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Beyond Charlotte: Reflection for Continuous Improvement of Practice

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Abstract: *Little positive correlation exists between teacher performance, or value-added teacher assessment, and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014). "Thus, evaluation in its current form, often contributes little … to teacher learning…" (Darling -Hammond, 2014, p. 1). Minnici (2014) summarizes "teachers are the most important in school factors that influence student achievement" (p. 1) and yet she questions whether the current systems of teacher evaluation improve teaching practices and engages teachers in necessary, continued professional development and growth during their careers. Additionally, Nolan and Hoover (2008) express concern about the current practice of ill-defined, mixed use of teacher evaluation and supervision used to enhance teaching performance. These authors are emphatic that this trend will not improve teaching or student achievement unless there is clear differentiation of the processes of evaluation and supervision as they are intended.*

With the advent of Race to the Top grants and waivers, teacher evaluation evolved quickly into an unprecedented accountability requirement for the states to receive federal funding (National Center for Education and Economy, 2014). Across the nation, state departments rushed to increase efforts to design and implement teacher evaluation systems (Performance Evaluation Reform Act, 2010). But most recently, with the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, and the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law, federal involvement in teacher evaluation may have come to an end. The new law does not require states to set up teacher evaluation systems based primarily on student test scores (Sawchuk, 2016). Lack of evidence to date that these systems have not yielded significant teaching nor student improvement has not gone unnoticed.

Little positive correlation exists between teacher performance, or value-added teacher assessment, and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014). "Thus, evaluation in its current form, often contributes little … to teacher learning…" (Darling -Hammond, 2014, p. 1). Minnici (2014) summarizes "teachers are the most important in school factors that influence student achievement" (p. 1) and yet she questions whether the current systems of teacher evaluation improve teaching practices and engages teachers in necessary, continued professional development and growth during their careers. Additionally, Nolan and Hoover (2008) express concern about the current practice of ill-defined, mixed use of teacher evaluation and supervision used to enhance teaching performance. These authors are emphatic that this trend will not improve teaching or student achievement unless there is clear differentiation of the processes of evaluation and supervision as they are intended.

Teacher evaluation has been an area of interest particularly when training preservice teachers in the field as they are developing content and pedagogical skills. In an effort to build upon their successes and help them develop, the notion of a summative tool was replaced with other formative tools. In our university-based Professional Development School (PDS) work (Damore, Kapustka, & McDevitt, 2011; Kapustka & Damore, 2012; Damore & Kapustka, 2007), we, the university faculty and PDS school liaisons, questioned the validity of the use of a traditional, college of education prescribed, checklist-based performance assessment as an effective evaluation of student teachers. Concerns focused specifically on the structure and content of the supervisory feedback conference and perceived limitations for yielding improvement in the student teacher's growth and development. Specifically, the researchers wondered if the traditional assessment model yielded changes to teacher practice. Was the model helpful in teachers learning a process for self-reflection or was it dependent upon who was giving the feedback and how it was delivered?   In the context of this university-school partnership, and its focus on critical-collaborative inquiry, one of the innovations attempted was a unique, structured post-observation interview protocol designed to be used after each formal observation of a student teacher by the university supervisor. The post observation conference was selected and targeted as the ideal setting for debriefing on lessons and guiding the teacher to reflect upon what her intentions were, versus what actually occurred during the lesson and what might be improved in the future. The hypothesis was that preservice teachers with a more collaborative, supervisory feedback model, inviting their participation, self-assessment and reflection would support an improved process of self-understanding, and thus improvement of practice. The protocol was designed in response to concerns about the unstructured nature of the observation conferences, and written after reviewing the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards (1992), National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) principles (1987), and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards (2001) for professional development schools.   The literature review yielded an eight question interview protocol that focused on 5 domains: curriculum, differentiation, evidence of student learning, communication and professionalism, and reflective practice/inquiry. The protocol was utilized by several supervising faculty members, assigned to the PDS schools in the network, and was administered four times throughout the student teaching experience. Four times per year was dictated by the university but continues as the model today.

Feedback from faculty and teacher candidates, at that time, was positive and transformational. That is, teachers were able to make their own connections and see where and why lessons had been successful or not. Additionally, they

linked prior learning from professional development experiences and mentors to specific aspects of their teaching. They were able to contextualize the lesson and provide the background with which they operate in their classrooms. They shared ah-ha moments along the way as they made these connections. We observed and documented improved outcomes of teaching and learning (Kapustka & Damore, 2012). Overall, participatory experiences yielded a different lens to shape the structure of supervisory feedback to establish a meaningful, supervisory relationship between supervisor and supervisee (Damore & Mulvey, 2009).   Our work has since transcended from the original student teacher audience to the use of the protocol by principals with practicing teachers. Research is currently in process to examine the effect of this inquiry based supervision model. The purpose of this paper is to broaden and connect the researchers' theoretical framework grounded in best practices in teaching and practitioner based inquiry to literature on purposes and qualities of effective supervision to promote professional learning and growth for teachers.

Teacher Evaluation versus Supervision

Teacher evaluation determines the effectiveness of a teacher's competence, typically yielding a summative rating at the end of the process. Models of teacher evaluation are designed to ensure all teachers achieve minimum competency; to ensure children are learning and ensure schools are meeting their goals for educating its citizens. Evaluation results lead to rehiring and retention decisions. In contrast, supervision is a process focused on improving teacher competence or teacher practice. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) posit "the purpose of supervision is to help increase the opportunity and capacity of schools to contribute more effectively to students' academic success." "The purpose is to promote teacher growth beyond the teacher's current level of performance" (Nolan & Hoover, p. 8). Supervision should precede evaluation if we practice what we preach and want teachers to become better practitioners, and influence student achievement (Danielson, 2011; Aseltine, Faryniarz & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2006). Evaluation and supervision are different and have become mistakenly interchangeable as a result of school structure, accountability pressures and limited resources.

Historically, the roles within supervision and evaluation have not changed greatly over the course of the past hundred years. First represented by the inspectorial model, processes for teacher improvement changed dramatically with the infusion of more humanistic strategies, coined as clinical supervision in the 1960's by Cogan (1973) and Goldhammer (1969). With the wide use of Madeline Hunter's model of lesson design in the 1970's, which represented a hybrid of the

two previous models, a shift on the continuum reverted to a teacher evaluation tool.   In the late 1980's and 1990's, reflective and developmental models emerged to counteract Hunter's model (Glickman, Gordan, & Ross-Gordan, 2013). Today, the standard used across this country is Danielson's Framework for Teaching, a research-based set of components of instruction, aligned to the INTASC standards (2002), and grounded in a constructivist view of learning and teaching. While this model represents a well-defined measure of teaching and learning, its implementation is far from the purpose of supervision of teachers to improve their practice. (Danielson Group, 2015). The Danielson framework, in its current configuration, has been widely distributed and adopted by state boards of education throughout the nation, implemented in thousands of schools and school districts, resulting, to date, in minimal positive perceptions of improved student achievement.

Linda Darling-Hammond (2014) examines the dichotomy that continues today, expressing concern that little evidence exists of progress to train principals as "instructional leaders and evaluators of teaching" (p. 1). Marzano (2012) joins Darling-Hammond, in assertion that "measuring teachers and developing teachers are different purposes with different implications" (p. 16).

Utilizing the Danielson evaluation model exclusively, the role of the 21st century principal is confounded with the conflicting demands of evaluating a teacher's effectiveness while, generally, at the same time, facilitating development and improvement of teaching practices. In an attempt to serve both goals of evaluation and supervision, the current confounded system may hinder the ability and capacity of the school administrator to provide teachers with feedback that will result in development of reflective, inquiry based practice they can use to build and improve classroom performance.

Inquiry-Based Supervision

Darling-Hammond (2014) characterizes that few evaluative models include opportunities for teachers and their respective administrators to set goals for teaching and learning, much less provide regular, useful feedback to help guide teachers to improve instructional practices. Darling-Hammond (2014) and Mielke and Frontier (2012) advocate for systems of teacher evaluation that support models of continuous improvement, and growth opportunities for teachers. Danielson (2012) suggests that the post-observation conference is the "best opportunity to engage teachers in thinking through how they could strengthen their practice."   Employing teacher inquiry resulting in self-reflection has a better chance of teachers owning, studying and improving their classroom

practices. The skills and dispositions that an effective supervisor displays are characteristic of a professional educator, a teacher coach with strong beliefs in the tenets of supervision. "…Teacher supervision is an organizational function designed to promote teacher growth, leading to improvement in teaching performance and student learning" (Nolan & Hoover, p. 6). The supervision process, unlike the typical evaluative process, sets up the necessary milieu to establish the necessary trust between a teacher and an administrator to commence, nurture and sustain the dialogue and inquiry into teaching and student learning. The real-time conversations that follow an observation are the best opportunity to engage the teacher in reflective thinking about improvement of practice (Danielson, 2012).

Gabriel and Allington (2012) express concern that the current evaluation tools may not result in meaningful conversations with teachers; are the right questions being posed, are there additional opportunities for coaching and conversation? Danielson (2012) speaks of concern about principals not feeling prepared to conduct a post observation conference. Even if principals do have a clear definition of good teaching, are they ill prepared for conducting the conference itself? Research shows that teachers want feedback; they are best engaged when they are active participants in the process (Danielson, 2012). Honoring teachers as self-directed learners capable of creating improvement goals may appear in the literature but be more challenging to implement than envisioned (Mielke & Frontier, 2012). Principals may need to shift their mindset, give less prescriptive feedback, and be more open-minded to an inquiry-based approach to helping teachers create and find the solutions for improving their practices.

Tomlinson (2012) describes the "evaluation of my dreams." The numerous characteristics she identifies, align well to the purpose and intention of supervisory practices, content, and process such as:

> Communicate a vision of the potential power of my teaching so that my work would never become merely a mass of details..; mentor me; watch me work often so he or she would have a multi dimensional sense of both what I'm doing and how I'm doing; point out opportunities for me to continue to develop in my work; provide feedback that's personalized to me; deliver formative feedback and support for growth before summative evaluation, and acknowledge my progress when it's merited, pointing out my next developmental step. (p. 88)

Tomlinson (2012) goes on to say:

> My ideal evaluator would help to build a mutual relationship built on mutual desire for growth in meaningful work, clear learning targets,

formative assessment, and support for taking the next steps, recognition of a teacher's strength, and persistent feedback calibrate to that teacher's level of development. (p. 89)

Inquiry-based supervision, intentional dialogue, between administrator and teacher, for the purpose of study of practice, presents an alternative to top-down educator professional learning through its approach and its result. With the use of the aforementioned, effective supervisory qualities and intended results, inquiry models can guide principals to engage teachers in participatory learning, moving toward the acquisition and practices of methods found effective in classrooms (Palmisano, 2013). Reflective, inquiry based processes, where administrators and teachers can dialogue about classroom practices, are intentional to guide teachers to articulate, self-reflect and develop and grow professionally (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2007). Connected to the evaluators' perception of best practice in evaluation is an agreed upon definition of good teaching and learning.

Definitions of Good Teaching and Learning

Multiple definitions for effective teaching exist. Most frequently cited characteristics of an effective teacher include setting clear instructional goals and expectations, excels at classroom management, lesson planning and design. Research indicates that teacher preparation/knowledge of teaching and learning, subject matter knowledge, experience, and the combined set of qualifications measured by teacher licensure are all leading factors in teacher effectiveness (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2015). Published in 1989, the document "What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do" articulated the National Board's Five Core Propositions for Teaching. Similar to medicine's Hippocratic Oath, the Five Core Propositions underscore the accomplished teacher's commitment to advancing student achievement. Together, the propositions form the basis of National Board Standards and the foundation for National Board Certification. The five propositions embody essential themes for a teacher: committed to students and their learning; know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students; responsible for managing and monitoring student learning; think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and serve as members of learning communities.

Minnici (2014) continues to question whether new evaluation system developers and implementers agree on definitions of good teaching. Minnici seems to think that common language still needs further strengthening when discussing teacher quality or teacher effectiveness, for example. The problems escalate as school districts use these measures for teacher accountability. Others

believe that definitions and criteria are well articulated for classroom observations and classroom improvement, such as the highly adopted Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Danielson, herself (2012), indicates that observation systems must include well-defined components of good teaching and clarity for what an observer is looking for. But Danielson expresses concern about the principal who believes teaching is not occurring unless the teacher is lecturing directly to students as opposed to facilitating meaningful, "interactive work of students" (p. 33). She is dismayed when she hears "I'll come back when you're teaching." (p. 33)

We are not arguing about definitions of good teaching and learning. The teaching and learning principles utilized in the interview protocol are validated continuously throughout the literature over the past couple of decades (Danielson, 2012; Elmore, Peterson & McCarthey, 1996; Nolan & Hoover, 2008). Only recently, Darling-Hammond (2014) highlights increased interest and emphasis in teacher competencies with collegial activity with other teachers in the school. Harris, Ingle, and Rutledge (2014) also reported principal perceptions of good teaching included strong communication skills and ability to work with others. In our own research, we have also concluded these components of adult collaboration, communication, and professional development to be essential in the work of teachers; all are incorporate into the components of the Reflective Teaching Tool.

The Reflective Teaching Tool

The Reflective Teaching Tool is a structured, post-classroom observation, teacher interview "protocol." The authors first used the protocol with university supervisors and student teachers, and now report on transitioning its use to principals with practicing teachers. The interview questions, designed to incorporate evidence-based criteria of good teaching as well solicit critical inquiry-based teacher responses, enable the supervisor to guide teachers, after a classroom observation, to articulate, self-reflect and set goals to improve upon their classroom practices (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2007). As earlier mentioned, designed and administered several years earlier (Kapustka & Damore, 2012), with over eighty student teachers at a large, urban university, the protocol was developed in response to the researchers' participatory experiences in a university-based PDS model, as well as review of the literature that criticizes teacher education programs' ineffectiveness in preparation of future teachers (Levine, 2006). This tool is designed, with the intentionality of improving the supervisory relationship with the teacher (preservice or inservice), resulting in improved teacher performance on specific criteria for effective teaching. It also

provides the teacher with a routine for reflective practices, using the protocol to understand areas for improvement to their teaching.

The specific components, incorporated into questions of the interview protocol, include (1) curriculum planning/delivery of instruction; (2) differentiation of instruction; (3) evidence of student learning; (4) adult communication and collaboration; and (5) professionalism/reflective practices (INTASC, 1992; NBPTS, 1987).

To illustrate the use of the protocol questions presented to the teacher by the supervisor, we highlight one here for purposes of the reader's rudimentary understanding of the intentionality of the protocol. The protocol questions are used following a classroom observation and elicit the teacher's feedback on his/her lesson. One question on the protocol "What did your students learn today and how do you know?" was guided by two research questions: (1) How would student teachers articulate their understanding of student learning from their first weeks of student teaching, and how would this articulation develop over time? And (2) Was the interview protocol helpful in guiding student teachers to reflect upon student learning? (Kapustka & Damore, 2012).

In this study, principals conducted the interviews after observing the researchers modeling the process. Interview responses were audiotaped and transcribed. Responses were coded and themes identified (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Reflection as a practice emerged as an overarching theme. The interview analysis identified areas of focus in the student teachers' responses to the question about student learning that included content knowledge and teacher practices. We also noticed that, over time, the student teachers began to anticipate the question, and we noted, in later interviews, that they often stated some version of "I knew you were going to ask that" when we queried them about student learning after the lesson. The most common responses from student teachers focused on the content knowledge they expected their students to obtain, and the standards they had identified for the lesson. As students progressed through their student teaching placement, they became more confident in their responses and were able to articulate *how* they knew their students were learning. Effective teacher practices emerged as a second category for evidence of student learning, specifically in response to the second part of the question, "What did your students learn today *and how do you know?"* Student teachers reported that they watched the class closely for indications of learning and discussed behaviors such as actively listening to the students or quickly assessing the students' work as a part of the lesson or as they moved around the classroom. With other questions on the protocol, we saw similar patterns with student teachers thinking, articulating,

and engaging in self-inquiry and reflection about curriculum delivery, differentiation, communication/collaboration, and professionalism/reflective practice. Like Hollins (2011), we recognized the value of providing the practice of inquiry and opportunity for the student teacher to make connections between influences of practice on student learning. It is our assertion that these inquiry based conversations led by a skilled supervisor, someone who recognizes and values the process of self-reflection as the pathway to teacher improvement, are essential in the preparation of teachers who will be able to ensure the learning of all students in their classrooms.

With an updated review of the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Minnici, 2014; Danielson, 2012; Marzano, 2012), the inclusion of the original components stand relevant today for the protocol and its questions, and for practicing teachers in a post observation conference format such as Danielson's four domains, NCATE Five Core Competencies to name a few. In the past few years, the increased need for teacher collaboration with colleagues, and significant correlations between evaluation and continued professional learning has been highlighted for good teaching practices. Collaboration, development of professional culture, deep knowledge base in teaching, integration with professional development and teacher responsiveness to differentiated needs are identified by Simon (2012) and validate further the strength of the content of the interview protocol components and questions.

Implications: Promoting Teacher Growth through Supervision, Not Evaluation

Research and literature support that current teacher evaluation programs have minimal positive impacts on teaching and learning. Supervisory oriented, post classroom observation inquiry based feedback conferences, focused on best practices in teaching and learning, may be more effective, and scalable, for use by principals to improve instruction. This may be an opportunity to improve classroom learning more effectively than currently claimed as dismal in the research.

The literature supports significant opportunities for improvement in teaching and learning through the differentiation and appropriate applications of the processes of supervision as aforementioned by Nolan and Hoover (2008). We must be clear about our purposes and look at processes to implement both evaluation and supervision effectively; they are different, one for measurement of competencies, and one for teacher development and growth.

As aforementioned, Nolan and Hoover (2008) are concerned that improvement of student achievement is contingent on the mixed use of teacher evaluation and supervision practices; they define very different purposes for the two functions, and find it troubling that the same administrator performs both roles.

We, the authors, recognize that the current structure in schools requires that one person may be responsible for both evaluation and supervision. The principal is by state statute charged with the role of evaluation of teachers. Additionally, she/he is often the one responsible for supervision of teachers, supporting teachers' growth and development. In some cases, instructional coaches at the building or district level may be involved in supervision, but more often than not, the principal has ownership of this role as well. Given this reality, how can principals support teacher growth and develop in a manner that encourages self-reflection, ownership of professional practice and future growth and learning? We posit that introducing teachers to processes to develop skills in self-reflection and awareness of teaching strengths and areas for growth will far outweigh that feedback which an administrator hands to them in a formal cycle of a classroom visit.

We will continue our research in the use of the Reflective Teaching Tool that honors the definitions of good teaching as well presents a road map for reflective, inquiry-based conversation to lead principals to engage teachers about their practices in the classroom and subsequent professional development. The review of the literature on supervision has further enriched our understanding and theoretical framework to support the use of the 'protocol" to promote inquiry based supervisory practices. Training of principals in such an approach is essential to the model. Post classroom observational feedback cannot be one-way and prescriptive, but must be meaningful, mutual, participatory and afford opportunities for teachers to articulate, own, and improve teaching and learning.

The literature and research discussed in this paper, supports not only the path of our specific strategies, but can serve to inform and redirect some major thinking in current teacher evaluation systems. At present, significant interest in teacher evaluation exists with an opportunity to create effective supervisory models, potentially embedded in evaluation models. Models where inquiry based questions exist to engage teachers to grow and develop as effective educators; where teaching and learning are highly connected; valued within the profession and become programs of continuous improvement for both supervisors and supervisees. We must consider and honor the distinct differences and processes of evaluation and supervision. Supervision is about the development and growth

of the teacher. The supervisory feedback is defined as meaningful conversations between a supervisor and a teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2014), that teachers must be active participants in the change process and improvement of their own practices. Palmisano (2013) believes that collaborative inquiry for professional development of teachers is a viable and scalable alternative to traditional approaches to educational reform. Yet, principals and supervisory personnel must be trained in facilitation of inquiry and embrace the value of dialogue, not prescriptive feedback that is evaluative and authoritative in nature. In order for change to occur, we cannot overlook the literature on establishing trust and mutual relationships (Tomlinson, 2012) between principals and teachers.

We propose the use of best practices in teacher supervision with the utilization of classroom post-observation conferences that utilize reflective, inquiry-based feedback based on recognized components of good teaching. The strategies can be applicable with both student teachers and practicing teachers. Regardless of the evaluation framework used by a school district, required by state mandate or individual school, this teacher development strategy will honor the theoretical underpinnings and purpose of supervision to improve teaching and learning.

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