that help or hinder their receptivity of feedback and what leads them to change their practices. Do the participants’ descriptions reflect the literature on best practice (e.g., goal setting prior to observations, observation forms to support goal setting, etc.)? Teachers were asked to quantify whether feedback was helpful, neutral, or not helpful. Teachers were asked if setting goals with the administrator prior to the observation/feedback process would enhance the experience. Overall, I worked to identify the factors that promote receptivity to feedback and those factors that may impede the feedback process.

Relationships.

In addition to identifying the characteristics that make feedback helpful, including “specific strategies” that could be “implemented right away” and “tied to research,” participants also cited how relationships played a role in whether the feedback could be considered helpful. The administrator from School A stated during her interview, “I know that I have to be gracious when I’m allowed in and build the relationships so that if there is a need for correction, I can give that too.” A teacher from School B noted she found feedback more helpful if the administrator

made efforts to put her at ease:

(Administrator's name) is very good about even his body language and the way he talks making you feel comfortable. So I do think that's very, very important and it is life. You know, people are always going to react better when they feel comfortable and not feeling like it's your superior who's looking down on you.

The School B administrator echoed his teacher and asserted that “(r)elationships are so key in all three of those categories (helpful, not helpful, neutral)”. Another teacher in School B said, “I think our administration here wants to know that they are kind of out there and looking and care about what you're doing.”

Missed opportunities.

When asked to describe when feedback seemed not helpful or neutral, nearly all participants described vague feedback that contained general praise. As one teacher in School B stated, “I have feedback like ‘you're a good teacher’. I don't think that's helpful at all except for making you feel better about yourself.” Another teacher from the same school relates how she felt early in her career as a teacher when the administrator told her she was “doing great”:

‘Hey, you're doing great! Glad you're here.’ I mean, at the time when I was a young teacher, I felt great, but I don't think it actually gave me any room to grow as a teacher. I would much rather have, you know, even if it's not necessarily corrective, an observation that gave me specific feedback to know exactly if I was doing something well.

When asked about receiving feedback participants considered neutral, teachers spoke of compliance. “So there are some times where you know that they're just looking at the nitpicking

stuff, you know, your blinds aren't even, your flag is wrapped: those ones would drive me crazy.” Another teacher gave an example of how at School B it is a requirement to post learning targets:

When I post the learning target on the board, I know (the administrator) said that the kids all noticed; ...the best kids don't. The learning target might actually be something that's neutral because I can see, you know, there might be a couple of kids in there that do look at that every day ...but when I get the chuckles from kids...

Transparency and goal setting.

Participants were asked to reflect on whether or not setting goals prior to observations and feedback conferences would be helpful in making teachers more receptive to receiving feedback. To almost all the participants, this was a novel idea. One teacher from School A responded very positively during her interview about how this would help her:

I honestly have to say I really love what you just said. I've never done that. I've never asked it of an administrator, whether it was on a planned visit or just a, hey, sometime when you're in my room observing me informally, like a quick pop in. Can you notice if I'm only talking on one side of the room or if I'm calling on girls more than boys or vice versa or I'm speaking loud enough or to be heard in the back of the room or if I look like I'm connecting with all? I've never actually. I really like that idea.

Not all teachers felt it was necessary or something they would enjoy. One teacher from School B stated she “kind of likes not knowing what he's looking for” while another teacher thought goal-setting may be better suited for novice or “struggling” teachers. In all schools, administrators tied their observations to school-wide goals or individual teacher-created SMART goals required

through the evaluation process. The administrator from School B summed up the lack of goal setting she saw across the district as problematic:

Well, I think that's the alignment and I think a lot of schools are way off base. I think that it should not be a secret - what I'm looking for when I come to visit. And I think that if you're under evaluation with me, I want to talk to you ahead of time because I value what you know and I want you to share with me what you would like me to look for.

The creation of the look-for observation sheets and checklists (review of artifacts) show evidence that the three school administrators do have an understanding of what they are hoping to get out of the observation session, and when they provide these tools to their teachers in advance of their observations they demonstrate a desire to provide their teachers with an idea of what they will be looking for during classroom observations. Although several like the idea, participants did not cite engaging in goal setting prior to their observations.

Summary of Findings

The previous sections provided the findings from data collection from three middle schools on perceptions about what constitutes the nature of effective feedback, the ways leaders can plan for and deliver feedback, and what makes teachers more receptive to hearing feedback.

For non-content factors, the findings on temporal considerations and agent were very straight-forward. All teachers suggested observations should happen at least twice per year and possibly more frequently, particularly for new teachers. Administrators expressed the opinion of the more frequently the better, even weekly, and agreed new teachers required more frequency. Post-observation feedback conferences should ideally occur in face-to-face meetings where written feedback has been provided prior to the meeting.

For content factors, participants noted that specific feedback and observations were necessary to support general comments. Teachers shared that praise may make them feel better about themselves but did not support improving practices. Administrators should have a positive tone when providing feedback. The feedback should focus on the actions taken by the teacher as observed by the administrator and not focus on the teachers themselves. Goal setting was a novel idea to most unless connected to school-wide goals or SMART goals created as part of the evaluation process.

I have utilized the structure from Table 1 in chapter two in creating Table 6 below to organize the findings.

Table 6

Summary of Capstone Findings on Effective Feedback

	Non-Content Factors			Content Factors			
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Timeliness</i>	<i>Agent</i>	<i>Specificity</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Positive or Corrective</i>	<i>Goal Setting</i>
Capstone Findings	At least twice per year; more frequent shorter observations preferred; novice teachers may need more frequency	As soon as possible; less than 24 hours is ideal; no more than 48 hours	Initial written documentation preferred (can be an email) within 24 hours followed by face-to-face conference	Specificity works in supporting more general comments; some suggested it could not be too specific; immediate implementation and tied to research	Focus on actions taken by the teacher not the teacher themselves	Positive tone but not empty praise; corrective feedback delivered professionally and at a different time	Observations rooted in school goals and/or district initiatives

This summary takes into account themes found throughout the data as they relate to the study’s research questions and elements of the conceptual framework.

This chapter began with a summary of the findings of the research conducted in three

middle schools with three administrators and six teachers regarding feedback practices. The next chapter provides a discussion of the findings as they relate to the existing body of literature and my observations and thoughts. Then, I provide recommendations to school districts and principals and my plans to communicate my findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMUNICATION

This final chapter of the capstone contains three sections. The first section provides a discussion of the findings from research conducted in three middle schools regarding the nature of effective feedback, how leaders prepare to provide feedback to teachers, and how receptive teachers are to receiving feedback. The second section offers district leaders, principals, and scholars three recommendations to consider in an effort to improve the feedback process. The final section outlines a communication plan for sharing the recommendations.

Discussion

In the previous chapter, the findings of the research were presented as they relate to my three research questions. I generalized themes found in the data and organized the findings using my conceptual framework. In this section, I discuss the findings as they relate to the body of research presented in chapter two. Specifically, the discussion unfolds in three major sections. I will first discuss the findings on the role of leaders in the feedback process as it relates to the literature. Secondly, I will discuss the two main factors impacting the receptivity of teachers to receiving feedback: (a) the leader-teacher relationship and (b) how the leader uses the tenets of coaching to guide the feedback discussion. Finally, I will discuss the barriers that exist in the feedback process. Throughout this section, I will share how my experiences, review of the literature on feedback, and research shaped my recommendations.

The role of leadership.

As leaders, school administrators control much of the feedback process. Cavanaugh (2013) found that performance feedback is an important strategy for helping teachers improve. He further recommended that “education leaders should consider how the provision of

performance feedback might be efficiently instituted within the current context of education reform” (p. 131). Leithwood et al., (2004) cited the key practice of developing people as an avenue to improving student learning. It was apparent to me that school leaders play a critical role in how the feedback process is carried out in a school, and all three administrators acknowledged this responsibility. The administrator from School B saw his role as a collaborator to help teachers develop skills an integral part of being an instructional leader. Another administrator from School A described feedback as an ongoing driver of growth through one’s career:

School leaders have a responsibility to make (feedback) commonplace. Having been at several schools within this division, I feel that it's interesting. For some reason we perceive that schools that have a high needs population or that we deem to be underperforming, well, they're the ones that need feedback. But the truth of the matter is we all need it because education isn't something that we arrive at. We're all growing. It's a journey. So I think we have to be careful that we don't send the message by not visiting teachers often enough. Whether they are stellar, whether they are novice, new to our profession or somewhere in between that, that their room is one that I don't need to go into. I think that every room should be (visited) multiple times in the school year.

Marshall (2005) recommended leadership actions to ensure an effective process asserting that leaders should “systematically visit all classrooms” (p. 732) and “give teachers prompt, face-to-face feedback after every classroom visit” (p. 734). Two of the leaders I observed were clearly prepared for the process to ensure it went smoothly. Observations of the teachers were scheduled on calendars well in advance along with scheduling the accompanying feedback

conferences. Copies of the feedback forms and/or notes were provided to the teachers in advance of the feedback session either on paper or by email. The administrators made a point of having a welcoming atmosphere to include a small, round conference table to set a comfortable scene for the discussion. The intentionality of leaders to pay attention to details and plan for effective feedback sessions match my experiences and literature review. If leaders demonstrate through actions or inactions that the process doesn't seem to matter than that is quickly communicated to the teacher.

Beyond providing the right setting and being organized in the process, effective leaders carefully prepared for the content of the feedback session. When the structure of the conversation had been pre-planned by the administrators, I observed it had a certain flow. The content of the conversation was tailored to provide the "individualised support" to "foster intellectual stimulation" (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2008, p. 30). Anecdotal notes "focused on specific teaching behaviors" (Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee, 2004, p. 405). You can relate preparedness of an administrator to what we have all observed in teachers. The teachers with a clear lesson plan, deliberate instructional moves, and well-timed routines shine in the classroom. These same components are important to the success of a feedback session.

By contrast, I observed in School C that the sessions seemed rushed and there appeared to be less preparation for the content of the conversation. One meeting started late because the time of the feedback session had not been communicated in advance and the teacher had to be called down from her classroom. Since the session started late, the entire conversation seemed rushed and I observed the teacher appeared less engaged. All of these things communicate to the teacher that the feedback process is a formality and not something of value. On the other hand,

when teachers recognized the time, energy, and focus the leader put towards having a successful meeting, the teachers valued the feedback offered.

Additionally, the feedback conversation between the administrator and the teacher at School C was held across from each other on either side of the administrator's desk. I observed that as the administrator leaned forward, the teacher leaned back. The dynamic between the leader and the teacher appeared unequal and the transcript of the meeting showed the majority of the talking was by the administrator. The administrator talked for two-thirds of the conference (16 minutes) compared to one-third for the teacher (8 minutes). I also observed the administrator interrupted the teacher twelve times. This communicates a message to the teacher a sense of one-way communication and does not support a reflective conversation that is supported by the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

I have also noted that teachers may not be receptive to feedback if certain relationship components are missing. Blase and Blase (2000) showed that effective principals are critical friends who can provide thoughtful discussions with their teachers. Administrator-teacher relationships play a role in teacher's receptivity to feedback and how it may help or hinder the process.

The role of relationships in teacher receptivity.

In conducting this research, I worked to uncover what factors create conditions so that teachers are receptive to receiving feedback. In this section, I present two themes that emerge from the data and how they relate to the existing body of literature. One of the leaders I interviewed stated, "Relationships are so key" to whether feedback is perceived as helpful, not helpful, or neutral. Odden (2011) states that "the principal sets the tone for a trust-oriented culture, which can be the foundation of teacher engagement" (p. 165). Further, Northouse

(2012) describes a leader as someone who influences a group of individuals to accomplish a common goal through active relationships with followers. One of the school leaders (School A) echoed this sentiment.

The more visible I can be, the more present I can be, the more I can foster a relationship with a teacher and really serve as an ally and an advocate for them, the stronger that relationship is, the more productive the school is going to be and then the learning is going to happen.

One teacher spoke of how that lack of a relationship can limit the effectiveness of a feedback conference.

I don't think we kind of built a relationship at first when we were having a first observation, first evaluation meeting, you know, we have to kind of get to know each other.

The observation template (Appendix D) provided the best evidence of relationships between the teachers and administrators. I noted body language and tone. Did the teachers and administrators lean in or sit back? Were arms crossed to signify a closed conversation or open for feedback? Were there smiles and laughs or awkward pauses? In almost all of the observations, the relationships seemed warm and had a positive tone and it was clear in other interactions beyond the formal conversations that a rapport existed. One administrator from School A spoke about creating the relationship first outside of the evaluation process and how that allowed him to create that trust as an instructional leader.

Building up the relationship with the teacher in almost a non-evaluative sense and a non-observation feedback sense, building up that relationship with them where they come to view me as an instructional leader and the feedback that I'm going to give them is coming

from experience and coming from research.

Several participants felt the observation–feedback process provided the opportunity for reflection. Anseel, Lievens, and Schollaert (2009) found that reflection, when combined with feedback enhanced performance improvement better than feedback alone. One teacher from School A stated the administrator “gave me specific strategies that I could use and also in her feedback, she made me reflect on things that I can do differently.” To encourage teachers to reflect on their practice is dependent on a strong relationship between participants but it also reveals a need for a broader skill set – that of coaching. Many novice administrators were great teachers who built relationships with students and were able to motivate them to learn and improve. Adult learning requires different skills and through my experiences I have learned does not come naturally to some. The instructional coaching world provides participants with explicit skills and models for leaders to use to achieve this result with adults.

In the next section, I will discuss the findings on effective feedback and its relationship to coaching. Administrators play a critical role in whether the conversation allows for the opportunity for reflection through thoughtful questioning, pausing, and paraphrasing. These all represent best practices among instructional coaches.

Coaching and its Impact on Receptivity to Feedback

Almost two-thirds of the feedback conferences I observed I would categorize as coaching sessions. Killion, Harrison, Bryan, and Clifton (2012) state the goal of instructional coaching is to “increase teacher effectiveness and student learning by supporting teachers in implementing proven practices, reflecting on their instructional decisions, and making needed adjustments” (p. 42). The language participants used in describing effective ways to change teachers’ practices either explicitly or implicitly mirrored the language of instructional coaching. The leader from

School B noted, “Ultimately, I want them to improve their practice of teaching. And so the way that I would give them feedback might be in like a coaching kind of way to lead them into my big point.” Another administrator from School C noted "a lot of times it's not me giving the feedback, it's me asking a question and helping them to hash out the development in a helpful sense". How can we increase the coach to administrator pipeline or at least offer professional development to assistant principals and principals to learn these skills?

To illustrate this point further, I highlight one particular feedback session between an administrator and a teacher from School B. The session began by the administrator welcoming the teacher, inviting her to sit down and then setting the stage. “We're going to talk today about the observation that I conducted on the 19th during your second period class. Did you get the document I sent with my notes?” He started the session by saying to the teacher, “tell me about your thoughts on the particular lesson that you did as you reflected on the lesson.” During the feedback conference, the administrator asked leading questions, paused, paraphrased and let the teacher come to her own conclusions. He leaned forward in an engaging way and smiled at the teacher. Follow up questions included examples such as “Had you taught this lesson before?”, “Are you confident that each of the kids kind of mastered that idea of the factory?”, and “So what happened after I left?” In contrast to the example discussed in the previous section, this administrator spent less than one-third of the time speaking (6 minutes) as compared to the teacher (14 minutes). The longest amount of time the administrator spoke was at the very end as a summary for about 30 seconds, “So to summarize everything, I think the lesson was very engaging to the kids....” The session concluded and the teacher and administrator continued to talk about non-school related topics which showed further evidence of their strong relationship.

When interviewing the teacher following the session, she noted:

We have always had our conversations at this table, which I feel like is a lot more relaxed. I like getting a copy of feedback so I can read through it and reflect on it and then have a meeting after. Being able to read through what (administrator's name) thoughts were led me to be able to kind of think about what he had to say.

The administrator reflected on his experience as well.

The language of the administration, you can get a message across to the teacher by leading them to the solution, so to speak, by the way you approached the feedback and the questions you ask and the demeanor and the tone that you have.

Preparing for an observation and the feedback conference takes considerable time and forethought. Utilizing skills from the coaching world takes expertise and training. However, when all of those characteristics come together, there is powerful learning taking place. The teacher concluded her interview by stating, "I think not all administrators obviously, you know, offer observations and feedback the same way. And I think this way was very effective." District leaders and principals should consider these factors in selecting new leaders and when creating professional development of administrators. In the next section, I will explore some of the barriers that get in the way of leaders providing effective feedback. If we wish to change the evaluation and feedback process to ensure teachers are receptive to changing their practices, we must provide administrators with the tools and skills to make a difference.

Barriers to effective feedback.

In examining the findings, I have noted several things as barriers to leaders providing effective feedback to teachers. As stated previously, it takes a significant amount of time to set up observations, write up notes, hold feedback sessions, and do the rest of the job as an

administrator. Another barrier is formed when relationships are not as strong as they could be. Finally, the skill sets of administrators are not the same.

Finding the time to do it right is a challenge. One leader mentioned having “administrivia” detract from the frequency of observations he can complete. A teacher said she “understands that for administrators it's very time consuming and laborious. And they have lots of other things going on as well. So I do appreciate feedback. I also am sympathetic to the plight of the administrator.” Horng, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2010) noted that very little time is spent by administrators on observations. What efficiencies can be instituted to allow administrators the time to focus on instruction over discipline, paperwork, and unproductive meetings? In the recommendations section to follow, I will offer some ways to support administrators better in this process.

Building strong relationships with teachers is a must. Zimmerman and Deckert-Pelton (2003) noted improved pedagogy and increased student achievement when there is positive rapport, trust, and respect between the teacher and the administrator. The administrator from School A discussed how she approaches this in her building. “So if I want the door to be open, I know that I have to be gracious when I'm allowed in and build the relationships.” At least for this administrator, feedback sessions are the means to building relationships. “(Feedback) has the potential to build the relationship between the person who is giving the feedback and the person who's receiving it and create an environment where it's more reciprocal, where the conversation is a give and take and that there's learning taking place. I hope that feedback is really about learning.”

Administrators must have a large skillset to be effective leaders in a building. “When school principals are the source of feedback, the disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge

principals have is fundamental in order to support teacher professional development” (Leiva, Montecinos, and Aravena, 2016). Several participants in this research study noted that administrators were more credible if they kept up with current practices. A teacher noted that administrators “have to know upcoming strategies are really used in the district or in the state or in the education field. They really need to be up to date with all those so that when they actually provide feedback, it is valuable.” Another teacher stated in her interview that she appreciated how the administrator cited research in their feedback session. As noted previously, instructional coaching skills are also needed to enhance the feedback. What tools can we provide principals to help them identify potential assistant principals who have the ability to build strong relationships and hold reflective conversations? And probably more importantly, what support can we provide principals in helping nurture these skills in current leaders?

Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this section focus on leveraging what I have learned in this study, along with existing research, to improve the feedback process for teachers. My recommendations focus on leaders’ understanding of the nature of feedback, guidelines on planning for and engaging teachers in the observation and feedback process, and creating a culture in schools that is conducive to feedback receptivity. District leaders must play a critical role in supporting principals and schools as they start to implement changes to the feedback process designed to improve instruction and raise student achievement.

Recommendation One: The evaluation process needs to be streamlined and differentiated.

In discussions with administrators and teachers, the role of frequency and timeliness were clearly interrelated and both impacted by the workload on the administrator and the time

consuming process of formal evaluations. Administrators are given large caseloads of teachers requiring formal evaluations. This impacts the frequency of observations. Formal processes require considerable amounts of time and preparation. All of the teachers who participated noted that more time should be spent with novice teachers. Experienced teachers would benefit from shorter, more frequent, less formal observations requiring less time.

Recommendation Two: Administrators would benefit from professional learning on effective feedback processes.

Given the large skillset required to deliver feedback effectively, administrators need to understand the three most important components. First, they must be grounded in understanding of both the non-content and content features of feedback. Understanding the importance of frequency, timeliness, providing written feedback prior to the conference, and creating a welcoming atmosphere are the basic building blocks. Additionally, administrators need to have the skills of an instructional coach in order to lead the teachers to reflect on their practices, be commended for their strengths, and set goals for growth. Learning coaching skills will also help administrators in building strong professional relationships with staff. Finally, administrators must keep up with best practices in teaching and learning along with current district initiatives. This would require a series of professional learning sessions and would need to be spread out over time.

Recommendation Three: The district should work with principals to develop a protocol and tools to help them evaluate the feedback structures in their schools.

Principals would benefit from checklists provided to administrators around the feedback process to ensure certain details critical to the process are not overlooked. These include such

things as feedback with 24 hours, more guidance on shorter drop in sessions, and a listing of required professional development to be taken by all administrators. A protocol and observation tool could be developed to mirror the methods used in this study whereas the principal or an administrative colleague could observe a feedback session and provide feedback to the administrator on the delivery and effectiveness.

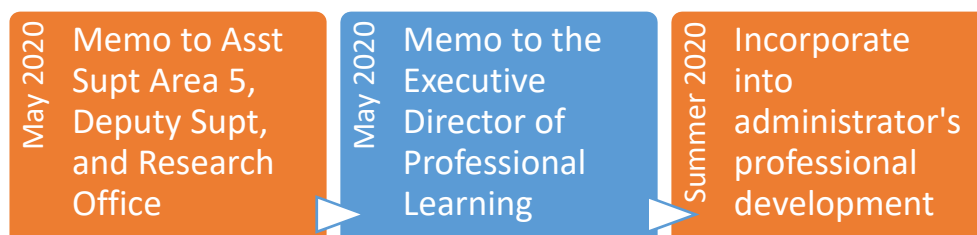
Communication

The previous section of this chapter presented a discussion of how the findings did or did not match the current body of research on providing teachers with feedback to improve their instruction. Additionally, it suggested three recommendations for school districts to consider to improve the feedback process. In this section, I have created my action communication plan and products that I will share with school district leaders in which I conducted my research. These communications will be presented to the assistant superintendent of Area 5, district research office, and the deputy superintendent in May 2020 through a memo.

The second communication product will consist of the same summary memorandum to be sent to executive director of professional learning including a PowerPoint presentation presenting the problem of practice, my research questions, findings, and recommendations in May 2020. I will request to present the findings and PowerPoint to the District's Leadership Team for possible incorporation in professional development for administrators. Figure 2 illustrates the communication timeline.

Figure 2

Communication Timeline



Summary Memorandum

Summary Memorandum for the Assistant Superintendent, Research Office, and Deputy Superintendent

Topic: Recommendations to Improve Feedback Practices to Enhance Teacher Performance based on research conducted in spring of 2019

Problem of Practice: This study focuses on a problem of practice that is common to many schools and one that has persisted for decades: providing effective feedback to teachers. In my research, I sought to understand the nature of effective feedback, how leaders plan for and engage in providing feedback, and what factors contribute to teachers being receptive to receiving feedback.

Characteristics of Feedback: Through the literature review and research data collection, I identified the characteristics of feedback and then was able to determine what practices were effective or not. The first category of characteristics relates to how leaders set the stage for providing feedback to teachers. This includes the frequency of observations, the timeliness of feedback provided after an observation, the manner in which the feedback is delivered (email, written notes, conference), the setting in which the feedback session occurs, and the perceived relationship between leader and teacher. The second category relates to the content of the feedback provided. This includes the specificity level of the feedback, the role of praise, tone, corrective feedback, whether the feedback focused on the teacher or the observed actions taken by the teacher, and the role of the administrator as a coach or supervisor.

Research Methods: This study focused on one of five geographic areas in a large suburban school district. The data was collected in three middle schools through interviews, observations, and artifact reviews. There were nine interviews conducted which included six teachers and three administrators. The observations and interviews were audio recorded and the transcripts analyzed to determine what participants considered practices effective or not effective to the feedback process.

Findings: Teachers and administrators agree that observations should happen at least twice per year and if possible more frequently, particularly for new teachers. Post-observation feedback conferences should ideally occur in face-to-face meetings where written feedback has been provided prior to the meeting. Participants felt specific feedback with observed examples were necessary to support general comments made by the administrator. Recommendations should be supported by research. Teachers felt praise may make them feel better about themselves but did not support improving practices. Administrators should have a positive tone when providing feedback. The feedback should focus on the actions taken by the teacher observed by the administrator and not focus on the teachers themselves. Administrators must be well-versed in current best practices and district initiatives. Goal setting was a novel idea to most unless connected to school-wide goals or SMART goals created as part of the evaluation process. Both teachers and leaders agree that the relationship between the participants is critically important. Teachers were more receptive to feedback when it was presented in a coaching manner that stimulated reflection.

Recommendations: The following recommendations are provided to improve the process by which leaders provide feedback to teachers.

Recommendation One: The evaluation process needs to be streamlined and differentiated. In discussions with administrators and teachers, the role of frequency and timeliness were clearly interrelated and both impacted by the workload on the administrator and the time consuming process of formal evaluations. Administrators are given large caseloads of teachers requiring formal evaluations. This impacts the frequency of observations. Formal processes require considerable amounts of time and preparation. All of the teachers who participated noted that more time should be spent with novice teachers. Experienced teachers would benefit from shorter, more frequent, less formal observations requiring less time.

Recommendation Two: Administrators would benefit from professional learning on effective feedback processes.

Given the large skillset required to deliver feedback effectively, administrators need to understand the three most important components. First, they must be grounded in understanding of both the non-content and content features of feedback. Understanding the importance of frequency, timeliness, providing written feedback prior to the conference, and creating a welcoming atmosphere are the basic building blocks. Additionally, administrators need to have the skills of an instructional coach in order to lead the teachers to reflect on their practices, be commended for their strengths, and set goals for growth. Learning coaching skills will also help administrators in building strong professional relationships with staff. Finally, administrators must keep up with best practices in teaching and learning along with current district initiatives. This would require a series of professional learning sessions and would need to be spread out over time.

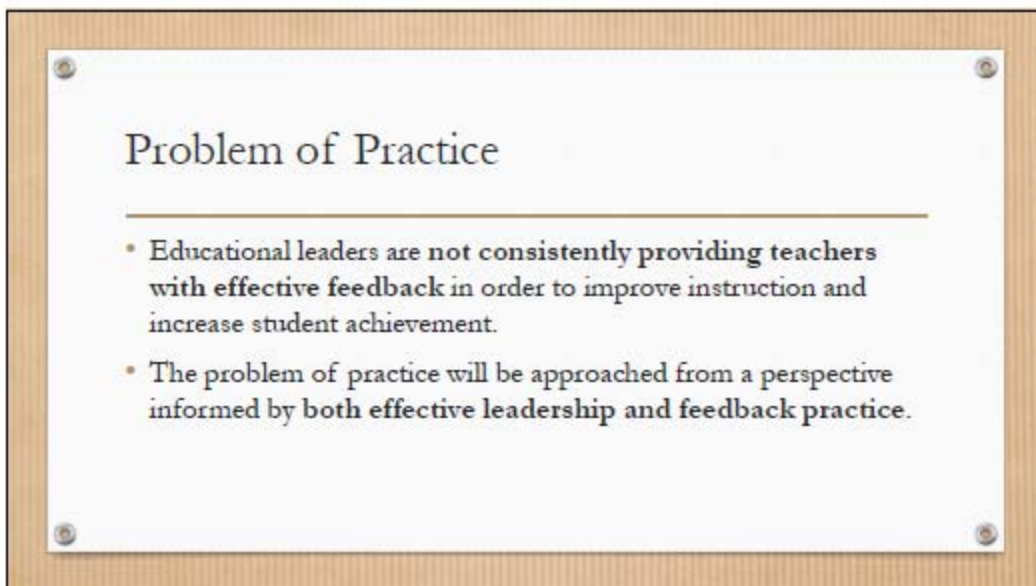
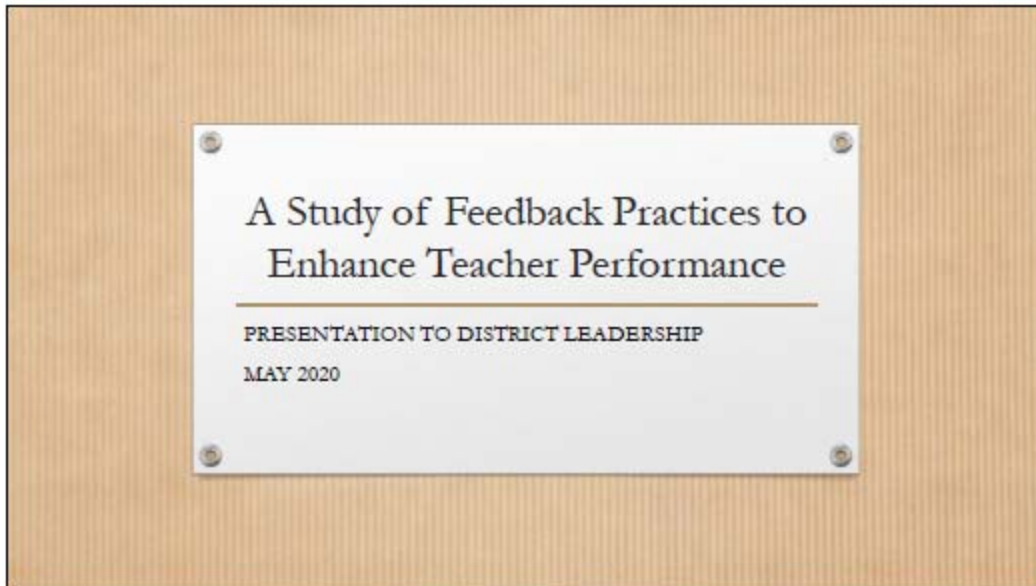
Recommendation Three: The district should work with principals to develop a protocol and tools to help them evaluate the feedback structures in their schools.

Principals would benefit from checklists provided to administrators around the feedback process to ensure certain details critical to the process are not overlooked. These include such things as adhering to a set of guidelines such as providing feedback with 24 hours, more guidance on shorter drop in sessions, and a listing of required professional development to be taken by all administrators. A protocol and observation tool could be developed to mirror the methods used in this study whereas the principal or an administrative colleague could observe a feedback session and provide feedback to the administrator on the delivery and effectiveness.

Summary: School leaders need more opportunities to learn about effective feedback practices and have more time to implement these practices with fidelity. The current evaluation should be streamlined and differentiated. Principals should be provided with training, protocols, and tools to support administrators in improving their feedback providing skills. Taken together, these recommendations can impact the feedback process and improve instruction leading to increased student achievement.

Figure 3

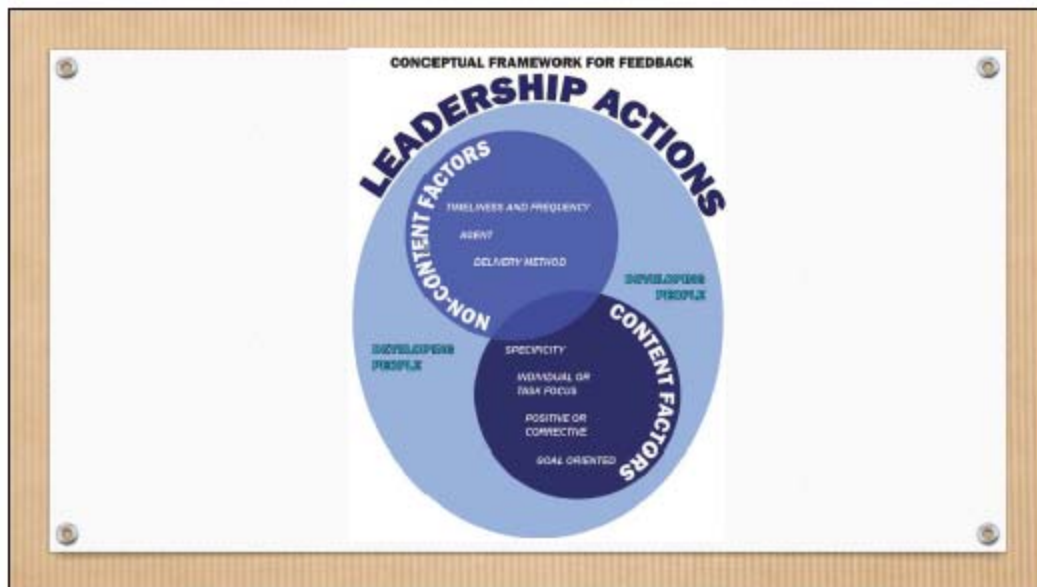
District Leadership PowerPoint Presentation



Darling-Hammond (2014) asserted that she and her colleagues “searched the country for effective evaluation systems and found ourselves rummaging for the proverbial needle in a haystack. We discovered only a very few that offered opportunities for teachers to set goals and receive regular, useful feedback” (p. 5).

Purpose of Study

- To answer research questions seeking to understand the nature of effective feedback practices and their influence on teacher receptivity.
- To provide suggestions to district leaders and administrators.
- To contribute to the body of research connecting leadership actions with improved feedback practices for teachers.



Literature: Effective Feedback

- Positive, focused on the task not the learner
- Specific but in manageable chunks
- Frequent and timely
- Paired with goal setting
- Learner is equal partner in the process
- Learner engages in reflection

Blase and Blase (2000); Brinko (1993); Cavanagh (2013); Hattie and Timperley (2007); Kluger and DeNisi (1996); Scheeler, Ruhl, and McAfee (2004); Shute (2008); Thurlings et. al. (2013)

Research Questions

- What is the nature of effective feedback from leaders to teachers?
- How do leaders plan for and engage in providing effective feedback?
- What conditions promote teacher receptivity and changes in their practice as well as what conditions impact the receiver negatively?

Methodology Overview

- Qualitative study using observations, interviews, and artifact examination.
- Three administrators and six teachers from three different middle schools.
- Participants identified through discussion with Area Leadership.

Key Findings

Non-Content Factors			Content Factors			
Frequency	Timeliness	Agent	Specificity	Focus	Positive or Corrective	Goal Setting
At least twice per year; more frequent shorter observations preferred; novice teachers may need more frequency	As soon as possible; less than 24 hours is ideal; no more than 48 hours	Initial written documentation preferred (can be an email) within 24 hours followed by face-to-face conference	Specificity works in supporting more general comments; some suggested it could not be too specific; immediate implementation and tied to research	Focus on actions taken by the teacher not the teacher themselves	Positive tone but not empty praise; corrective feedback delivered professionally and at a different time	Observations rooted in school goals and/or district initiatives

Recommendation One: The evaluation process needs to be streamlined and differentiated.

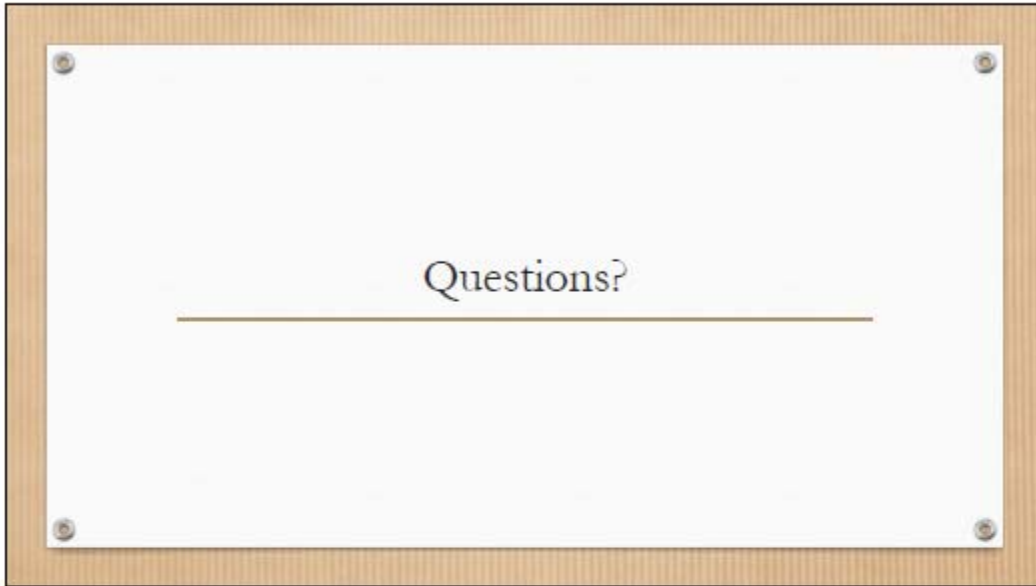
- The workload on administrators and the time consuming process of formal evaluations impacts frequency and timeliness.
- More time should be spent on novice teachers.
- Experienced teachers should receive shorter, more frequent, less formal observations.

Recommendation Two: Administrators would benefit from professional learning on effective feedback processes.

- Administrators must be grounded in their understanding of frequency, timeliness, providing written feedback prior to the conference, and creating a welcoming atmosphere.
- Administrators need to have the skills of an instructional coach in order to lead the teachers to reflect on their practices, be commended for their strengths, and set goals for growth.
- Administrators must keep up with best practices in teaching and learning along with current district initiatives.

Recommendation Three: The district should work with principals to develop a protocol and tools to help them evaluate the feedback structures in their schools.

- Administrators would benefit from checklists provided to administrators around the feedback process to ensure certain details critical to the process are not overlooked.
- A protocol and observation tool could be developed to mirror the methods used in this study whereas the principal or an administrative colleague could observe a feedback session and provide feedback to the administrator on the delivery and effectiveness.



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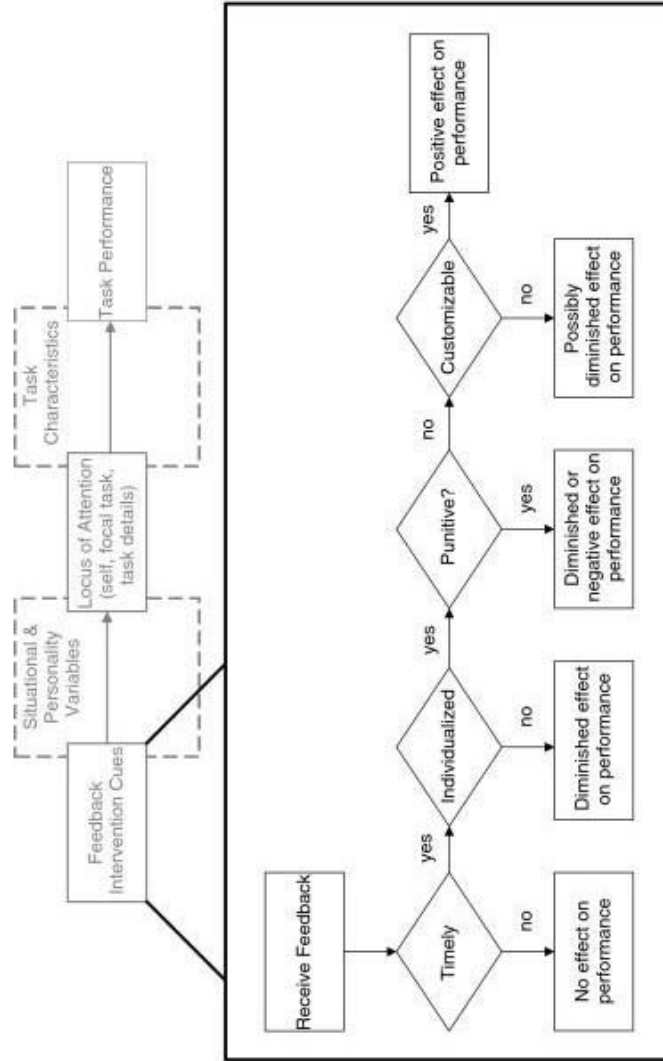
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Appendix A

Hysong et al.'s (2006) model of actionable feedback in the context of Feedback Intervention Theory.



Appendix B

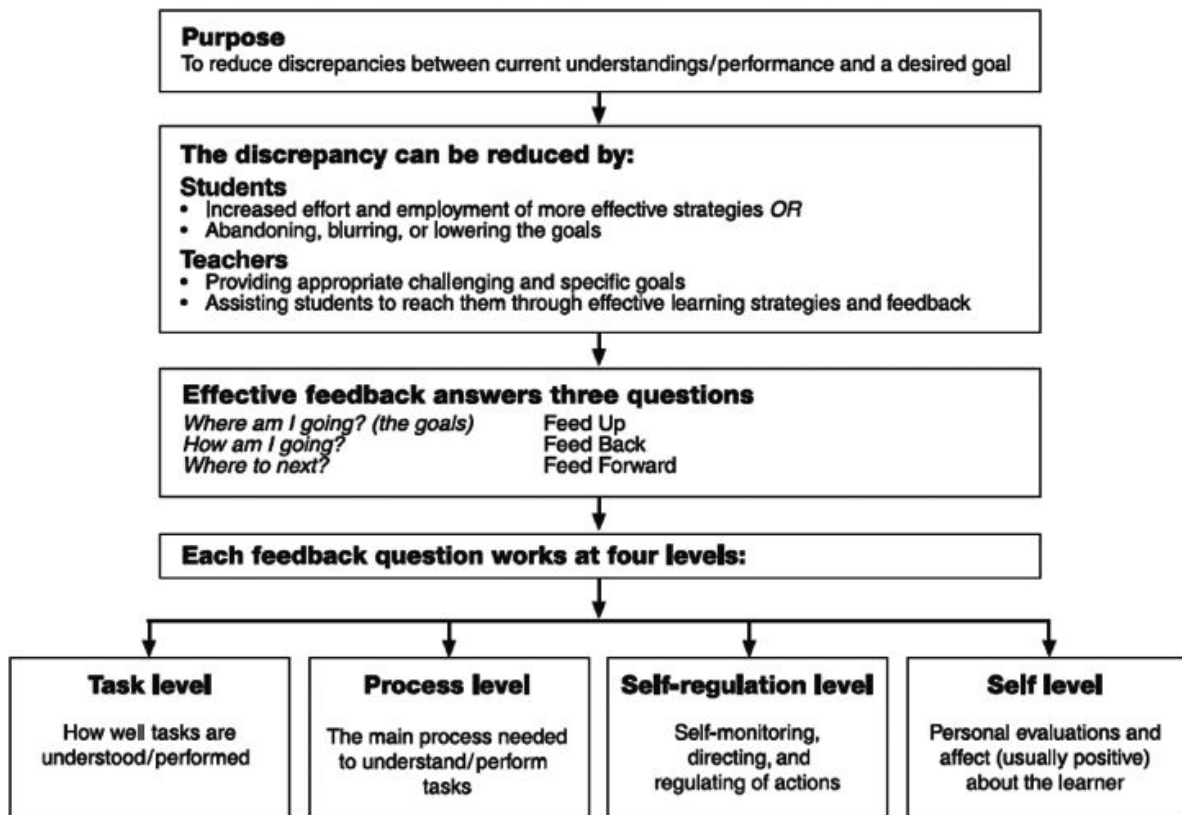


FIGURE 1. A model of feedback to enhance learning.

Appendix C: Protocol for Feedback Interviews (60 minutes)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. The purpose of this discussion is to gather your perceptions about feedback sessions you participated in as an administrator or teacher. Lessons learned will be shared with other schools and districts that are seeking to understand more about effective feedback.

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation. As reminder, this was mentioned in the consent form you have already signed. Only I will have access to the transcripts and after a certain amount of time, all records will be deleted. I intend to write up a summary of what I learn through this and other conversations. However, all comments will be treated as confidential and at no point will anyone be able to connect one of your comments with your name or your school's name. Our conversation will be most fruitful if I can get an accurate picture of what your experience has been, both good and bad, so please feel free to be completely open and honest. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions, but it is very helpful if you use specific examples in your answers.

[Begin with introductions of researcher and the administrator/teacher. Ask the administrator/teacher to tell how long he/she has been in the position overall and how long at his/her current school.]

- As a reminder, please be as specific as possible.
- Please describe any specific actions, words, or experiences that add to your perceptions.
- Do you have any questions before I begin?

Questions about the feedback received during the post-observation conference

1. Let's begin with the purpose of feedback in post teaching observations. What are your thoughts?

2. Given those purposes, how frequently do you think a teacher should receive feedback from an administrator?

Probes:

- What has been your experience?
- Does the frequency affect the impact of the feedback?

3. How soon after an observation should an administrator provide feedback to a teacher?

Probes:

- How long is too long after an observation?
- Do you think the timeliness makes a difference?

Let's talk about more specific aspects of feedback.

4. When a person gets observed, the feedback can focus on the person or on what the person did. When you reflect on your experience, describe what you mostly talked about? Provide specific examples that support your perception.

Probes:

- Which of those types of feedback, do you think, has greater positive impact?
- As a receiver of feedback, which do you prefer?

5. Feedback tends to range between affirming and correcting. Please share the nature of the feedback you received.

Probes:

- What did you talk about during the conference?
- Which of those types of feedback, do you think, has greater positive impact?
- As a receiver of feedback, which do you prefer?

6. The specificity of feedback can range from general comments to very minute details about a specific instance. What was the feedback you received like? Please share one or more specific examples that help me understand your experiences.

Probes:

- Can you say more about that?
- Which of those types of feedback, do you think, has greater positive impact?
- As a receiver of feedback, which do you prefer?

7. Feedback can be perceived as helpful, neutral, or not helpful at all. I'd be really interested in hearing your thoughts on what distinguishes feedback into these categories as well as how you would describe your past experiences. Please provide examples of feedback that you considered to be helpful, examples you would categorize as neutral, and examples of feedback that were not helpful at all.

Probes:

- Can you give a specific example from the meeting?
- What made the feedback helpful, neutral, or not helpful?

8. Most administrators and teachers set goals and objectives for what they wish to get out of the observation process. What role did goals and objectives play in your post teaching observation meetings? When your post-observation meetings focused on pre-established goals and objectives, how did that impact the content and impact of the meeting?

Probes:

- Can you give a specific example from the meeting?
- Do you think it is/would be more helpful for the feedback to be based upon agreed upon goals?

9. Feedback can be delivered to individuals through multiple methods including face-to-face, email, google docs, etc. What do you think is the most effective way to for feedback to be delivered?

Probes:

- What modes of delivery have you experienced, personally?
Can you share the pros and cons of that feedback experience?
- Can you describe the benefits and drawbacks of the different methods?

Appendix D: Observation Template

Researcher will observe feedback session through the lens of the literature on effective feedback. Researcher will debrief with administrator and teacher after the observation.

Understanding the Setting			
Opening actions		Seating arrangement	
Location		Time of day	
Time elapsed since observation		Approach to providing feedback (sandwich, good news first...)	
Length of session		Closing actions	

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes	
Observational Memos	Methodological Memos	Theoretical Memos