TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH A REFORMED TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM: CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR CHANGING PRACTICE

A Dissertation in Curriculum and Instruction by

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ABSTRACT

Since the introduction of the Race to the Top initiative in 2009, many states and school districts have rapidly modified their teacher evaluation models in order to hold teachers accountable for student learning and meet federal mandates. Through evaluative feedback and professional learning, the intended outcome in many districts is improved instructional practices by ensuring quality teachers in every classroom. Due to these changes, this phenomenological study sought to understand how teachers experience a reformed evaluation system and their perception of changes in their practice as a result of teacher evaluation. This study found that while teachers have varying experiences with reformed teacher evaluation within one school district, there are components of evaluation that lead to teacher change in practice. Teachers desire feedback that helps them reflect on their practice or try something new in their classroom. By setting a meaningful annual goal for their evaluation, teachers had a focal point for the year and something to work towards which often lead them to refine or make changes to their instruction. Through a survey and teacher interviews, this study contributes to the academic literature by demonstrating that teacher evaluation can result in more than simply accountability; it has the potential to bring about change for teachers if the right conditions are in place through the evaluation process.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

This study sought to better understand the phenomenon of how teachers experience a reformed evaluation system, with a particular focus on teachers’ perceptions of the impact high-stakes evaluation has upon their practice. The purpose of this study was to explore how reformed evaluation methods impact elementary teachers’ instructional teaching practice. The use of the phrase “reformed evaluation” throughout this study refers to evaluation models that have been redesigned since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. These reformed evaluation systems are nearly always mandated by state or federal education agencies and provide economic incentives to schools with the hope of improving the quality of education (Mette, Range, Anderson, & Hvidston, 2015).

The study combined a survey, interviews, and document analysis in a qualitative phenomenological design methodology to understand constructs within teacher evaluation that may enable or inhibit teacher change in practice. Through qualitative data analysis, I examined how teachers in two elementary schools within one school district experience a reformed evaluation system and their perceptions of the extent to which reformed evaluation practices influence their practice.

In order to frame the study, this chapter begins with background and context that enables me to articulate the problem statement. After the problem statement, the purpose and research questions are described. The methodology and research approach are then outlined,
giving a rationale for this qualitative research study. The chapter concludes with assumptions, a rationale for the study, and a brief explanation to the reader of how this dissertation is structured.

**Background and Context**

At the heart of many educational reform discussions lies the notion of teacher impact on students’ learning. It is commonly questioned how we know that every child is in a classroom is with a highly qualified teacher. This focus on accountability has led to restructuring of school procedures and introduced a number of accountability policies in recent years (Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peesma, & Geijsel, 2011). Schools have made large-scale changes to their accountability efforts in order to meet new guidelines that qualify them for state and federal funding. These revisions often rely on student test scores as an indicator of teacher effectiveness. They also typically include rigorous evaluation protocols to generate additional input for teacher evaluation scores. While the newly implemented Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA] (2015) has caused a shift in evaluation by no longer requiring that states uses student achievement test scores in teacher evaluation, the law still requires every state to have both a comprehensive teacher evaluation system and student achievement accountability (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018). Because many states recently invested large amounts of time and money to reform their evaluation practices to meet the former guidelines for federal funding under the Race to the Top Initiative, it is unlikely that they will make significant changes to their evaluation model based solely on the new ESSA regulation (Sawchuk, 2016). Therefore, most
reformed evaluation systems include student achievement components in teacher evaluation even though it is no longer a *required* component under ESSA.

Along with an explosion of standardized testing to measure student performance, a wave of goal-oriented teacher evaluation programs have emerged since the implementation of the NCLB Act of 2002 (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012; Murphy, Hallinger, & Heck, 2013). Conversations and controversies have been fueled by initiatives, such as Race to the Top (2009), where, to receive federal funding, states revamped their teacher evaluation models in an attempt to improve teaching practices, which, they reasoned, might enhance student academic performance as measured by standardized tests. The underlying method for evaluation presumed to improve student achievement was three-fold; administrators are able to provide feedback and support teachers’ learning, replace under-performing teachers, and reward high performing teachers to motivate teachers to work harder and improve performance (Donaldson, M. L., Woulfin, S., LeChasseur, K., & Cobb, 2016). Beyond eliminating underperforming teachers and maintaining effective ones, teacher evaluation is intended to serve dual purposes: (1) to assure instructional quality so that every child has access to “good teaching” and (2) to promote teacher professional learning (Danielson, 2010; Steinberg & Garrett, 2016).

**Problem Statement**

With the newest wave of accountability efforts, policymakers have shifted the focus of evaluation from certifying teacher competence (with district guidelines and curricular practices)
to improving teacher practice and classroom instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Hill & Grossman, 2013). Frequently, this change requires teachers to set goals for their own learning and to provide evidence of growth through multiple measures, such as common district assessments or demonstration of increased teacher performance. Teacher evaluation should not be “a stressful, summative, and conclusive exercise;” yet for many teachers, this is their experience (Benigno, 2016, p. 128). Consequences, such as reduction in pay or placement on probation, may ensue if teachers are unable to meet their targeted goals. Additionally, collecting evidence to support learning goals can be time consuming for teachers and administrators alike. The problem is that despite the implementation of new measures, there is little published research on whether or not the changes in evaluation are actually improving teacher instruction. Given that these sweeping changes to teacher evaluation have recently occurred in schools across this country, this study sought to understand what factors of an evaluation system are perceived by teachers to influence a change in their practice. The following two sections provide a brief background on both reformed teacher evaluation and teacher learning in connection with this study.

**Reformed Teacher Evaluation**

**Changes to teacher evaluation practices.** Over the last century, many factors prevented teacher evaluation from being purposeful, such as: limited evaluator time, poorly defined standards, school culture that rejects negative feedback, inadequately trained evaluators, restrictive teacher unions, and ineffective evaluation instruments (Donaldson, 2012). In fact,
previous evaluation instruments gave “nearly all teachers the highest possible ratings and provide almost no information about the technical or instructional core of teaching” (Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014, p. 75). Given the frequency of high ratings, traditional evaluation approaches were relatively useless for identifying successful teachers. Pressure for improved instruction and high-quality teaching brought many policy changes.

Combined with new policy directives, the understanding that the teacher has the greatest influence over student achievement (Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, 2010; Minnici, 2014) has placed emphasis on evaluating the specific teaching skills that lead students to greater academic success. After the Race to the Top (2009) initiative was introduced, ineffective methods of teacher evaluation were called into question in order to address teacher accountability and quality teaching practices. The former model of most teachers receiving high ratings was viewed as obsolete. The change in evaluation was not only a realignment of practices but also a shift in purpose: No longer would teacher compliance and competence be an acceptable measure of quality teaching; instead, evaluation shifted to examining teachers’ development of their own practice.

**Teacher evaluation as professional development.** A major outcome of teacher evaluation, under these reformed systems, is teacher professional development (Hill & Grossman, 2013; Papay, 2012). Previously, teachers had to meet accountability requirements, such as meeting a minimum number of hours in professional development workshops. Now, evaluators collect data on teacher performance with the intent to develop the teacher’s skill set
Teachers are regularly collecting data, through multiple measures, on their performance to prove they are effective teachers. Reform efforts have shifted evaluation away from supervisors using checklists of broad teacher traits, looking for compliance and accountability, to three areas of focus: (1) classroom observations (2) achievement gains and (3) student feedback (Marshall, 2012).

In addition to linking student performance to teacher evaluation, reformers have identified individualized feedback from teacher observations as a relevant method to lead to teacher professional development (Hill & Grossman, 2013). Many schools moved from a checklist of teacher behaviors to a standards-based evaluation model that includes both student achievement data as well as teacher reflection (Pham & Heinemann, 2014). Teacher reflection often occurs through a face-to-face post-observation conference. Early evidence from teacher evaluation reforms indicates that evaluation can be effective in improving instruction and learning (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). By working towards specific goals, teachers can target areas for their own improvement. Indeed, evaluation can provide feedback on teachers’ performance, subsequently supporting their development (Papay, 2012).

Learning to teach is an on-going and continual process for the duration of teachers’ careers (Cochran-Smith, 2012). Opfer and Pedder (2011) reviewed academic literature on teacher learning in order to conceptualize how teachers best learn. They found that teachers need time to process new learning and that learning needs to be sustained and intensive rather
than episodic and brief. Teachers learn best when they are physically using materials of practice, when the learning can easily be embedded in their daily work, and when the pedagogy of the professional learning mirrors the instruction they provide to their students. Because it is so complex, teacher learning must be viewed as a recursive system rather than as an event that occurs. Considering that teacher evaluation takes place over time and should be embedded in teachers’ daily work, it has the potential to contribute to positive changes in teachers’ practice based on Opfer and Pedder’s conclusions.

Numerous states and districts have implemented revised evaluation systems which include teacher reflective practice, hoping to leverage evaluations for teacher learning with research-based techniques. Recent research indicates that despite the changes to teacher evaluation, less than 1% of teachers receive ratings below proficient (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017). How do these continued high ratings impact teachers’ ability to improve their practice based on evaluative feedback? This study sought to understand whether teachers perceive evaluations, which objectively have the potential for teacher learning, as actually influencing the development of their practice.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

This study examined the ways teachers may, or may not, develop their practice by engaging in the teacher evaluation process. The purpose of this study was three-fold:

1. To establish how teachers experience the phenomenon of a reformed teacher evaluation system;
2. To examine the extent to which reformed evaluation measures influence teacher practice; and
3. To understand if teachers perceive changes to their practice in relation to their evaluation feedback.

The broad, phenomenological research question to address in this study was:

- What is the experience of reformed teacher evaluation like for teachers?

Specifically, this study sought to address:

- How do reform-based evaluation practices being employed in one district enable or inhibit teachers’ ability to make meaningful changes in their practice?

Methodology

Phenomenology

For this study, I was interested in describing those aspects of evaluation that result in change to teachers’ practice. Researchers who are interested in conceptual descriptions are curious about the nature of quality of a particular phenomenon (Baptiste, 2015). Phenomenology is an appropriate approach to use when the researcher is trying to understand how someone else experiences a particular phenomenon and the commonalities they share with others who experience the same phenomenon. The goal is not to interpret the essence of the experience, but to give voice to the participant(s) and tell their story in a richly descriptive, narrative way. In this sense, I explored the phenomenon of teachers developing their practice through their teacher evaluation experiences. By using their voices, I have described teachers’ experiences within a reformed evaluation system and have interpreted their perceptions of
changes, or lack thereof, which they made to their practice as a result of teacher evaluation.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research perspective intended to understand and portray a lived human experience at a fundamental level. The intent is to describe the universal nature or essence of the thing: “Researchers may investigate the phenomenon in its outward form, which includes objects and actions, as well as in its inward form, which includes participants’ thoughts, images, and feelings” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 215). The researcher attempts to write a thick description of not only what was experienced, but also how it was experienced in order to explain it fully (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology moves beyond the issue of appearances and forces one to see the parts in relation to its whole. Phenomenological researchers use the study of an experience to compose a worldview of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the goal of phenomenology is to develop conceptual descriptions of the experience rather than simply understanding it (Baptiste, 2015); The researcher moves beyond basic understanding and shifts to a rich description of the phenomenon.

In combining phenomenological interviews with a preliminary survey for this study, I employed a concurrent mixed methods phenomenology approach using survey data to strengthen and triangulate the description of the interview participants’ experiences with teacher evaluation. The overarching mixed-methods approach is “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). I
invited teachers to complete a survey and a question on that survey asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview. The interviews were intended to enhance the survey data with the necessary depth of detail to establish a more wholistic understanding of teachers’ experiences with evaluation. Once the data was collected, and prior to initiating the analysis, I merged the two data sets so both the survey and interview data were analyzed concurrently. Therefore, the findings for this study stem from a combination of survey and interview data, coded and thematized using the same codebook. More detail about the mixed methods phenomenological approach employed in this study has been explained in chapter 3.

**Reliability and Triangulation**

To ensure reliability, I conducted stability checks prior to the analysis of the interview transcripts through member checking. Member checking allowed me to better capture the lived experiences of the participants (Cho & Trent, 2006). I sent participants their raw transcripts to ensure I was representing their statements accurately and to provide an opportunity to clarify any statements. The member checking process that was used has been more thoroughly explained in chapter 3 of this dissertation. I also triangulated my data sources to support the comments provided by the teachers in their interviews. The triangulation was accomplished through administrator interviews, as well as document analysis of district policies and handbooks for teacher evaluation. From an interpretivist perspective, I have tried to understand the multiple perspectives of teachers regarding evaluation (Glesne, 2011). To this end, I incorporated data from multiple sources; not only classroom teachers but also evaluators...
and available district resources.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

In the first phase of data collection, I selected two schools within one district where administrators were willing to participate. I decided to use multiple school sites as I was concerned with having enough teacher participants in both the survey and interview phases of data collection. Recruiting two schools to take the initial survey allowed me to generate a sufficient number of voluntary interview participants, based on the completion of the survey. I selected two schools with fairly similar demographics. Because I received a reasonable number of interview volunteers, (see chapter 3) I conducted interviews at both school sites with all willing participants.

The two schools that were identified are both within the [BLINDED] Public School District, in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, and are pre-school through 6th grade elementary schools. The first school is a Title One school educating approximately 720 students. Of those, 335 students receive free or reduced lunch. Additionally, 36% of the students are English Language Learners and the mobility rate is 18% (compared to the district rate of 12%). I selected this school because I previously supported literacy professional development for the teachers and I have a close relationship with the principal. The second school serves approximately 640 students and has a local advanced academic program in which 66 of those students attend. This school has 35% English Language Leaners and 25% (164) of the population receiving free or reduced lunch. The mobility rate is 16%. I selected this school
because I have close contact with the administrative team; I previously worked in this school as the school-based instructional coach. However, the vast majority of the staff with whom I had worked were no longer with the school. Therefore, the teachers participating in this study had little prior contact with me. While the demographics are similar, the primary difference is that the first school is a Title One school with nearly half of the population receiving free or reduced lunch while the second school is not.

The district was selected because it had recently implemented a reformed evaluation system, based on a 2011-2012 district task force recommendation, in order to meet the Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation adopted by the State Board of Education in 2011. Within the 2015 evaluation handbook, the district specifically states learning purposes for teachers, such as to “promote self-growth through a variety of opportunities such as goal-setting, reflection, action research and professional development plans” and to “promote continuous professional growth and improved student outcomes” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 3). The handbook states that these purposes are in place to meet the district goal of supporting the continuous growth and development of each teacher because “teachers matter extraordinarily to student learning” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. ii). With this reformed evaluation system, the district is attempting to move evaluation away from being based strictly on accountability and compliance, while emphasizing elements for teachers to develop their own practice.

In the spring of 2018, I surveyed all willing participants on both the evaluative practices
employed by their school and the ways this evaluation impacts or impedes changes to the teachers’ practice. Participants gave implied consent before beginning the survey and they had the option to opt out of participation in the study at any time. Additionally, participants were aware that their survey responses may result in an invitation to participate in an interview. The survey was intentionally kept brief to encourage participation. If teachers have to spend a significant amount of time answering survey questions, they are far less likely to participate. Also, when talking with principals about school participation, principals only consented to their school’s participation if the survey would not consume much of the teaching staff’s time. The survey (see Appendix A) consisted primarily of Likert scale items with a few open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were limited as they are often the most time consuming for participants to complete (Dixit, 2011). The survey analysis consisted of quantitizing the Likert-scale items and, using NVIVO 12 software, thematically coding the participants’ responses to the open-ended questions. The thematic codes formed the foundation of a codebook which connected the analysis of the survey data to the interview data.

The second phase of data collection occurred concurrently with the survey data analysis. This phase consisted of conducting interviews with teachers and writing researcher memos based on these interviews. Part of the survey, administered previously, asked participants if they were willing to participate in an interview. I planned to use maximal variation sampling so that the teachers interviewed would represent a broad range of perspectives of evaluation and/or teacher learning. As Creswell and Plano Clark explain, “if participants are purposefully chosen to be different in the first place, then their views will reflect this difference and provide
a good qualitative study in which the intent is to provide a complex picture of the phenomenon” (2011, p. 174). I used a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix B) with some planned questions and the flexibility to ask follow-up, probing, and clarifying questions to gain insight into the participants’ perspectives. Because of distance, interviews were conducted at the participants’ convenience in one-on-one video-conferences via the university’s Zoom software license. Interviewees consisted of volunteer teachers, principals, and assistant principals from both schools. Participants were asked to partake in one to three interviews; however, I was only able to conduct one interview with each participant due to time limitations defined by the school district’s external research approval committee. I asked all participants if I could follow-up via email with any questions I had during data analysis if more information was needed; they all granted me permission. As a form of member checking, interviewees were provided the opportunity to read their raw interview transcript before my data analysis began (Maxwell, 2012). Interview dialogue was audio recorded, with the interviewee’s permission, then transcribed in its entirety. I used Braun and Clark’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis to code and analyze the transcript data through NVIVO 12 software, acquired through the university. The establishing of codes, described in detail in chapter 3, were part emergent and part a priori. The a priori codes included components of common elements of teacher learning as well as general evaluation practices, such as observation, feedback, etc. The a priori codes were determined by the results of the open-ended survey data as well as the teacher evaluation handbook. Emergent codes were determined by the initial process of open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).
As a third data set, I conducted a document analysis of district materials as “the analysis of documentary sources is a major method in social research” (Mason, 2002, p. 103). One benefit of using documents is that they are able to “provide you with historical, demographic, and sometimes personal information that is unavailable from other sources” (Glesne, 2011, p. 85). I analyzed the district’s performance evaluation handbook and the resources given to evaluators, including the rubrics, in order to more fully understand the evaluation goals and procedures. I gained access to materials that are publicly available on the district webpage, as well as screen shots, emails, and other data provided by the building administrators and/or the teacher participants. The document analysis assertions have been interwoven and interspersed with the interview and survey analysis and interpretations in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Rationale and Study Significance**

A tremendous amount of time, effort, and money is spent on teacher evaluation in the name of student achievement. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has spent multiple millions of dollars over recent years to drive wide-scale change in teacher evaluation models; specifically to include classroom observations, measures of student achievement, and individualized professional development for teachers (Will, 2018). However, the foundation’s recent study showed that despite the implementation of reformed evaluation practices, student achievement has not changed. Therefore, focusing exclusively on teacher effectiveness, through teacher evaluation, is not enough to make changes to student performance (Will, 2018). Yet we know from previous research that the classroom teacher has the greatest impact on individual student achievement (Donaldson, 2012; Hallinger, Heck, &
Murphy, 2014). Subsequently the following questions arise from this juxtaposition: Are there specific elements of teacher evaluation that are informing teacher practice? Are there aspects of reformed evaluation processes that improve teacher performance? Can we find a relationship between improved teaching and student learning? Is the pressure of high-stakes evaluation preventing teachers from taking the risks required to change their practice due to a fear of retribution? Despite extensive research around teacher evaluation, there are still many questions worth exploring.

The research questions for this study are significant because they hold implications for how a required evaluation system may lead to improving teacher practices. Being evaluated is part of the job of being a teacher. However, teachers interviewed in this study experienced a subjective evaluation system, despite the district’s efforts to standardize the evaluation process across schools, practices, perceptions, and ratings. Teachers’ experiences were greatly impacted by their perception of trust in their evaluator. This study examined the conditions that teachers perceive as necessary to make the teacher evaluation process useful to their practice. The results of this study, described in chapter four, found that actionable feedback from evaluators and authentic goals as a result of evaluation systems may lead to teacher change in practice. The problem is that many teachers and many evaluators are lacking the required time to effectively develop purposeful goals and give feedback, respectively. The rationale for this study emanates from my desire to understand the impact of reformed evaluation practices on teacher learning and practice; there is demonstrated potential for reformed evaluation systems to inform teacher practice. As a teacher educator, it is important
to me to understand which practices currently being employed by schools enable or inhibit teachers’ ability to make meaningful positive changes in their practice. While the findings from this study were particular to schools in a single district, implications have been drawn (see chapter 5) that can inform the future development of evaluation systems as well as future research for the field.

Increased understanding of how evaluation practices align or do not align with instituting positive changes in teacher practice may impact future evaluative reform efforts or influence practices and procedures currently used during teacher evaluation. If specific aspects of evaluation tend to prompt teachers to reflect more frequently or thoroughly upon their practice and drive changes to their day-to-day instruction, then it would be worthwhile to develop those aspects and scale back on others. Further, if teachers and evaluators believe teachers are not learning from evaluative practices, they may be able to shed light on the reasons why. The results of this study had the potential to answer more questions about evaluation such as:

1. How do certain evaluation constructs impact veteran teachers more than beginning teachers?
2. What role does goal-setting play in teacher self-evaluation and what potential does it have for teacher change?
3. To what extent do teachers believe the feedback they receive aligns with areas they need to make changes to their practice?
Overall, inquiring into teacher learning and the connection to evaluation practices was anticipated to be able to inform future evaluation systems and measures. Teacher evaluation is an on-going component to teaching. This study was undertaken with the intent to unveil practices within evaluation that consistently lead to teachers making changes in their instructional practices. The results of this study possess the potential to expand the literature regarding teacher evaluation systems which lead to positive changes in teachers’ instructional practices.

**Format of this Dissertation**

To support the writing of this dissertation, I used the book *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation, A Road Map from Beginning to End* by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) as a resource. The text helped guide my research process by posing questions for me to reflect upon as I wrote each chapter and provided a structure for writing this dissertation. Therefore, this dissertation consists of five chapters, modified from Bloomberg and Volpe’s six-chapter model: chapter one introduces the research problem, chapter two shares relevant literature, chapter three explains the research methodology, chapter four presents the findings, and chapter five synthesizes and interprets the findings in relation to the research questions in order to offer implications for practice. Aligning with the phenomenological research approach, chapter four presents the findings through the lens of the participants while chapter five draws out the conclusions and implications I synthesized as the researcher. Through this format, the authors encourage the researcher to use a matrix of findings to make recommendations based on an “If/Then/Therefore/Thus” (p.83) scheme. This pattern drives the researcher to think through
the conclusions drawn from the findings in order to develop recommendations for future practice based on the conclusions of the study (p. 270). Essentially, the matrix encourages the researcher to identify the findings (chapter 4), interpret what the findings mean (chapter 5), and draw conclusions to inform recommendations (chapter 5). Table 1.1 shows a modified matrix that I used based on Bloomberg and Volpe’s work to guide the written chapters in this qualitative phenomenological study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If/Then/Therefore/Thus Matrix</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Presentation of findings</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Findings:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If I find this...”</td>
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*Table 1.1* Adapted If/Then/Therefore/Thus Matrix from Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to set an introduction to the research, specifically state the research question, describe research methods, and to provide a rationale for the significance of the study in light of teacher reform efforts. The chapter also previewed what is to come in the remainder of this dissertation with a brief explanation of the writing structure. While methods and findings have been touched upon to give the reader a preview, a more detailed description of both can be found in later chapters. The following chapter provides an overview of the scholarly literature which informed this study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of the impact high-stakes evaluation has upon their practice. Specifically, I sought to understand how reformed evaluation systems in one school district contribute to, or detract from teachers’ abilities to make meaningful changes in their day-to-day teaching practices. In order to thoroughly develop the study, it is necessary to complete a critical review of literature.

The intention of this review is to examine empirical studies and relevant literature discussing the relationship between teacher evaluation and development of practice. This review of literature justifies the need for this study by emphasizing the lack of empirical research on reformed teacher evaluation practices connected to teacher change in practice. While a great deal of research has been conducted around teacher value-added evaluation models, I sought to connect literature between reformed evaluation and teacher practice. The review is meant to be representative of the literature, not exhaustive. Both empirical and theoretical works are included in this review, with specific inclusion criteria for empirical literature.

This chapter is divided into multiple topics relating to teacher evaluation, as relevant to the research question. The chapter begins with the theoretical and policy perspectives of both teacher evaluation and teacher learning. Next, the focus shifts to empirical findings on the relationship between evaluation and teacher learning. After I describe the inclusion criteria and
method, I include sections examining the empirical literature on each of the key components of teacher evaluation: reflection for learning, conferring with teachers, evaluative administrator feedback, and goal setting. In conclusion, I address teacher perceptions of evaluation, which are the core unit of analysis for this study and describe cross-cutting themes from the review of literature that are significant to the findings of the study, described in chapter 4, and previewed in this chapter.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

Concepts and terms can have variable meanings in relation to the context. For the purpose of this review, a *conference* refers broadly to opportunities for a teacher, along with a supervisor, to jointly “talk about, inquire into, and reflect on their [teaching] practices” (Zepeda, 2013, p. 167). In the field, *clinical supervision* is both a concept and a structure; in the context of this review, it will be referenced as a structure. Within this paper, *clinical supervision* signifies the structure of a principal engaging in a pre-conference, observing a teacher, analyzing the observation, conducting a post-conference, and reflecting upon the process (Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, 1998, p. 298). While not designed to be an evaluation model, some school districts use a modified format of clinical supervision to conduct evaluative observations. *Differentiated supervision* indicates administrators responding to the individual needs of a teacher by allowing the teacher options for what his or her individual supervision will look like. For example, this may include mentoring from a more experienced teacher or planning instruction with an instructional coach (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 2007). Teachers’
effectiveness is the impact they have on student achievement outcomes (Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014), such as the students’ ability to demonstrate mastery of content. Finally, growth refers to learning beyond minimal competency; it is a new level of mastery or understanding (Duke, 1990).

Theoretical and Policy Perspectives on Evaluation and Teacher Learning

The Purpose of Teacher Evaluation

Though it’s been around for decades, teacher evaluation first came into the limelight in the 1980s, following the publication of A Nation At Risk. The idea behind evaluation was that if teachers were appropriately trained and evaluated, they would improve their skills which would then lead to an increase of student performance (Moran, 2017). The overarching goal, of both supervision and evaluation, is to increase both teacher effectiveness and student achievement (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018). While there are multitudes of ways to conceptualize the purpose of teacher evaluation, two purposes come to the forefront: improving teaching performance and documenting teacher accountability (Stronge & Tucker, 2003, p.4-5). These two purposes are often described as formative (on-going teacher improvement) and summative (accountability) and can be seen as mutually exclusive measures. However, reform efforts are leading districts to search for ways to develop systems that recognize both “the craft of teaching in the context of professional accountability” (Silverberg & Jungwirth, 2014, p. ix). If the purpose of evaluation is to identify quality teaching (accountability) and to promote on-going teacher learning (improving teaching), examining how teachers develop their practice
must be part of the equation.

**Teacher Development of Practice**

Teacher learning is widely explored through academic literature on education. Teacher learning can be conceptualized as change; either a change in belief, practice, or students (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). According to Guskey (2002), what brings about teacher change is meaningful professional development (see figure 2.1). Parise and Spillane posited that both formal teacher professional development as well as on-the-job learning opportunities lead to teacher change in practice (2010). This supports Putnam and Borko’s (2000) finding that, in order to promote change in teachers’ practices, dialogue and engagement with other colleagues should be combined for formal professional development experiences.

Research indicates that teachers make changes to their practice when learning occurs through professional development that is thorough, continuous, and job-embedded (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). Professional learning requires that teachers have the opportunity to reflect critically on their teaching in order to develop knowledge and beliefs about pedagogy and their students (Darling-Hammond & Mclaughlin, 1995). Further, to be meaningful, teacher learning needs to be socially situated - in order for teachers to learn together through social interactions - and job-embedded within the context of the school where the teacher works (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wayne et al., 2008). For adult learners, interactions with others are a crucial component of the learning process.
In addition to what we know about teachers as learners, we must also consider what we know about learners in general; learning occurs when the learner is actively engaged in the process. Learning is something done by the learner, not done to the learner. In this respect, Danielson (2010) writes, “If we want teacher evaluation systems that teachers find meaningful and from which they can learn, we must use processes that not only are rigorous, valid, and reliable, but also engage teachers in those activities that promote learning—namely self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation” (p. 38). In summary, if we want teacher evaluation to bring about change in practice, components of the evaluation must equate to a form of meaningful professional development. In Figure 2.1 below, Guskey’s model of teacher change, the first circle of professional development must occur during some part of the evaluation cycle in order for the evaluation to lead to change in teacher practice.

![Guskey’s model of teacher change](image.jpg)

**Figure 2.1 Guskey’s model of teacher change (2002).** To assume teacher change occurs during teacher evaluation, some element of professional development must occur during the evaluation cycle.

**Reformed Teacher Evaluation: Policy and Practice**

Prior to 1980, teacher evaluation was largely unnoticed and left to the discretion of local school districts (Hazi and Rucinski, 2009). Teachers were expected to have basic content
knowledge and the ability to demonstrate teaching skills. These two general areas were evaluated based on a rudimentary checklist completed during an observation by the building principal. In 1983, stemming from the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, many states began to target teacher evaluation systems as a means of measuring teacher quality. After the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, policymakers shifted the focus of evaluation to creating models that would improve teacher effectiveness (Moran, 2017).

In 2001, the *No Child Left Behind Act* [NCLB] required that all teachers be “highly qualified” within their content area (Kuenzi, 2013). With the change in this law alongside a shift in focus on student achievement, “teacher quality” became measured or determined by student progress. To achieve this goal of teacher effectiveness, policymakers have leveraged teacher evaluation as a means to measure student achievement progress (Donaldson & Papay, 2015).

Another federal program that brought wide-spread change to teacher evaluation, Race to the Top (2009), “requires participating states and school districts to measure and reward teachers and school leaders based on contributions to student achievement, or ‘value-added’” (Harris, Ingle, Rutlidge, 2014, p. 74). A significant change to teacher evaluation, from Race to the Top, is the inclusion of student standardized test scores through value-added models in rating teacher effectiveness. In 2009, only 16 states required student learning as a component to teacher evaluation whereas in 2013, 40 states require evidence of student learning as a contributing factor to a teachers’ evaluation (Marchant, David, Rodgers, & German, 2015). In
this transition to meet new federal mandates, many schools moved from a checklist of teacher behaviors to a standards-based evaluation model that includes both student achievement data as well as elements of teacher reflection (Pham & Heinemann, 2014).

The most recent federal mandate, the Every Student Succeeds Act, known as ESSA, went into effect for the 2017-2018 school year. ESSA is reigning in some of the federal control over district funding created by NCLB and RTTT initiatives and allowing states and districts to have more autonomy over interventions they put into place for underperforming teachers and schools:

Under ESSA, states and districts will still have to transform their lowest-performing schools, but they will be able to choose their own interventions, as long as the strategies have some evidence to back them up. They’ll also have to flag schools where historically overlooked groups of students, such as English language learners, members of racial minorities, and students in special education, aren’t performing as well as their peers. (Klein, 2016, p. 5)

With the law, states and districts have more freedom to design and implement evaluations systems (Steinberg & Kraft, 2017). While there is a great deal of hypothesizing how this new law might impact teacher evaluation (Sawchuk, 2016 a), many states and districts spent a great deal of time, financial, and human resources aligning their teacher evaluation systems to align with the Race to the Top (2009) initiative; it is unlikely that they will make drastic changes to teacher evaluation in the near future (S. Sawchuk, 2016 b).

**Teacher Reflection as Teacher Learning**

The evaluation process creates opportunities for teachers and administrators to have
open, professional conversations about instructional practices (Ramirez & County, 2010). Growth and change in practice stems from reflection: “It is through discussing and reflecting on evaluation results that evaluation becomes a system that supports professional learning, not just accountability” (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012). After observing, principals have the opportunity to debrief with teachers through a post-observation conference; “The most critical and most difficult aspect of the supervision process is the discussion regarding the actual performance of the teacher in the activity” (Benigno, 2016, p. 130). Teachers are regularly looking for constructive criticism to help them refine and improve their practice (Donaldson, 2016; Range, Young, & Hvidston, 2013). In a quantitative study exploring teacher reflection, findings indicate that when teachers have specific goals to develop competencies or engage in new tasks, they are more likely to engage in independent reflective practices (Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010). A post-observation conference allows the opportunity for evaluators and teachers to set goals.

Teacher reflection is a deliberate, meta-cognitive process which denotes cognizance of an individual’s actions and thoughts (Marcos, Miguel, & Tillema, 2009). Reflection is an instrument of teacher change in “that analysis of needs, problems, change processes, feelings of efficacy, beliefs are all factors that contribute to teacher professional development, be it through enhanced cognitions or new or improved practices” (Avalos, 2011, p. 11). When teachers engage in dialogue about their practice as a form of job-embedded learning, such as through an observation conference, they display greater reflective practices than traditional professional development formats, such as courses or workshops (Camburn, 2010). Teacher
reflection and conversations concerning teaching and learning are important mechanisms for teacher growth in practice. Likewise, in order to communicate that feedback, teachers and administrators need to have a trusting and open relationship. Many states and districts are implementing revised evaluation systems which include teacher reflective practice hoping to leverage evaluations in ways that researchers believe can support teacher learning and change in practice.

Empirical Findings on Relation Between Evaluation and Teacher Learning

Inclusion Criteria

The empirical literature included in this review had to be from studies between 2007 and 2018, as evaluation processes have changed greatly since the NCLB and Race to the Top federal mandates. While a great deal of research has been conducted on teacher evaluation in the 1990s and early 2000s, many of them are not representative of existing evaluation systems. Teaching itself has been under scrutiny and many processes for evaluation have become more rigorous in nature. The use of recent studies (within the past ten years) illustrates a clearer picture of what is occurring in schools today. Because the intent of evaluation has shifted from being an episodic event to an on-going process, the length of the study was critical to my search, therefore the second criterion is the study duration must be a minimum of one year. Additionally, I was searching exclusively for literature that links evaluation through conferring, preferably through a pre or post conference and/or coaching, or professional development that includes reflection on practice, since this may lead to change in practice. Also, this type of
evaluation aligns with reformed evaluation practices that I examined through the study. The context of this study is within a school district where reflective practice is a critical component to teacher evaluation. Therefore, studies using similar models are more relevant to this research than other models, such as strictly value-added models. The review is limited to studies conducted within the United States because teaching and school structures greatly vary across nations and, currently, former federal mandates significantly impact the recent changes made to teacher evaluation. While several international studies shed light on teacher learning and change in practice through evaluation, they were not considered for this review. Finally, I excluded articles regarding pre-service teacher evaluation, as I am currently concerned with in-service teacher development and assessment.

**Method**

The purpose of this review is to examine empirical studies of the relationship between teacher evaluation, teacher growth, and development of practice. While a great deal of research has been conducted around teacher value-added evaluation models, I sought to connect literature between evaluation and teacher learning. The review is meant to be representative of the literature, not exhaustive. I started with a database search in ERIC and ProQuest using the search terms “teacher evaluation” and coaching. This latter was included because the coaching method is a promising venue through which teachers develop their practice through reflective dialogue (Cornett & Knight, 2009). This general search lead to 29 articles. The next search terms I used were “teacher evaluation”, “teacher supervision” and elementary school, which yielded 57 articles, some overlapping with the initial search.
Attempting to more thoughtfully pinpoint articles of interest and on topic, I used the search terms “teacher evaluation” and professional development OR professional learning and elementary. This search generated an additional 80 articles. All literature reviewed for this study was accessed through ERIC, ProQuest, and the Penn State Library system. The articles acquired during this search then lead to reference mining for additional articles. Articles were culled based on the inclusion criteria listed above and the most relevant articles were sorted by research topic, which can be found in table 2.1. Periodically, throughout the writing of this dissertation, additional searches were conducted in order to seek newly published works that might contribute to context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Evaluation Literature (Research focused on:)</th>
<th>PD/Teacher Learning:</th>
<th>Teacher/admin. Perceptions:</th>
<th>Implementation:</th>
<th>Student Achievement/school improvement:</th>
<th>Fairness, Reliability, &amp; accountability:</th>
<th>Reviews of Research:</th>
</tr>
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Table 2.1 Teacher Evaluation Literature by Theme
Conferring with Teachers

As mentioned previously in this chapter, when teachers have the opportunity to talk about and reflect on their teaching, they are given the opportunity to make changes to their practice. In their 2013 study, Range, Young, and Hvidston explored teachers’ perceptions of pre- and post-conferences in connecting with principals’ evaluation. The researchers used an online survey to gather teachers’ perceptions from thirteen K-12 schools in a Mid-Western school district. Their conceptual framework focused on the principal as formative supervisor (aiming to improve teaching practices) rather than as summative evaluator. Relevant to teacher learning, their study found that teachers value a post-evaluation (observation) conference more than a pre-conference because there are greater opportunities for reflective practice. Additionally, the researchers found a difference between novice and veteran teachers in terms of how the conference helped them reflect and grow as educators. Tenured teachers found only two aspects of the post-conference valuable for their growth: discussions leading to professional development opportunities and positive comments from the principal both of which lead to reflection on their personal practice. Novice teachers, however, found numerous aspects of the post-conference valuable to learning through reflective practice. These characteristics include: building trust, gaining constructive criticism, the observation report or administrator write-up, and identified lesson focus and standards (Range, Young, et al., 2013).

Evaluative Feedback

Acknowledging that current evaluation practices provide a great deal of information
about teachers but little information about their professional development needs, Shakman, Zweig, Bocala, Lacireno-Paquet, and Bailey (2016) conducted a study examining evaluators’ feedback to underperforming teachers to determine the types of professional development activities being suggested to them: “This written feedback, which the district refers to as prescriptions, suggests how teachers may improve their practice by participating in professional activities, including professional development activities and professional practice activities” (Shakman et al., 2016, p. i). They further define professional development as activities working with someone else, such as coaching or attending a workshop. Professional practice activities are those that a teacher does independently, such as implementing a new teaching strategy within her classroom. The research team focused on teachers who received a “needs improvement” or “unsatisfactory” rating on their evaluation. Of the 586 eligible teachers, 248 teachers participated in the researchers’ survey.

Results indicated that evaluators more often prescribed professional practice activities that teachers could do on their own rather than professional development, such as receiving mentoring, observing a colleague, or taking a course. Further, less than 40 percent of teachers actually completed the prescriptions in their entirety; some did part of the recommendations while others did a related activity but not directly what the evaluator suggested. Both principals and teachers agreed “that the prescriptions and what teachers actually did were not deliberately or explicitly aligned” (Shakman et al., 2016, p. 13). Teachers were evaluated on four standards: (1) curriculum, planning and assessment, (2) teaching all students, (3) family and community engagement, and (4) professional culture. For standards two through four,
teachers received an increased rating on their summative evaluation even if they did not engage in either professional development or professional practice activities. This further indicates misalignment with evaluator ratings and teacher performance and demonstrates that participating in professional activities is not necessary to earn an increased rating.

In their evaluation of Chicago’s Excellent In Teaching Project, a teacher evaluation system which is based on the Danielson Framework, Steinberg and Sartain (2015) studied the connection between the evaluation system and student achievement. I included this study in the review because one of the district’s goals of the pilot evaluation project was to improve teaching and learning by providing teachers with structured feedback on their instruction (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). As with Range, Young, and Hvidston’s (2013) work, the teachers in this Chicago pilot also had pre- and post-observation conferences. The authors used a combination of administrative, personnel, and student test score data from the 2005-2006 to the 2010-2011 school years. Through quantitative analysis, Steinberg and Sartain (2015) did not find statistically significant differences in long-term student achievement data (though, some short-term improvements in reading were identified). They discuss the evaluation system as one that is time intensive for administrators: “Principals had to rate teachers on the new evaluation framework, and also to work with teachers in pre- and post-observation conferences to develop strategies to improve their instructional practice. Indeed, the principals’ role under this new pilot system evolved from pure evaluation to one where the principal incorporated instructional coaching into a dual role as evaluator and formative assessor of a teacher’s instructional practice” (2015, p. 566). To improve teaching, the evaluation system depended on
the principal’s ability to provide meaningful feedback and for teachers to respond to the feedback in a way that would generate improvements in teaching.

**Teacher Goal Setting**

As professional development literature supports the idea that teacher goal setting supports teacher learning and development (Hirsh & Killion, 2009), some reformed evaluation systems, including the system examined in this study, use an element of teacher goal setting as a part of their teacher evaluation process. Having teachers set professional development goals has become a “best practice” in evaluation. In fact, texts designed for administrators and those studying education leadership often had a section within their evaluation chapter discussing the need for professional goals to provide meaningful feedback to teachers (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018 & Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012). Despite the increased use of goal setting in schools and particularly in reformed evaluation systems, at the time of this writing, there are no studies examining the use of goal setting within teacher evaluation. This study aims to address teacher goal setting in relationship to teacher evaluation.

**Teacher Perceptions of Evaluation**

Many perceptions can come into play when considering teacher evaluation. For instance, how teachers perceive their evaluators ability to accurately evaluate them or how teachers’ perceive evaluation to impact their practice. In examining literature on teachers’ perceptions of evaluation, a few previous studies related to this research. A 2001 study
conducted by Ovando examined twelve elementary teachers’ perceptions of a learner-based teacher evaluation. This study is relevant to the current study as it also focused solely on elementary teachers and the evaluation system of one particular school district. Through open-ended questionnaire responses, Ovando found that teachers appreciate being able to self-assess and play a part in their own evaluation (Ovando, 2001). Additionally, the teachers believed that the evaluation approach had the potential to impact their own teaching practice and student learning.

In a more recent study, Clipa (2015) conducted a study of secondary teacher perceptions of evaluations in Romania and Spain. Though not a study conducted in the US, I included a brief description of this study to indicate teachers’ perceptions of evaluation. Also using a questionnaire, Clipa found that teachers’ perceptions of evaluation varied greatly depending on the participants’ age and years of teaching experience (Clipa, 2015). Teacher respondents in this questionnaire found evaluation to be a “necessary evil” (2015, p. 919) to determine teacher effectiveness.

Using the same data set as the Range, Young, and Hvidston (2013) study described in detail above, Range, Anderson, Hvidston, and Mette (2013) examined teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ supervisory and evaluative practices in eight elementary schools. Teacher participants (74 of the 179 total teachers) completed the online survey. Though this study is not directly about teacher change through evaluation, it is included in this review because the researchers found that teachers valued differentiated supervision as an opportunity to learn
and improve practice through the evaluation system (Range, Anderson, Hvidston, & Mette, 2013). Additionally, while principals had developed trust with their teachers and teachers believe principals have the skills to effectively evaluate, teachers desired more constructive criticism in order to improve their own teaching practice (2013, p. 74). This idea of trust and constructive criticism will be examined in the findings chapter of this dissertation.

In her 2017 article, Moran explains her ethnographic study of eight first grade teachers’ perceptions of teacher evaluation (Moran, 2017). Through teacher interviews and classroom observations she had two primary conclusions regarding teacher evaluation: Teachers want to be held accountable for their teaching performance and appreciate evaluation as a means of “weeding out” bad teachers and as a positive method to validate their own teaching performance (Moran, 2017, p. 186). Her second finding revolves around scoring. Teachers lack understanding of how evaluations were scored and did not feel that using school-wide data was an accurate reflection of their individual teaching performance. Also, teachers felt that different evaluators determined scores differently. Through her study, Moran demonstrates that teachers generally perceive evaluations favorably however, they want a fair measure to hold them accountable and consistency across evaluator scoring (Moran, 2017, p. 193).

**What is Evaluation Measuring?**

Steinberg and Garrett (2016) sought to find a connection between incoming students’ achievement and teacher evaluation ratings. They used data from the two-year Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Study to examine how incoming students’ level of performance
impacts a teacher on the Danielson observation framework. Using qualitative data analysis, they found that ELA teachers were more than twice as likely to receive the top performance evaluation score and math teachers were six times as likely to receive top scores if they were assigned the highest achieving students (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016, p. 304). The significance of this study indicates that data used to evaluate a teacher’s performance may actually be constructed by the students to which the teacher is assigned rather than on the teacher’s instructional practice. Further, these findings conflict with the findings of Kimball and Milanowski (2009) who found that teacher evaluation scores did not align with student achievement scores.

Based on this revelation, the concern over using evaluation as a form of teacher learning comes into question. If one outcome of evaluation is improved teaching, the idea that observations are more often based on the students themselves rather than the teacher’s instruction could inhibit development of practice. The potential mischaracterization of teacher performance does not allow for the teacher to reflect on her performance and, in turn, learn from evaluation feedback.

**Discussion**

If teacher evaluation is intended to generate teacher improvement and is linked to performance pay, school funding, and accreditation, why, then, is the literature connecting teacher change in practice to evaluation so limited? At the core is the idea that, unless operationalized, teacher change is extremely difficult to measure. Changes suggested by an
administrator may often be connected to teacher compliance rather than teacher learning. If teachers feel their job or pay may be in jeopardy, they may be more willing to comply rather than actually reflect upon and inquire into their own performance; preventing the “professional development” aspect of Guskey’s learning model, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, to be avoided.

Below I describe the identified five cross-cutting themes that emerged from the empirical work included in this chapter and their connection to the current study’s findings, which will be discussed in detail in chapters 4 and 5.

Cross-Cutting Themes

**Observation as evaluation data.** Learning is a social behavior and teacher learning is contextual, in that the context of a teacher’s classroom is where she will learn the most about her students and practice. Evaluation has shifted from examining teacher traits to a focus on individual teacher goals (Murphy, Hallinger, & Heck, 2013). While most evaluation systems should and do involve multiple forms of data collection (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016), observation continues to be the primary method of evaluating teachers. Of 46 states implementing new evaluation systems, all of them used observation as a component to a summative rating (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016). In the current study, observations were the most commonly used means of teacher evaluation.

**Conferring as teacher learning.** Range et al. (2013) identified the importance of having a
post-observation conference in order to provide both feedback and a venue for teacher reflection. However, in order to communicate that feedback, teachers and administrators need to have a trusting and open relationship. Range et al. (2013) found that “building trust between the teacher and the principal/supervisor was the most important predictor of the teachers’ rating of reflection on practice” (p.70). Further, Steinberg and Sartain (2015) unveiled the importance of principals having the ability and capacity to deliver useful feedback to teachers. To have a purposeful and effective evaluation system, relationships, collaboration, and climate for learning need to be at core (Donaldson & Papay, 2015; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). Having a post-observation conference is not enough; intentionally focused feedback needs to be the center of the discussion (Goe et al., 2012). Teacher participants in this study frequently describe the need for data to be meaningful in order for them to be encouraged to make changes to their teaching practice. They also discussed the impact that time has on their ability to have purposeful conferences with their evaluator.

Discrepancy between highly-rated teachers and higher student achievement. In their synthesis of evaluation literature on student achievement, Taylor and Tyler find: “a small but growing number of empirical studies have found meaningful correlations between observed teacher practices, as measured by evaluative criteria, and student achievement growth” (2012, p. 3631). On the contrary, Kimball and Milanowski (2009) did not find a correlation between highly-rated teachers and student outcomes, despite principals’ perceptions that highly-rated teachers yield higher student achievement.
Moreover, research indicates that teachers who have higher achieving students from the onset tend to have higher evaluation ratings compared to teachers instructing below grade level achievers (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016). This discrepancy can lead to misidentification of a teacher’s performance by measuring the performance of the students instead of the teacher. As classes are regularly non-randomly assigned to teachers, evaluators can come into an evaluation with biases based on known student performance (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016). These conflicting findings indicate the inconsistencies in evaluation systems and the inability to use observation as a reliable measure of teacher performance. If teachers are to truly develop their instruction through reflection on practice, they need accurate data of their teaching. While this study does not specifically delve into teacher ratings and student achievement, parallels can be drawn between the inconsistencies in evaluation systems, described in this theme, and inconsistencies within the system examined in this dissertation. Additionally, teachers spoke at length about inconsistencies with the data they receive as feedback from their evaluators.

**Rater-reliability in evaluation systems.** Evaluation reforms are touted as being rigorous, however, they regularly reflect the industrial era notion of a manager overseeing the laboring class; in this case, the principal as manager and teachers as workers (Murphy et al., 2013). These principal-managers can have very different interpretations of evaluation systems. In fact, teachers are regularly rated differently by an administrator from year to year: “Researchers have found that teacher effectiveness ratings differ substantially from class to class and from year to year, as well as from one statistical model to the next” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012,
Principals may need a great deal of support to fully and effectively implement a time-intensive, feedback-driven evaluation system (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). Further, training on evaluation systems tends to focus on implementation rather than on inter-rater consistency or accuracy of scores (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). In this way, even the same evaluation system can yield varying results depending on the evaluator. Evidence of the various ways a single evaluation system is implemented across and within multiple schools is a point addressed in the findings section of this study.

**Principal preparedness.** An administrator who is overwhelmed with job responsibilities is less likely to develop the skills needed to be an effective evaluator. Beyond time, teachers must have the will to want to be thorough evaluators of teachers’ practice (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). As Kimball and Milanowski state:

> The more skilled the evaluator, the more likely that she will give ratings that accurately reflect how the teacher actually performs on the dimensions defined by the evaluation system. Thus, if there is a relationship between the teacher behaviors specified by the system and student learning, an accurate set of ratings will exhibit a stronger relationship with student achievement than an inaccurate set. (2009, p. 39)

Principals report that they generally lack the time, funding, and authority to truly provide learning opportunities for teachers connected to evaluation systems (Donaldson, 2013; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015).

Shakman et al. (2016) suggest that principals and teachers may disagree on areas for improvement. Too, teachers may misunderstand the feedback given to them or not know what type of professional development to access. Some principals need guidance on how to give
specific and actionable feedback that leads to teacher learning.

Reformed evaluation systems require strong leadership skills and commitment from school evaluators (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007). As with any profession, not all principals have the same strengths and abilities. As a whole, principals are fairly accurate when evaluating the best and worst teachers however they struggle to effectively evaluate teachers “in the middle” and make meaningful suggestions for growth opportunities (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008). Additionally, engaging in a meaningful evaluation cycle with meaningful feedback can be extremely time consuming for evaluators in addition to other job responsibilities (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). Both time and administrator preparation are examined in later chapters of this study.

Limitations

A number of limitations apply to this literature review. Due to the narrow focus of exploring professional learning for teachers in connection to teacher evaluation, a great deal of literature on evaluation as whole was not included in this review. Further, the date restrictions, implemented to capture recent evaluation reforms, may have also excluded research on the topic. Additionally, though the bibliographic branching may have yielded purposeful literature, I may have inadvertently overlooked other relevant pieces that could contribute to the topic. Too, through the course of conducting the study, I included additional sources that I came across which became relevant to the work after the initial literature review search was conducted.
Chapter Summary

The rate in which school systems are modifying and adopting new evaluation systems is rapid. If the intent is to ensure a high-quality educator in every classroom, more evidence is needed to indicate that reformed evaluation systems do, indeed, lead to teacher change and ultimately a change in student learning outcomes. While evaluations are more readily including opportunities for teacher reflection, which is identified as a critical component to teacher learning, evaluators need to be skilled in coaching teachers through reflection or providing opportunities for meaningful reflection and feedback through post-observation conferences.

Previous research has emphasized the importance of relationships within schools; an idea that is not consistently found in evaluation literature. Relationships are an essential component to school culture because “principals and teachers who trust each other can better work together in the service of solving the challenging problems of schooling” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Trust in school leadership leads not only to a positive school climate but also to higher student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). When principals empower teachers and grant them significant autonomy in their work, teachers have higher levels of trust with the principal (Moye, Henkin, & Egley, 2005). The idea of being rated or ranked by an administrator can inherently cause a distrusting relationship to form.

In his discussion of evaluation through clinical supervision, Benigno (2016) describes the need for fidelity in collaboration between an administrator and evaluator. Once a trusting relationship is established, an evaluation system needs to be aligned with professional learning
goals. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality published a research and policy brief to explain the connection between evaluation systems and professional growth (2012).

The authors identify six factors that can improve instruction within an evaluation system:

1. High-quality standards for instruction
2. Multiple standards-based measures of teacher effectiveness
3. High-quality training on standards, tools, and measures
4. Trained individuals to interpret results and make professional development recommendations
5. High-quality professional growth opportunities for individuals and groups of teachers
6. High-quality standards for professional learning (Goe et al., 2012)

Involving teachers in these components to develop an evaluation system may lead to more buy-in and understanding of growth through evaluation. Further research needs to be conducted on the specific components of evaluation that lead to teacher learning and what role the evaluator plays in contributing to a teacher’s growth and development. The lack of empirical literature supporting evaluation as a method to bring about teacher learning implies that evaluation is a current accountability measure rather than a development tool.

This chapter began with an overview of reformed teacher evaluation, followed by conditions for teacher change and finally examines evaluation practices through the lens of empirical research. The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a framework for the study and will be referenced throughout the following chapters. This chapter also supports the need for this study; there is limited research on reformed teacher evaluation practices and how they
connect to teacher change in practice. The literature provides a background for the findings described in chapters four and five. In the next chapter, chapter three, a detailed description of the study, including the methodology, data collection methods and data analysis are explained.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The intention of this phenomenological study is to examine how teachers experience evaluation and their perceptions of the impact that high-stakes evaluation has upon their teaching practice. Specifically, the study sought to address the research question: how do reform-based evaluation practices employed in one school district enable or inhibit teachers to make meaningful changes in their practice? This chapter is intended to describe the epistemological foundation of the study and also make a case for what Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2014; 2015) define as mixed methods phenomenological research, or MMPR, in educational research. Within the chapter, I will describe (1) an introduction with research purposes, (2) rationale for the research methodology, (3) the researcher connection to the context, (4) the study participants and context, (5) research design, (6) data collection methods, (7) data analysis procedures, (8) ethical considerations, (9) issues of trustworthiness, (10) limitations and delimitations, and finally, (11) a chapter summary.

This study examined the ways teachers may or may not develop or make changes to their practice by engaging in the teacher evaluation process. The purpose of this study is three-fold:

1. To establish how teachers experience the phenomenon of a reformed teacher evaluation system;
2. To examine the extent to which reformed evaluation measures influence teacher practice; and

3. To understand if teachers perceive changes to their practice in relation to their evaluation feedback

The broad, phenomenological research question addressed in this study was: What is the experience of reformed teacher evaluation like for teachers? This study sought to address: How did the reform-based evaluation practices being employed in one school district enable or inhibit teachers’ ability to make meaningful changes in their practice?

These questions and purposes were addressed through a survey, interviews, document analysis, and researcher memos, all described in detail throughout this chapter.

Rationale for the Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is used when researchers are interested in “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p.5). Through asking questions of and interacting with participants, qualitative researchers explain their patterns of analysis through description (Glesne, 2011). Because the purpose of this research was to come to descriptive findings about how teachers experience evaluation and how they perceive reformed evaluation practices influencing their day-to-day practice, an appropriate qualitative methodology had to be selected.
Phenomenology

For this research, I was interested in describing teachers’ perceptions of evaluation in the context of their own professional growth. In a nutshell, phenomenology seeks to reveal the essence of a human experience (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological methodology was an appropriate approach to address my research question because I was trying to understand how someone else experiences a particular phenomenon and the commonalities they share with others who experience the same phenomenon. A phenomenon is never objective. It is always the experience of the thing (Baptiste, 2015); in this case, “the thing” is teacher evaluation. The goal is not to interpret the essence of the experience, but to give voice to the participant(s) and tell their story in a richly descriptive, narrative way. Researchers who are interested in conceptual descriptions are curious about the nature of quality of a particular phenomenon (Baptiste, 2015). In this sense, I have investigated the phenomenon to the extent that I have gleaned descriptive narratives about these teachers’ developing practices arising from their evaluation experiences in one school district.

According to Moustakas (1994), the typical data collection method of phenomenology is an interview using open-ended comments and questions. The goal of the interview is to have a social conversation to build a trusting atmosphere in order for the interviewee to describe his or her experience fully. Moustakas (1994) states: “The interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively” (p.114).
Phenomenology is a qualitative research perspective intended to understand and portray a lived human experience at a fundamental level. The intent is to distill the experience(s) to a description the universal nature or essence of the thing. Savin-Baden & Major (2013) explain the dual considerations that comprise such a description of the phenomenon. They write, “Researchers may investigate the phenomenon in its outward form, which includes objects and actions, as well as in its inward form, which includes participants’ thoughts, images, and feelings” (p. 215). In using a phenomenological methodology, researchers must be able to distinguish between aspects that are shared across all experiences and those that are not (Baptiste, 2015). The researcher attempts to write a thick description of not only what was experienced, but also how it was experienced in order to explain it fully (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology moves beyond the issue of appearances and forces one to see the parts in relation to its whole. Phenomenological researchers use the study of an experience to compose a worldview of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The goal of phenomenology is to develop conceptual descriptions of the experience rather than simply conceptually understanding them (Baptiste, 2015). While there are varying types of phenomenology, for the purposes of this study a descriptive phenomenology was employed so that I could study teachers’ personal experiences with teacher evaluation and interpret the meaning of their experience through this research investigation (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). The primary data collection measure was teacher interviews. However, because this study used data beyond the interviews, the following section explains the use of mixed-methods phenomenological research as methodology within this study.
Mixed-Methods Phenomenological Research (MMPR)

Two primary data collection methods, a survey and interviews as described in further
detail below, were used in this study. As such, this phenomenological study employed a mixed
methods approach. The overarching mixed-methods approach is “the class of research where
the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods,
approaches, concepts, or language into a single study” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). I
invited teachers to complete a survey about their perceptions of teacher evaluation. The survey
asked participants about their experiences with goal setting, receiving feedback, and making
changes to their practice based on teacher evaluation. One question on that survey asked if
they would be willing to participate in an interview. The interviews were intended to provide
detail to, and elaborate on, the survey data in order for me as the researcher to gain a more
wholistic understanding of teachers’ experiences with evaluation. Once the data was collected,
I merged the two data sets before beginning the analysis to analyze them concurrently.

Through their work in defining mixed methods, Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015) argue
for the need to formally conceptualize a mixed methods version of phenomenological research.
They define MMPR as “research that combines phenomenological methods with methods
grounded in an alternative paradigm within a single study” (p. 98). In this research approach,
the quantitative data can identify trends of the phenomena and can also strengthen the case by
using quantitative data to inform the qualitative data and vice versa. Similarly to other MMPR
studies, this study prioritizes the phenomenological data (interview and open-ended survey
responses) over the complementary data (the quantitative, Likert-scale survey responses) (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). According to Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015), concurrent mixed methods is typical of MMPR. It is also the approach used in this study. In this mode phenomenological interview data and complementary survey data are collected and analyzed concurrently in order to “cross-validate [and] confirm findings” (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015, p. 100). I took on a similar interpretivist stance in data collection and analysis; I sought to understand the multiple perspectives of the teachers surveyed and interviewed in order to understand and describe the complex phenomenon of how teachers experience evaluation (Glesne, 2011).

An example of a similar research study using MMPR methodology is Gupta, Paterson, Lysaght and von Zweck’s 2012 study examining work-related stress and burnout leading to job dissatisfaction. For this study the researchers invited participants to complete a survey. Part of the survey asked participants about their willingness to participate in an interview or focus group. Similar to this study, interviews were conducted electronically due to geographical differences, recorded and transcribed for analysis. These researchers describe the purpose of interviews to “explore the lived experiences of participants relative to burnout and to build an understanding of how Ontario therapists cope, successfully and unsuccessfully, with contemporary practice demands. This information was intended to complement the findings of the survey by adding rich, thick descriptions” (Gupta, Paterson, Lysaght, & Von Zweck, 2012, p. 87). Their analysis merged the two data sets to form a wholistic representation of the results. Gupta, Paterson, Lysaght, and Von Zweck’s study mirrors the current study in that the data
collection and analysis are the same; I merged the open-ended survey responses in with the interview data for coding and thematizing in order to demonstrate a more holistic understanding of the findings presented. By integrating the data during the analysis, I demonstrated the concurrent nature of this study and convergence of the two data sets to strengthen the MMPR approach (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014).

**Researcher Connection to the Context**

While the school district and participants will be described in detail in the following section, it is important to address my own personal connection to this research. The school district in which the research was conducted is a district in which I previously worked for 11 years. Throughout my tenure there, I worked in three different school buildings, one of which was used as a site for this study. I was an elementary educator, that is, a classroom teacher for seven years and then an instructional coach for teachers of pre-k through sixth grade for four years. While an instructional coach in the district, I participated in the roll-out of the reformed teacher evaluation examined in this study. My participation was limited to supporting implementation. As an instructional coach, I attended a training on the new system which included strategies for supporting teachers in developing student achievement goals and understanding the new evaluation process. Within that context, I met with each teacher individually to discuss and help them craft their goal to meet the district expectations. I resigned from the district in 2014 to pursue my PhD and, since then, modifications have been made to the reformed evaluation process. These changes are reflected in the 2015 district
evaluation handbook, though the purpose, goals, and indicators remain the same as they were during the initial 2013-2014 implementation.

As mentioned, during my time as an instructional coach, I worked at a school site used for this study. While there has been a great deal of turnover in the staff at school, I had a previous relationship with roughly half of the teachers in my former capacity as an instructional coach. The majority of the participants (described below) from this individual school site are teachers I knew from my former position. This may have impacted the feedback they provided during both the interview and survey. To account for any influence personal relationships may have had on the data, I relied heavily on the trust I had previously developed with the staff. In doing so, I emphasized the anonymity of the survey data and also strictly adhered to the interview protocol. That included the asking of follow up questions when participants assumed I knew what they were referencing because of my prior knowledge about the school environment.

I believe my former relationship contributed positively to this study. Because many of the participants knew me personally, they appeared to be frank and straight-forward in their responses. They did not seem concerned that I would speak to others about their responses. I reassured them of confidentiality and that their participation would not be made known to anyone, including the building administration. They knew they could trust in my confidentiality because they had experienced it first-hand. Occasionally, teachers at the second school site (wherein I do not have a prior relationship with the staff) would ask questions such as “no one else will hear this interview, right?” or “my principal won’t know that I said this?” I had to
establish trust with this second group, whereas it had already been established with the teachers at the first school site. Knowing some of the teachers beforehand did not negatively impact the results of this study; rather, my prior relationships with some helped them to be more forthcoming in the brief time frame I had to conduct the interviews.

**The Study Participants and Context**

**Context**

Two schools were selected for this study in order to widen the data sources to strengthen the claims. The two schools identified are both within the same large, suburban mid-Atlantic school district and are pre-school through 6th grade elementary schools. To protect anonymity, both schools are referenced in this study by pseudonyms. The first school, Piney Creek Elementary School, is a Title One school educating approximately 756 students during the time the data was collected. Of those, 335 students receive free or reduced lunch. Additionally, 37% of the students are English Language Learners and the mobility rate is 17% (compared to the district rate of 13%). Because of its Title One status, Piney Creek has more teaching staff and smaller class sizes than average schools in the district. I selected this school because I previously supported literacy professional development for the teachers and I have a close personal relationship with the principal. The other school, Mountain Ridge Elementary, serves approximately 651 students and has a local advanced academic program in which 66 of those students attend. Mountain Ridge has 32% English Language Learners and 25% (164) of the population receiving free or reduced lunch. Their mobility rate is 19%. I selected this school because I not only have close contact with the administrative team, but I also previously
worked there as their school-based instructional coach. Even so, about half of the staff I worked with no longer work at the school. Therefore, many of the teachers participating in this study have had little to no prior contact with me. While the demographics are similar, the primary difference is that Piney Creek Elementary School is a Title One school with nearly half of the population receiving free or reduced lunch while the Mountain Ridge Elementary School is not. Table 3.1 compares the demographics of the two schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School:</th>
<th># Students:</th>
<th># Teachers:</th>
<th>% ELLs:</th>
<th>% Free &amp; Reduced lunch:</th>
<th>% Mobility rate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piney Creek Elementary</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Ridge Elementary</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>Over 188,000</td>
<td>Over 27,500</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.1. School demographics chart. The most recent data provided by the district, and included in this table, is from the 2016-2017 school year*

The district was selected because it has recently implemented a reformed evaluation system based on a 2011-2012 district task force recommendation in order to meet the *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation* adopted by the State Board of Education in 2011. Within the 2015 evaluation handbook, the district specifically states learning purposes for teachers such as to “promote self-growth through a variety of opportunities such as goal-setting, reflection, action research and professional development.
plans” and “promote continuous professional growth and improved student outcomes” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 3). The handbook states that these purposes are in place to meet the district goal of supporting the continuous growth and development of each teacher because “teachers matter extraordinarily to student learning” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. ii).

Participants

Survey Participants

In the spring of 2018, all teachers from the two school sites (specialists, general education, and special education) were invited to participate in a preliminary survey and follow-up interview (See Appendices A and B). How the survey was presented and administered is described in the data collection section of this chapter.

Participants

Administrators were not permitted to take the survey and were not informed as to which staff members completed the survey or the survey results. Of the 61 total survey participants, 47% of Mountain Ridge teachers and 51% of Piney Creek teachers took the survey. According to the responses, 3 teachers were male, 57 were female, and 1 preferred to not identify a gender. Additionally, 25% reported earning a Bachelors degree, 54% earned a Masters degree, 20% hold a Masters plus 30 credits, and 2% have a Doctorate degree. There was a range of teaching experiences among participants. One teacher was in her first year. Seven were second or third year of teachers. Nine were in their fourth to sixth years of
teaching. Twelve were in their seventh to tenth years. Fifteen were in their eleventh to
tenth years. Ten were in their sixteenth to twentieth years and seven teachers had more
than twenty years of teaching experience.

_Evaluator Participants_

All the administrators who conduct evaluations within the school participated in
interviews so that I, as the researcher, could have a clearer understanding of how they conduct
evaluations at each school site. The administrator interview protocol can be found in Appendix
C. Administrator interviews were kept separate from the teacher interview data set as they
served a different purpose. These interviews were also coded using the codebook described in
this chapter, however, they were coded separately from the teacher interviews. Administrator
interviews were conducted for context in order to gain an understanding of how each building
implements the reformed evaluation system and to support the findings presented in chapter 4
and strengthen the discussion in chapter 5 of this study.

_Interview Participants_

At the end of the survey, participants had the option to schedule an interview.
Additionally, when I presented the research to the staff and invited them to partake in the
survey, teachers had the option to read and sign a consent form to participate in an interview.
As an incentive, I offered anyone willing to participate in an interview to be entered into a
drawing to win a $50 Amazon gift card. For each school site, I selected a random winner
(drawn from a hat), who received the $50 gift card during the final week of school.

Based on the signed consent forms, I could contact teachers directly during the window of time in which they could complete the survey. Nine teachers from Mountain Ridge Elementary school and thirteen teachers from Piney Creek Elementary signed consent forms volunteering for interviews. Participants were contacted via email to schedule a date and time that was convenient for them for the interview. Interviewee volunteers who gave consent but who did not respond to the initial email to schedule a time were sent two to four follow up emails, until they either scheduled an interview or four emails were sent and received no response, so I ceased contacting them. I assumed that they were not interested in participating as an interviewee.

In the end, six Mountain Ridge (11.3% of site teachers) and eight Piney Creek (11.4% of site teachers) teachers were interviewed. Seven participants hold masters’ degrees while three have a masters plus 30-credit designation. Four interviewees hold bachelors’ degrees in elementary education. Teachers had a range of teaching experiences. Two interviewees had been teaching for over 20 years, two had been teaching between 16-20 years, four had been teaching 11-15 years, three had been teaching 7-10 years, and one each had been teaching 4-6 years, 2-3 years, and one-year, respectively. Of the fourteen teacher interviewees, only five believed teacher evaluation can lead to positive change in teacher performance or practice yet nine responded that teacher evaluation has led to positive changes in their own practice. This variance is addressed in the findings of this study. All interview participants are female. Table
3.2 below shows the demographics of the fourteen teachers interviewed for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School site</th>
<th>Yrs. teaching</th>
<th># yrs. at this school</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>Mountain Ridge</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters +30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>Mountain Ridge</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kinder.</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Mountain Ridge</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Mountain Ridge</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanne</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reading specialist</td>
<td>Masters +30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>Mountain Ridge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luanne</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>Over 20*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>Mountain Ridge</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Masters +30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Piney Creek</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.2 Interview Participants.*

*This participant began teaching in 1992 but took multiple years off for child rearing. She has been teaching for over 20 years, but the exact number is not known.

Study Context

**District evaluation system.** In 2011 the State’s Department of Education issued a new directive for all school districts to implement a teacher evaluation system that includes measuring student achievement as a measure of teacher quality. In response, the district examined in this study created a task force to examine current evaluation practices and devise
a new system to meet the board of education requirements. The district School Board issued a regulation effective October 23, 2012 which states:

A. The assessment and evaluation process is a collaborative endeavor between the evaluator and employee. Open communication and attention to strengths, as well as to areas for growth and improvement, are the foundation of meaningful professional development.

B. The primary purpose of performance assessment is continuous growth and improvement. Consequently, self-appraisal and on-going discussions between evaluators and employees regarding strengths and areas for improvement are essential to assessments and evaluations. Self-appraisal takes place through self-assessment when an employee participates in the formal or summative evaluation cycle. (2012, Regulation 4440.13)

Stronge states:

The primary purpose of the... [DISTRICT] Teacher Performance Evaluation Program is to help both teachers and their evaluators collect more comprehensive and accurate assessment data for judging teacher effectiveness and, then, to support quality teaching every day in every classroom. The only way I know that schools can improve student achievement is to improve teacher effectiveness” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. ii).

The handbook further posits that the goal of the evaluation model is to support continuous growth and development of teachers (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 1). This focus on teacher development and learning is intended to improve student outcomes, thereby meeting the state regulation.

Technical aspects. The district’s previous evaluation model had six core components and teachers were “in” evaluation cycle every three years. With the newly implemented system, there are seven core components and all teachers are on the evaluation continuum. Teachers spend one year in a formal evaluation, known as “summative” and then two years in “formative” evaluation where they are setting annual goals and collecting evidence to be used
in their summative year when it repeats again (DISTRICT, 2015). The revised model includes 60% teacher performance and 40% student achievement performance to equal 100% of the teacher evaluation score. The evaluation is not connected to any type of merit-based pay.

Teachers are evaluated by administrators on matrices (see sample matrix in Appendix D) in seven performance standards (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 4):

1. Professional knowledge
2. Instructional planning
3. Instructional delivery
4. Assessment of and for student learning
5. Learning environment
6. Professionalism
7. Student academic progress

Multiple data sources are necessary to support each standard. The 40% student achievement performance is measured by standard 7 whereas the teacher performance (60%) is measured through standards 1-6 (Silverberg and Jungwirth, 2014). Each year, whether teachers are on summative or formative cycle, they are expected to submit a Goal Setting for Student Progress Form (see Appendix E) and maintain an electronic Documentation Log, providing evidence for the standards listed above. The self-assessment form is intended to help “teachers clarify areas of professional practice where they see themselves as strong as well as those areas where they see themselves needing to grow professionally” (Silverberg and Jongwirth, 2014, p. 30-31).
When a teacher is in a summative evaluation cycle, the evaluation must consist of two observation data sources (completed by the evaluator) and two other data sources (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 6). The latter include, but are not limited to (a) observations, (b) documentation log, (c) student learner/client opinion surveys, (d) structured interview, (e) other relevant information, such as a time on task chart analysis and (f) measures of student progress.

**Goal setting.** Based on the evaluation handbook, teachers are to engage in goal setting in collaboration with their evaluator. Goals are to be set and approved by October 31 of each academic year. Goals are required to meet the requirements of SMARTR goals: **S**trategic, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**esults-oriented, **T**ime bound, and **R**igorous (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 11). The goals are expected to show student growth over time; they are typically measured at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. All teachers, whether on a formative or summative evaluation year, are required to review their goal with their evaluator at the middle and end of the year. For teachers on summative cycles, this consists of an evaluation conference. For teachers on formative evaluation cycles, the administrator, as the evaluator, can decide how to collect data and review the goal (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 13). Further, at the mid-year check in, evaluators can provide additional support for teachers who are not making adequate progress towards their achievement goal (Silverberg & Jungwirth, 2014).

According to the interviews conducted for this study, teachers upload their goals and any supporting evaluation documentation, including the previously mentioned documentation log data, to an electronic portal (see images 3.1 and 3.2). The handbook does not address the
electronic system except in the introduction, which states:

The 2015-2016 marks the first year that the online teacher evaluation system is live district-wide for all employees and program managers responsible for the evaluation process discussed in this handbook. EER specialists can provided support related to administering the evaluation process through the online system. The system can be found at [WEB ADDRESS] has worked to create a user friendly system with prompts, FAQs and other assistance available. (DISTRICT, 2015, p. ii)

Teacher participants explained that they complete the goal setting form, upload it into the online portal, sign it electronically, and then receive feedback from their evaluator. Image 3.3 shows an example of an uploaded goal in the electronic portal. Having an electronic submission streamlines the process and allows for all teachers to receive feedback on their goals without necessarily having a face-to-face conversation with their evaluator. Typically, teachers in their formative evaluation year receive feedback in this manner.

![Figure 3.1 Teacher evaluation electronic portal](image-url)
Figure 3.2 Teacher evaluation portal

Figure 3.3 Electronic submission of midyear goal. Teacher and evaluator names are blinded.

Teacher performance ratings. For the seven performance standards, teachers are evaluated on a four-point rating scale. The indicators are:

1. Highly effective
2. Effective
3. Developing OR Needs Improvement
4. Ineffective

The District handbook describes these indicators as follows,

The rating **developing OR needs improvement** helps to delineate the difference between a novice and veteran teacher. Our school district recognizes that educators in their first three years of teaching are developing their understanding of curriculum and pedagogy. Likewise, there is recognition that time is often needed for an experienced teacher to develop content knowledge following a change in grade level or content assignment. Therefore, a **developing** rating can be used for a teaching in one of the former categories. Teachers outside of the categories mentioned will receive a **needs improvement** rating if their performance falls in this range. (p. 14)

In the summative year, at the final evaluation conference, a teacher is assigned a designation of reappointment, conditional reappointment, or do not reappoint (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 17). Teachers must have highly effective or effective ratings for the majority of performance standards to receive a reappointment designation. Teachers with developing or needs improvement can receive a conditional reappointment where they will again be on summative evaluation cycle in the upcoming school year. These teachers may have interventions put in place to assist their performance for the upcoming school year (Silverberg and Jungwirth, 2014). Teachers who receive a “do not reappoint” designation are recommended to the district for dismissal.

Generally, teachers with conditional reappointment, or a “needs improvement” rating throughout the evaluation cycle, are recommended for a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)
and participate in an intervention plan. A PIP is “developed by a teacher and identifies appropriate strategies for improvement in identified Performance Standards” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 20). Further, the handbook describes: “a PIP is designed to support a teacher in addressing areas of concern through targeted supervision and additional resources. It may be used by an evaluator at any point during the year for a teacher whose professional practice would benefit from additional support” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 21). Teachers receiving conditional reappointment are required to participate in an intervention program with an intervention team during the following (conditional) school year. According to the teacher evaluation handbook,

a plan will be developed by the team [teacher, curriculum designee, and an HR specialist] to determine areas for improved and requisite resources to address those areas over a prescribed period of time. Team members may make classroom observations and provide feedback to the teacher. The assessment and evaluation process and the intervention process are separate processes but will continue concurrently (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 22).

The administrator, therefore does not take part in the intervention program but continues to evaluate the teacher.

Research Design

The design for this mixed-methods phenomenological study consisted of three distinct parts: (1) survey of elementary teachers in participating schools, (2) interviews with evaluators to gain an understanding of how they conceptualize the goals of teacher evaluation and implement it in their buildings and (3) interviews with teachers.
**Survey**

The survey was administered to willing teacher participants electronically using the University’s *Qualtrics Survey Software* license. The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of 17 items, 5 of which were demographic questions and the final question asking the participant if he/she was willing to participate in an interview. Most of the survey questions were Likert scale items so that the survey could be completed quickly. For example, teachers were asked as part of the evaluation process, does the administrator make recommendations for you to change your practice? Teachers could then select from the choices of always, most of the time, about half the time, sometimes and never. On average, the survey took participants two minutes to complete. The survey design and few numbers of questions were intentional in order to ensure that completing the survey would not take much teacher time with the hope that this would increase the number of participants.

**Evaluator Interviews**

In the beginning of data collection I interviewed each school evaluator in order to better understand the evaluator’s interpretation of the reformed evaluation process and the evaluator’s procedures within that building. Questions for evaluator interviews were structured in a way to gain an understanding of how effective the evaluator feels the evaluation system is, how they introduce it to their staff and implement it throughout the course of the school year (see administrator interview protocol, Appendix C). For example, administrators were asked to describe the evaluation practices they use in their particular building. The intention of these
interviews was for researcher background information and to gain a clearer understanding of the evaluation process within each building and to shed light and elaborate on the teachers’ responses. Interviews were intended to last roughly 30 minutes, though a few ran much longer depending on the depth and length of the answers provided by the administrator. These interviews were transcribed in their entirety and coded using the same codes designed for the teacher interviews. No new codes were derived from the evaluator interviews in order to keep the study focused on the teacher perspective.

**Teacher Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were used for this research because it is the most logical way to ascertain teacher perceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). One interview was conducted with each teacher participant. At the end of each interview, however, I asked participants if I could follow up with them via email if I had additional questions while analyzing their transcripts. The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B) allowed me the flexibility to gain insight into teachers’ perceptions of the reformed evaluation system in relationship to their practice. For instance, questions from the interview protocol asked teachers to describe how they receive feedback on their evaluation goal and also about the types of evaluation practices their administrator implements within the school building. If a shallow answer was provided, I asked a follow-up question to gain clarity and insight during the interview, such as asking for an example or rephrasing the question in order to get a clarifying response.
Data Collection Methods

After the research was approved by the district’s external research review board, I contacted the principals at the two approved school sites to inform them of the data collection methods. Each principal invited me to the school building to introduce my research to the staff and administer the survey.

At Mountain Ridge Elementary I had five minutes to explain the research to the staff at an early morning staff meeting. A few minutes before the meeting, all of the teaching staff was sent an email containing the survey, consent forms, and the following introduction.

![Email inviting teachers to participate in the survey](image)

My name is Amy Long. I am a graduate student at Penn State University and a former [BLINDED district name] teacher and instructional coach at [BLINDED School Name]. As part of my doctoral program, I am doing a research study on teachers’ perceptions of reformed teacher evaluation practices. I am requesting your participation in a survey. The responses you will provide here are very important to this study. Please be as candid as possible. Your individual responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your administrator or evaluator. The results of the study will be shared with the school district. Please indicate if you are willing to take part in a follow-up interview by providing your name and email address at the end of the survey. Thank you very much for participating in this study. Your participation in the study implies your voluntary consent to participate in the research.

During the meeting, I informed the staff of the research purpose and the data collection components, i.e., brief survey and interview. To encourage participation, I informed them that I
would be in the school building all day and was happy to come by their classroom to answer any questions or read aloud to their class so that they could have time to complete the survey. I informed the teachers that I would leave consent forms and an envelope in the staff mail room so that they could complete a consent form if they were willing to participate in an interview.

A few weeks later, I was able to attend Piney Creek Elementary school on a teacher workday. The teachers were participating in professional development in the morning and then came to the cafeteria to hear my brief explanation of research. At this school, I gave more of an introduction of my background as this is not a school building I previously worked in and I was unfamiliar with the staff. Also, the principal had allowed for more time, so I explained the research and answered questions for roughly 15 minutes. The principal had asked teachers to bring their laptops with them to the meeting. After explaining my research and what I wanted them to do, I sent them the email described above with the survey attached, I left consent forms and an envelope, and I left the cafeteria, with the principal, so I would not influence teacher participation. The principal informed teachers they could stay and complete the survey or leave if they chose not to participate.

After introductions at both school sites, I began the administrator interviews. At Mountain Ridge Elementary, I interviewed both evaluators (principal and assistant principal) separately using Zoom Video conferencing which allowed me to record the interview and conducted the interviews virtually as I do not live near the school site. These two interviews lasted roughly 45 minutes and, while following the protocol (see Appendix C) were more
conversational in nature. Using the semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to ask follow up questions in order to gain a more complete understanding of how the administration views evaluation and how evaluation is implemented at the school site. At Piney Creek Elementary, I interviewed all three administrators in person, via a focus group, immediately following my introduction of the research to the staff. While teachers were in the cafeteria completing the survey and/or signing consent forms, I met with the administrative team. The principal wanted me to conduct this interview as a focus group because she felt they all had the same philosophy and implementation of evaluation. She was also being protective of her two assistant principals’ time and allowed 30 minutes for the focus group. Because this interview was in a focus-group setting, each participate did not necessarily answer each question, however, they built off of one another’s’ answers and provided rich description of how they work as a collaborative, administrative team to approach teacher evaluation. Their focus group interview was recorded on multiple devices and transcribed in its entirety.

Once I had signed consent forms from participants willing to undergo the interview process, I scheduled interviews at the participants’ availability. I asked teachers to send me three dates and times that would work for them to participate in a 30-45-minute interview. All interviews were conducted through Zoom video conferencing and were audio recorded in addition to using Zoom’s video recording tool. Interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix B), following the same protocol for each participant but allowing flexibility for follow-up questions, rephrasing, and conversation to elaborate on participant answers.
Interviews were conducted over a course of three weeks, at participants’ availability. During this time, I wrote numerous researcher memos to capture thoughts and ideas gained during the interviews. These memos proved to be an additional data source to contribute to the overall findings of the study.

Throughout the duration of the study, multiple documents were used for document analysis. I acquired some, such as the teacher evaluation handbook, through public resources available on the district webpage. Others were sent to me by interview participants or administrators to enhance the content of their interview; they wanted me to see guidelines or evaluation materials.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Through the Qualtrics software, survey results from both schools were combined and numerical data was extracted in tables and Excel files. The results of this quantitative survey data can be found in various tables in chapters 4 and 5. As I was seeking to understand how teachers experience the district’s reformed evaluation system, the quantitative data was combined for analysis and also analyzed by individual school site to look for patterns in school-level data. For the non-Likert scale questions, responses were reviewed and coded alongside interviews using NVIVO 12 software, as described below with transcript analysis. These open-ended responses were entered into NVIVO alongside the transcripts and followed the same coding patterns. Responses were coded by school as well as by teacher respondent.
data from individual interview participants were linked to interview transcripts in order to have a more comprehensive picture of the interviewees’ perceptions of teacher evaluation.

Audio files from interviews were uploaded to a secure server provided by the university. Files were transcribed using Rev.com, a transcription service, who ensures confidentiality by stating in their service agreement “Your files are securely stored and transmitted using 128-bit SSL encryption, the highest level of security available” (Rev.com, accessed 6/28/18). As the researcher, I then reviewed transcripts and compared them to the audio files, making corrections as needed.

Once the transcripts were ready, I sent them to individual participants for member checking as an indication of validity. Deciding to send participants their raw transcript was an intentional decision. While “returning verbatim transcripts creates the unusual situation where people see their spoken language in written form” (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016, p. 1803) it gives participants the opportunity to see their ideas in written format. I chose to send participants their interview transcript to ensure that the transcript reflected their personal experience, before I made any interpretations through data analysis, to increase descriptive validity (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Maxwell, 2012). As phenomenology is not simply a description but an interpretive process, I made the conscious choice to send the raw interview transcript before I began analyzing the data for findings as I did not want my interpretation to influence participants’ views of what they stated during the initial interview. While wanting to ensure the descriptive validity and account for teachers’ personal experience, I was simultaneously cautious about using raw transcripts for member checking because:
asking a participant to check the transcript of their interview potentially enhances accuracy of the data. Yet... it can be used as a way of enabling participants to reconstruct their narrative through deleting extracts they feel no longer represent their experience, or that they feel presents them in a negative way (Birt et al., 2016).

I wanted to give participants the opportunity to elaborate on or clarify any topics they may have brought up during the interview. I also recognize that our written ideas come across quite differently than ideas shared verbally; I did not want participants changing their responses because they disliked the way they sounded in the transcribed interview. I sent an email to participants to further establish trustworthiness, which I began to establish through our interview, and to ensure that member checking with raw transcripts would not result in changes to the data (Carlson, 2010). The email sent to the participants regarding member checking can be found in Appendix F. All responses to the member checks from participants stated that they did not see the need for any changes or additions and they concluded that the transcripts accurately represented their perceptions of teacher evaluation.

Once member checking was complete, transcripts and open-ended survey responses were thematically coded using NVIVO 12 software, identifying common themes, for example, change in practice, trust, and teacher reflection were all codes that were common across both survey and interview data. Themes addressed overall experiences with the teacher evaluation system in this district as well as specific, school level factors. In their extensive literature review, Opfer and Pedder (2011) found that teacher learning and change in teacher practice are heavily influenced by school-level decisions and beliefs. Though a teacher may individually set goals or seek improvement, the resources and support provided by the school are equally important. Therefore, individual teacher’s learning orientations cannot be examined without
the context of the school also being considered. For this reason, responses were coded as a whole as well as based on school-level and individual teacher differences (Opfer & Pedder, 2011, p. 393). A conceptual picture of each school’s orientation towards implementing teacher evaluation are described in the findings, based off of the coded data.

According to Boyatzis (1998), codes should be clear and concise in order to communicate the essence of the theme, for “the desire is to minimize the interpretation at this point in the process and save if for the analysis following code development” (p. 32). In order to develop the codes concisely, I named “segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). These codes were used to form specific themes regarding this district’s reformed evaluation system as well as specific school level evaluation practices, as described below. Each code is individually defined in the code book I developed for analysis of this study.

For this study, the six phases of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis was used to identify repeated patterns of meaning from the evaluation experiences of the teacher participants. According to Braun and Clarke, “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” ((Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis is an appropriate analysis method for this research study because it allows me as the researcher to examine perspectives of varying participants by highlighting similarities and differences, as well as generating insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). For the first step, familiarizing oneself with the data, I read through the transcripts, comparing them to the
audio files. I wrote memos about ideas that came to light from these initial readings of the data. Coding is the second phase. Coding is an integral part of the analysis process, for it allowed me to make connections between ideas and concepts which would later turn into the themes of this study (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). This phase took place in multiple stages. When I initially imported the raw transcripts and open-ended survey responses into NVIVO 12, I re-read all the transcripts and used basic codes to simply identify each transcript; these broad codes were developed merely from the context of the school district’s evaluation. Each transcript was labeled, in its entirety, with a code naming the school site. Using the site names as two of the codes allowed me to sort data based on location and also look for themes and patterns than may emerge depending on school building.

Additionally, I coded the transcript for either “formative” or “summative” depending on which evaluation cycle the teacher interviewee was currently on. Finally, I coded “positive” and “negative” responses in order to have broad categories of positive and negative features of teachers’ evaluation experiences. These broad codes allowed me to add descriptors to the transcripts which helped with analysis once the second phase of coding was completed.

Once this initial coding was complete, I was able to re-code transcripts with even more detail. These codes followed Boyztzis (1998) suggestion of keeping codes clear and concise and close to the data. In keeping close to the data, many of these codes came from the words the participants themselves used, such as goal-setting or observations. Therefore, these codes did not come from any “hunches” but rather stemmed from the interview data or the interview questions themselves as well as from the literature described in chapter 2 of this study. The
detailed codes emerged through rounds of open coding through the third stage of coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state, “Open coding is the interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically. It stimulates generative and comparative questions to guide the research” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 12). To get started, I began open coding from text inquiries within NVIVO 12 (frequently used words across all the data submitted), codes specific to teacher development of practice, and school-level orientation towards evaluation practices. For instance, when I ran a frequently used word inquiry in NVIVO 12, the word “feedback” emerged as high-frequency. Therefore, I used feedback as a broad code. However, in reviewing transcripts, I found that I could break feedback down further into observation feedback and goal-setting feedback.

As I worked through coding each transcript based on the initial inquiries, more codes emerged through my sensemaking of the transcripts. Through this phase of analysis, some codes were merged and refined to better align with the transcript data. For example, as I read through the transcripts, many teachers commented on the importance of authenticity. Therefore, “authenticity” became a code and I would return to previously read transcripts to re-code looking for references to authentic evaluation procedures. This third stage of coding allowed me to generate thematic codes based directly on participants’ responses and used their own language to form the codes. These codes formed the code book where I wrote descriptions of each code to be transparent about my interpretation of the raw data. The code book was critical to track definitions of codes and allowed me to gain a clearer understanding of
the interview data (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Table 3.3 below shows the phases of coding, with examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Examples:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Broad codes</td>
<td>School name, positive/negative responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A priori codes from interview</td>
<td>Goal-setting, observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>protocol and literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Open-codes from transcripts</td>
<td>Authenticity, trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.3 Phases of Coding*

Similar to the survey responses, researcher memos were also a critical part of the data analysis. I continued to record written memos throughout the analysis process to document ideas, synthesize my thinking, and to begin Braun and Clarke’s third phase of thematic analysis: searching for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Saldana (2013) defines a theme as “a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p.139). The themes are a step beyond the codes; it is the meaning-making aspect of analysis. Through researcher memos and the use of the software, I was able to make connections between codes and begin to construct themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that themes do not simply live in the data waiting to be uncovered but rather are pieced together by the researcher. Further, they state, “writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). This idea of writing as analysis justifies the need for continued memo writing throughout the coding and theme construction process. In this way, the researcher memos and refining of codes lead me to construct the themes of the data. By reviewing coded data, and writing reflections on it
through memos I was able to construct the themes from the coded transcript and survey responses. See table 3.4 for constructed themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructed Theme:</th>
<th>Description:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of feedback</td>
<td>The frequency and type of feedback teachers received contributed to their perception of teacher evaluation as a valuable tool for their growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of goal</td>
<td>Whether the teacher was able to select a meaningful goal (something she actually wanted to work on to improve her practice) impacted her view of teacher goal-setting as a method of change in practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>How the teacher viewed the relationship and level of trust impacted her view of the evaluator’s ability to accurately and meaningful evaluate her teaching performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>The large number of teachers on summative evaluation cycle each year influences the amount of meaningful time an evaluator can spend on evaluation practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of evaluation practices</td>
<td>Though the district uses the same practices to conduct evaluation, how the evaluators at each school site implemented them varied greatly and impacted teachers’ perceptions of their effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.4* Constructed themes from phase 3 of data analysis

The final three stages of Braun and Clarke’s six phases of thematic analysis were completed alongside the writing of the remaining chapters of this study. Phase four, checking themes in relation to coded data, required me to align the quotes from the coded transcripts within each theme to find examples from the participants which best support and explain the emerging theme. This process involved going beyond simply reading what participants said but rather, using the NVIVO 12 software to pull out intersections of codes to interpret meaning across transcripts and codes. I used multiple queries within the software to complete this task. For example, I could sort the data by school level and filter the data for when teachers were talking specifically about feedback from observation. Both “feedback” and “observations” were
codes used within the analysis process. In this way, I could narrow in on specific comments about feedback from observations and how the teachers from each school site perceived the feedback to be effective or ineffective to their practice. By conducting these queries, sorting and re-sorting my codes, and writing about my findings I was able to develop a thematic map which consisted of the themes displayed in table 3.3 and examples of teacher quotations and statements that align with each category.

From the developed thematic map, I began to construct the story of evaluation within these two schools; entering phase five of data analysis. I framed the story of these themes within the context of the larger research question: How do reform-based evaluation practices being employed in one district enable or inhibit teachers’ ability to make meaningful changes in their practice? The constructed story of the themes is explored in the next chapter and discussed in greater depth in chapter 5. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) final phase, phase six, is the writing of the report. Of course, this phase which describes the findings in detail can be found in the remaining chapters of this study.

Documents available through the district webpage and provided by interview participants were examined for triangulation of survey and interview data. These documents were not coded; however, they were read multiple times to enhance the researcher understanding of the evaluation process in each building and across the district as a whole. Additionally, transcript data from the school evaluators was also compared with the developed themes in order to both triangulate the data as well as provide more insight into the teachers’ perceptions and experiences.
Ethical Considerations

Although no serious ethical threats were posed to any of the participants, this study employed multiple safeguards to ensure the protection of the participants. Before the survey was administered, participants were given the opportunity to review the implied consent form which stated that by completing the survey, they were giving consent for their results to be analyzed in this study. Additionally, for interview participants, written informed consent was received from each participant. The participants’ privacy remained of primary importance during data collection and reporting. Participants did not know of other teachers who engaged in the interview process. Building administrators were not informed of survey or interview participants. I created pseudonyms for each participant, school site, the district, and the evaluators. Additionally, I was the only person that had access to the survey, interview audio files, and researcher memos which were all stored on a password protected computer to ensure secure storage of research-related records.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, “to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner… [and describe] the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible “ (2017, p. 1). This chapter seeks to address issues of trustworthiness by supplying a detailed description of the participants, data collection methods, and data analysis. The criteria for trustworthiness designed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) has become widely accepted and easily recognized among
qualitative researchers. They describe five areas of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, audit trails, and reflexivity. Below, I describe how this research aligns with Lincoln and Guba’s criteria for trustworthiness.

In this research, credibility is operationalized through participant member checking. Because the research is striving to ascertain teacher perceptions, only those teacher participants can verify if their thoughts, ideas, and experiences are accurately captured through their transcript. Transferability is addressed through rich, thick descriptions of participants’ experiences with the evaluation system. Direct quotations from participants are used throughout the findings chapter in order to capture participant ideas directly. Therefore, though specific to this context, some findings may be generalized to other schools within the same district or to school districts engaged in a similar reformed evaluation system. In order to be dependable, the research data must be logical and well-documented (Nowell et al., 2017). Through researcher memos the data collection and analysis process are well-documented and the records are kept along with coded transcripts, raw transcripts, and audio/video files of interviews. When credibility, transferability, and dependability are in place, then a study is able to be confirmed and audited by another researcher (Nowell et al., 2017). To ease auditing, reflexivity can be found throughout the study in the form of researcher memos. I completed researcher memos throughout the data collection and data analysis process.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

One delimitation of this study is the scale. Only two elementary schools from the district’s 142 schools were selected to participate. Therefore, while the evaluation system is
used district wide, the findings are representative of these two schools and may or may not be representative of teacher perceptions across the entire district or other schools also implementing reformed evaluation practices. The goal of this study, though, is not to generalize but rather to present descriptions of the teachers’ experiences. Additionally, a limitation is that within the schools, limited numbers of teachers participated. While their views are important and shed light on teachers’ perceptions of reformed evaluation, they may not be inclusive of all the teachers within that school building’s opinions and experiences.

A second limitation is time. Due the nature of the study approval, there was time to conduct one interview with each teacher. The data provided was rich enough to provide detailed findings, as explored in the following chapter. However, additional data collected from further interviews may have provided even more insight into the findings presented in this study or could bring about more findings in addition to those described. Also, there was limited time to collect both survey and interview data before the close of the school year, which ended the research agreement I had with the school district. Therefore, while I conducted more interviews (14) than I intended to (my goal was 10) if more time had been allotted I may have been able to secure interviews with a greater number of teachers.

Next, due to confidentiality restrictions of the district and the limited time-frame, there were not opportunities for myself as the researcher to observe evaluation observations or summative evaluation meetings. The majority of the data for the study comes from the teacher perceptions of observations rather than first-hand accounts.
Finally, a delimitation of the study is the brief nature of both the survey and the interviews. In order to ensure enough participation, I intentionally made both brief to not infringe on teacher time. This is a delimitation because if there were more survey and interview questions, a greater amount of data could have been collected from participants.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the methodology, methods, and data analysis used within this study. The chapter began with an overview of the methodology and then explains the specific district context. Participants for both the survey and interviews were described and displayed in table format. The chapter described the purpose for the methods of data collection and also discusses how descriptive data were analyzed, through thematic analysis using NVIVO 12 software. Finally, the chapter concludes with ethical considerations and limitations of the study. The following chapter explores the results from the data analysis through description of five assertions. These assertions are further synthesized and discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation.
CHAPTER 4

ASSERTIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods phenomenological study was to investigate teachers’ perceptions of a reformed evaluation system on their practice. Through the investigation, I sought to understand which factors or elements of teacher evaluation inform teacher practice. The methodology utilized for this study was a mixed-methods phenomenological approach to reveal the lived experiences of teachers, and their perceptions of evaluation, through their own voices. This interpretive phenomenological method allowed me to analyze the survey and interview data by drawing on my own “valuable expert knowledge” (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015, p. 97) of the evaluation system to interpret meaning and make sense of the teachers’ experiences with the reformed evaluation practices. This chapter shares the assertions of my interpretation of the teachers’ experiences with a reformed evaluation system within one school district. Following the If/Then/Therefore/Thus matrix (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016) described in chapter 1, this chapter describes in detail the findings from across the data points which are then synthesized into new learning statements and discussed in chapter 5.

In this study, I used surveys and qualitative interviews to obtain examples of teachers’ everyday experiences with a reformed evaluation system. The research responds to the following questions, which are further described in Chapter 1:

• What is the experience of reformed teacher evaluation like for teachers?
• How did reform-based evaluation practices being employed in one school district enable or inhibit teachers’ ability to make meaningful changes in their practice?

The district in which this study was conducted has five primary objectives for teacher evaluation. One purpose is to “promote self-growth through a variety of opportunities such as goal-setting reflection, action research and professional development plans that contribute to instructional effectiveness and overall professional performance” (DISTRICT, 2015, p.3). Another of the five purposes is to “implement a performance evaluation system that supports a positive working environment featuring communication between the teacher and evaluator that promise continuous professional growth and improved student outcomes” (DISTRICT, 2015, p.3). Of course, accountability and ensuring teacher competence is an underlying component of any evaluation system. Yet, with two of the five purposes describing an evaluation system that promotes goal-setting and professional growth, this study sought to determine teachers’ perceptions of the changes they make to their practice due to this district’s evaluation procedures. Findings for this study fall into two categories: how teachers perceive their evaluation experiences, and the practices used within the evaluation that lead to or inhibit teacher change in practice.

The study contributes to the literature on teacher evaluation by examining how a reformed evaluation system, developed as a result of recent national policy, influence teachers’ perceptions of improving their practice. The research questions strive to explore what aspects of reformed evaluation enable or inhibit teachers’ abilities to make meaningful changes to their own teaching practices. With limited research on how reformed evaluation systems influence
teachers’ perception of growth of their teaching practices, this study responds to a gap in the literature of the impact of reformed evaluation. This chapter will explore the findings that resulted from the data analysis described in detail in chapter 3. Each finding describes either an experience of the reformed teacher evaluation system or teachers’ ability to make changes to their practice, as related to the research questions.

The study examined 61 teacher survey participants’ responses across two school sites within one district and the responses of 14 teacher interviewees, who also completed the survey. Data collection for this study began in the spring of 2018 and concluded at the end of the academic school year, in early June, lasting roughly 3 months. This chapter presents the key assertions obtained from fourteen in-depth interviews, three administrator/evaluator interviews, sixty-one survey responses, district documents, such as the teacher evaluation handbook, as well as multiple research memos written throughout the course of data collection and analysis. The data collected describes teachers’ experiences of reformed evaluation implementation within their school sites and the perceived impact it has on their change in practice. To stay true to the phenomenological methodology, the voices of the teachers are used to describe their perceptions of reformed evaluation within their schools and on their own practices. The results from the survey data are intermixed with quotations from teacher interviews. These results include perspectives of teachers who make changes to their practice, based on evaluation, and also those who do not believe teacher evaluation influenced their practice. According to the 61 teachers surveyed, 66% (40 teachers) responded that teacher evaluation leads to positive changes in their teaching practice while the other 34% (21 teachers)
claimed that it does not (see table 4.1). Through analysis of the interview transcripts, I sought to determine what practices encourage teachers to make changes to their practice and which do not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher evaluation leads to...</th>
<th>Percentage of 61 Participants:</th>
<th>Number of Teachers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive changes in my practice</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>40 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change in my practice</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>21 Teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.1* Teachers who believe evaluation leads to positive changes in their practice

The major assertions that emerged from this study are:

1. The significance of the evaluation goal matters. If teachers believe their goal is authentic and will lead to an increase in student achievement, they are more willing to make changes to their practice to achieve it;

2. Actionable feedback from evaluators enable changes in teacher practice;

3. Trusting relationships are a critical component to how teachers’ experience reformed evaluation practices. How teachers view their evaluator, and the level of trust displayed by the evaluator, significantly contributes to teachers’ willingness to make changes to their practice and perceive the evaluation system as a means to support teacher growth;

4. Time constraints prevent evaluations from being as meaningful or intentional as teachers would like them to be. Limited time, to both conduct observations and provide feedback, inhibit teachers’ abilities to make meaningful changes to their practices and
5. Teachers experience a subjective evaluation system, despite the district’s efforts to standardize the evaluation process across schools, practices, perceptions, and ratings.

In the sections that follow, each finding is discussed independently with examples from the interview and survey data that support and explain each finding. By way of “thick description” (Moustakas, 1994), I set out to document the range of experiences of the teacher participants with the district evaluation system. In order to allow for participants to speak for themselves, illustrative quotations taken from the interview transcripts attempt to portray and capture the variety of participant perspectives. These quotations are used both as evidence in support of the finding but also to provide description of the finding and the teachers’ perceptions of their evaluation experiences.

Before delving into the narrative description of the findings, table 4.2 below displays findings of the two types of Likert Scale items on the survey. These results, in addition to the open-ended survey questions, contributed to the findings discussed throughout this chapter. Additionally, some of these survey results are displayed in various table formats throughout the assertions explanation.
**Table(s) 4.2** Likert Scale survey results
Findings

Finding 1: The significance of the evaluation goal matters. If teachers believe their goal is authentic and will lead to an increase in student achievement, they are more willing to make changes to their practice to achieve it.

The most common element in reformed teacher evaluation systems is the addition of student achievement as an added measure to the teachers’ performance. While there are many models of how this is enacted such as value-added models, the district observed for this study uses a teacher-goal setting model. Teachers set annual evaluation goals reflecting student growth. When asked on the survey how teachers go about selecting their goals, 52 of the 61 teachers stated that they align their goal with school-wide initiatives or goals. According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), evaluation systems should be linked directly to school initiatives. It makes sense then, that teachers would align their goals with those of the overall school. Table 4.2 shows the teachers’ responses to how they set their goal. Participants were able to select more than one option if they had multiple reasons for designing their evaluation goal; the table shows how many times each answer choice was selected. For teachers who marked “other,” four commented that they selected the same goal as their teammates, one chose something that was easily measurable, another chose an area where she knew her students would be successful, a special education teacher chose her students’ IEP goals as her evaluation goals and, finally, one teacher commented that she was told “this is your goal” by her administration.
Table 4.3 Teacher Goal Development

As this study sought to understand how teachers perceive evaluation procedures connects to changes in their practice, examining goal setting was a large component of the interview. Since one of the unique features of this district’s evaluation system is teachers setting an annual goal with the goal contributing to 40% of their evaluation score, I asked teachers how the process of setting and working towards a goal encouraged or discouraged them to make changes in their practice. Most teachers felt setting an annual goal encouraged them to make changes to their practice. For instance, Lucy explained that goal setting:

encourages me to make changes in a sense that I want to make sure that I’m doing everything I can to meet that goal. It kind of makes me aware, especially more towards the end of the year, like, ‘Don’t forget. You’ve gotta do this!’
Monique elaborated by explaining that setting the goal gives her a focus area to work towards.

Even though she naturally sets goals for herself, the required evaluation goal is one more thing for her to work towards accomplishing. She said:

Setting an annual goal gives me something to work toward. Once I get in there and I get to know my students, then it’s just something for me to work toward. I’m the type of person...I constantly make goals for myself anyway, that comes natural for me. I'm one of those people that have a checklist, I cross things off, I have a goal I need to get this done by...and so forth. It’s perfect for me because it lets me know, okay, this year I have a different group of children, so we're going to work on something different.

The quotations above illustrate the ways teachers felt goal setting helps them focus on a particular area and encourages them to stretch themselves and their practice to meet the needs of their students. Goal-setting motivates teachers by creating a sense of autonomy within their work (Grissom and Youngs, 2016). Through the process of setting an annual evaluation goal and working towards it, teachers reported that they made changes to their instruction. Savannah discussed how goal setting impacted her lesson planning and instruction:

[Goal-setting] definitely impacts how I structure lessons and how much time I spend on what lessons, or what lessons I skip, or what lessons I focus on more, which I emphasize a little bit more, because I know I’m going to have to collect data on it, and I want that data to look good. I want them to show growth, because my evaluation is on it. I want them to do well in general, but also because there's a different expectation now on it, not just for them to do well, but for me to do well teaching them how to do well.

Meanwhile, Courtney used goal setting as a chance to look at individual student needs based on data and make changes to her practice based on each students’ need. She explained:

For me, [goal-setting] encourages me [to change my practice]. Because I really do look at all of those kids individually. As readers or mathematicians, depending on what [goal] I have selected. So, for me, it encourages me to really look at that data at the beginning of the year. And even in third grade, have those conversations with the kids early on
about, "Hey, I notice this as a reader," you know? And it helps me to align; it starts my year off in a very clear way.

The majority of teacher participants believed that setting a goal as part of the evaluation process both encouraged them to change their practice as well as impacted their instruction. However, authenticity of the goals plays an important role. If teachers believe their goal is authentic and something they both want to, and need to, work on, it is more likely to lead to changes in their practice. Teachers must be willing to select a meaningful goal. Susanne elaborated on this idea by saying:

This year I would say that [my goal is] quite authentic. I think that...it really is relevant to the work that we were already doing...My experience in [this district] and at Piney Creek Elementary, specifically, has been that admin has been supportive of us selecting goals that align with the work that we’re already doing; that it’s not something, ‘Well, so this needs to be something in addition to A, B, and C.’ It’s, ‘What’s a goal that fits in with the work that you’re already doing? How can we capitalize on that?’ I think that my writing goal for this year, it’s what I was doing anyway and what I would have been doing, it’s just kind of taking that work and quantifying it for the goal setting.

Susanne addressed authenticity but also selected a goal that is already something students need to accomplish so that it is not adding additionally to teacher workload. Teachers are more encouraged to meet their goal if it is something that the students need to achieve, preventing it from being “one more thing” to add on to the teacher’s workload, as evidenced by the Brooke’s statement:

I think it is a real goal, but it’s a goal that we know the kids will be working on anyway. It’s not like I’m like, “Hmm. I’m interested in science, so let me make ...” You know? I’m not making up a goal that I actually would want to work on. ... I’m picking a goal that I know the kids have to do anyway.

Brooke, like Susanne, intentionally selected a goal that’s something her students need to achieve as part of the curriculum, therefore, the work she does towards her goal is work she
would be doing anyway within her classroom and refrains from adding additional planning to her workload.

Yet some teachers felt the goals are not authentic and therefore, are not capable of leading to meaningful change in practice. During the interviews, some teachers lamented how goals are assigned for them rather than following the district guideline of teacher-selected goals for evaluation. For example, Jen explains that at Piney Creek Elementary:

“It's pretty much decided mostly for us. I think that if you really want to fight it you can, but most people just go with the team goal...So, this year it's writing...We're sort of coached into what the goal is going to be, but it feels pretty decided upon before you come to the table. I mean, input is taken, but they've pretty much already got like the focus or the path for the goal.

Others believe that teachers simply pick something easily achievable in order to have a higher evaluation rating or they pick the same goal year after year even if that goal is not an area in which the teacher needs to improve her practice. Courtney described her frustration with teachers choosing the same goal year after year. She stated:

I know of teachers who copy and paste their goal from last year and just change the data. Because it's not meaningful and they know that no one is going to check in on it. Or they know no one is going to have conversations around it. So, I think it's probably half the teachers do think it's important, and focus, and collect the data, and know how they're going to track it and how they're going to support their goal. And then the other half is more ‘I am just going to copy and paste from my last year's goal, because it was fine and it will get approved.’

She feels the goal setting should be more purposeful and that evaluators should be more thoughtful about approving goals to ensure that are goals teachers actually need to work on.

Again, Jen shared her experience on this topic:

We're picking goals that aren't necessarily really making us better teachers, they're just letting us check a box that the kids are doing well. And I don't think that's really
improving our practice any. Or it doesn't seem like we're expecting high things out of ourselves. There's also an issue with certain teachers picking the same goal year after year because they KNOW they can meet it and so it's not necessarily something they need to work towards. I think that having the same goal year after year is a little bit tiresome, so it kind of takes it away. I think the first year into it, we were really good at it. We really strived to make these changes in our classroom, and attend professional development, and seek feedback, and seek observations from the instructional coach or the math leader, whoever. And now it's kind of just like, okay, we've done this for four years, so nothing is really different. So, we're kind of just going on and trying to improve a little bit. But we don't really have those discussions of CLT [Collaborative Learning Teams] like we used to when the goal was new.

This aligns with previous research on teacher goal setting where teachers are encouraged to make a goal easy so that it is obtainable and therefore, not necessarily purposeful (Donaldson, 2016). When goals are assigned or mandated, they are often removed from an individual teacher's instructional priorities and therefore do not have a significant impact on their practice (Grissom and Youngs, 2016). Certain teachers described having team goals rather than individual goals. For instance, Molly, a first-year teacher, said:

I just did what my team was doing. We had a team goal for math. Well, we had one for math and one for writing. I just chose the math one. Yeah, I think everybody in my team ended up choosing the same thing to look at. Especially since I was new, I was like, ‘Okay. Everyone's doing that.’

Danielson and McGreal (2000) describe the benefits of team-driven goals as increasing collaboration and promoting more reflective conversations among team members (p.114). In this study, some teachers felt that having a mandated goal or a team-selected goal made it less personal and prevented goal-setting from being an authentic area of growth for individual teachers while others, like Molly, selected a group goal intentionally to have support throughout the school year from her teammates.
According to this study’s participants, the significance of the evaluation goal determines whether or not it influences teacher practice. Teachers who had a choice in selecting a goal that they want to work on to improve their own instruction or student achievement felt that their goal was authentic. The process of setting a goal was meaningful for these teachers. The goal drove their instruction and motivated them to work on the goal throughout the school year. On the other hand, teachers who selected a goal which they know they can easily achieve or selected a team goal that may or may not be an instructional area they need to work on felt that goal setting was one more hoop to jump through to complete the teacher evaluation process.

Finding 2: *Actionable feedback from evaluators enable the majority of teacher participants to make changes to their practice.*

Literature suggests that the quality and timeliness of feedback are what lead to meaningful change in practice for teachers. For instance, in their text *Improving Teacher Evaluation Systems*, specifically written to help schools and administrators implement more substantial evaluation procedures, Grissom and Youngs (2016) state “useful feedback often focuses on evidence about an individual teacher’s pedagogy, curriculum and materials, and ways that the teacher can improve his or her practices and student learning outcomes” (p. 106). Because teachers frequently lament a lack of feedback, I asked teachers about the frequency and usefulness of feedback within the district studied. According to the 61 survey participants, approximately 35% of teachers feel their evaluator gives them actionable feedback most of the
time while 55% believe this happens only half or some of the time and 10% of participants surveyed believe they never receive meaningful feedback from their evaluator (see table 4.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers who believe their evaluators gives them actionable feedback most or all of the time</th>
<th>% of Teachers surveyed</th>
<th>Number of Teachers (of 61 surveyed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who believe their evaluators give them actionable feedback only half or some of the time</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>34 Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who believe evaluators never give them actionable feedback</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6 Teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.4 Teachers perceptions of amount of feedback received from evaluators**

The survey results leaned heavily towards teachers receiving feedback as a regular part of their experience with the reformed evaluation system. I asked specific interview questions to find out more about feedback, since the survey results suggested that teachers in this reformed evaluation system are, in fact, receiving some feedback, which they viewed as both positive and negative. To explore the idea further, I ran a matrix coding query within NVIVO12 with the rows as the codes “positive” and “negative” and the columns with the nodes “conferring/conferencing” and “feedback”. Overwhelmingly, there were more negative comments than positive; more than double. Table 4.4 shows the results of this query.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Conferring or conference</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.5 Data Analysis Feedback Matrix Coding Query**
Positive Responses to Feedback

Teachers naturally want to hear that they are performing well in their jobs. Teaching can often be isolating with an individual teacher in her classroom with her students, and with little outside adult interaction. The teachers in this study wanted assurance that they are doing well and wanted to be validated for the time and effort they put into planning and teaching. Evaluation was an opportunity for them to reflect upon performance and receive feedback from the evaluation. One participant, Phyllis, explained:

[Feedback is important] for you to feel that you're being recognized as well. It's always nice to hear all the positive things that [evaluators] see because we work really hard at what we do and it's just really nice to be recognized.

The primary positive comment regarding evaluation feedback is that teachers enjoy hearing that they are doing something well within their classrooms. Receiving positive feedback encourages teachers to feel valued within the profession. During her interview, Savannah stated:

I enjoy hearing that I'm doing something well. That is very encouraging to hear my administrator say, ‘Oh, when I came in and observed you, I saw kids engaged. I find you highly effective.’ Hearing that feels really good. I get more out of that than almost anything else.

Another teacher, Jen, described this idea of positive praise and being valued as the primary benefit to the teacher evaluation system. So often, teachers focus on the students who are struggling and not making progress that teachers can feel like failures. Receiving affirming feedback can reassure them and help them focus on the positive work they are doing. She explained:
I think a positive to evaluation is that people do see themselves as valued. And with student progress, you see that your students are making progress in a very quantitative manner... As teachers, sometimes you look at the two kids that didn't make progress, and you're like, ‘I'm horrible at this.’ Then you miss the 24 that did make progress. So, I think that's one of the [benefits]... Self-validation is a strength of the evaluation process, and then finding an area of weakness and being able to improve upon it is also the strength of it.

Others appreciate feedback that encourages them to change or reflect more deeply on their practice. This is not a new idea; in 1990, Duke wrote, “it is of little benefit to be motivated to grow if teachers are unaware of ways to improve their practice” (p. 133). More recently, literature suggests that when feedback occurs over time, is focused on ways to improve student learning and when it supports teachers’ opportunities to learn, it is most valuable (Looney, 2011; Range, Young, & Hvidston, 2013). Goe et al. states, (2012), “it is through discussing and reflecting on evaluation results that evaluation becomes a system that supports professional learning, not just accountability” (p. 14). Teachers both want and value feedback on their performance (Donaldson, 2016; Donaldson & Papay, 2015). When teachers receive constructive feedback or have the opportunity to engage in a reflecting conversation with their evaluator they are motivated to improve their own practice. Two teachers explained this idea of using feedback to reflect upon their own teaching practice. Phyllis described:

I prefer having feedback and I love getting people's insights, and I think that I really crave that. I'm somebody who likes collaboration. I'm somebody who thrives off of having that opportunity to brainstorm with others, and get people's perspectives, and that evaluation piece really can be a part of that... If you have that opportunity to really sit down and dive into it in a way that's authentic and there's enough time, then you can really provide that [collaboration].
Next, Lucy discussed how her evaluator encouraged her to change her practice by offering feedback that specified what she was looking for in order for Lucy to receive a higher rating on the rubric. Lucy stated:

A couple of years ago, [my principal said], ‘I want to give you a 'highly effective' but I’m not going to because I want you to be more of a teacher leader.’ That spurred me to make changes to become more of a leader in the building. I definitely think [comments] like that are positive.

Lucy described how the feedback inspired her to seek out leadership positions within her school and grow as a teacher due to the evaluation process. These examples of actionable feedback demonstrate teachers’ desire to receive evaluative feedback they can directly apply to their teaching practice.

**Negative Responses to Feedback**

Despite educators knowing the benefits of timely, meaningful feedback, not all teachers have this experience through their evaluation processes. This idea of unequivocal evaluation experiences under the same system will be addressed further in this chapter. However, related directly to feedback, the negative comments analyzed in this study reflected frustration in five different areas: (1) not receiving specific, actionable feedback, (2) not receiving enough feedback, (3) evaluators not knowing the grade level or curriculum well enough to give feedback, (4) lacking authentic feedback and (5) lack of time to hold purposeful, reflective conversations surrounding feedback. These negative responses show how ineffective feedback during the evaluation process can inhibit teachers or discourage them from making changes to their practice.

*The Need for Specific, Actionable Feedback*
Teachers desire specific feedback which they can immediately put into action within their classrooms. Jessica explained wanting to know specific areas she should work on after an evaluator observes in her room; she regularly experiences receiving generic feedback. She said:

I feel that a lot of times you’re not really getting a lot of specific feedback. They’re like, ‘Oh, that was great.’ I mean, I’m kind of one of the first people who’d like to know if something wasn’t great; can you tell me so I can work on it? I think sometimes they’re kind of like checking it off a list because they have to get it done, just like I have to be observed. Also, just not giving feedback that I can really do anything with.

Other teachers felt the same way and expressed similar sentiments regarding generic feedback. Brooke and Courtney both described their evaluation feedback lacking the usefulness to encourage them to develop or making changes to their practice. Brooke described the lack of specificity within feedback she has received by saying:

I don’t know how specific they are. They don’t really give us feedback. Like, ‘Oh, this is an idea.’ Or ‘Maybe you should do this’... Personally, I’ve never been given feedback that I could’ve changed anything. So, that’s why [feedback] is kind of not helpful.

Courtney connects the limited feedback to impacting student learning. She believes that more intentional, meaningful feedback could positively impact student learning. She stated:

But then we’re not getting that critical feedback we need as teachers to support us and help us grow, which impacts student learning. So, if teachers aren’t receiving support and the feedback they need in the way it should be done, students aren’t benefiting from that either. Which is really a shame when you think about it.

She confirms what previous research has found about the necessity of quality, actionable feedback stemming from evaluation practices. For instance, Hill and Grossman state “individualized teacher feedback has been successful in cases where teachers are given specific, actionable items they can implement during their work with students” (2013, p. 379).

Lack of Feedback
Another complaint teacher interviewees shared was about administrators not giving enough feedback to provide direction to teachers towards making meaningful changes to their practice. So, while some did not mention the quality of the feedback they felt they did not receive enough feedback in order for it to be actionable. Jessica described this limited feedback:

I don't think I've gotten enough feedback to be able to change much of my practices from what I've received as far as evaluations...They focus on the positive with the end of year write ups and mid-year write ups which is nice to hear but it doesn't... no, it's not really moving me forward as far as reaching new goals.

Other teachers described similar experiences. Savannah explained, “I feel like we just don't get enough feedback, or enough conversation about what we did in the classroom to facilitate [change in practice].” In the teachers’ experiences, the limited feedback prevents them from using the evaluation system as a tool for development, which counters the district goals of the reformed evaluation acting as a means of professional growth.

*Unknowledgeable Evaluator*

While most teachers felt they did receive some feedback, there were teachers who claimed to not receive any as illustrated by both the survey and interview results. When not receiving feedback, teachers felt it was because the evaluator was not knowledgeable in the grade level, content, or curriculum well enough to be able to give meaningful feedback. Brooke mentioned this idea of her evaluators being unfamiliar with kindergarten best practices throughout her interview. For example, she said, “When they come in here, I don't think that they know what kindergarten is supposed to be, what suggestions to give.” She felt the lack of feedback is because evaluators do not know kindergarten pedagogy well enough to supply
feedback which is actionable. Jen believes her evaluator's previous experience as a middle school teacher causes him to be unable to connect to the elementary classroom. She explained:

The assistant principal of our school has only ever taught middle school. Coming down to my first-grade classroom, things that he was looking for are things that you might not see in a first-grade classroom. Lacking that knowledge of what a first-grade classroom should look like, or should sound like, or what the expectations are, [compared to a middle school classroom] is hard [for him].

Not knowing the curriculum or grade-appropriate pedagogy impacts teachers’ perceptions of their evaluation feedback.

Lack of Authentic Feedback

In order for teacher growth to occur, evaluators should be giving feedback to be authentic, not just for the sake of “giving feedback” because that is what they are supposed to do as a part of the evaluation process. Lucy described this need best:

[Feedback] encourages me, as long as it feels authentic. If it feels like they're saying something because they're supposed to say something, then it's frustrating to me... [For example,] I don’t remember what the student asked, but whatever it was, the way I responded...was academic conversation stuff and [the evaluator’s] feedback was like, "Maybe that next time you could do x, y, and z." And I'm like, "But are you watching me? Because that's what I did. It just felt like she saw the child ask [a question], and then was like, "Oh, I can write notes about that," and tuned the rest of everything out, and that was her takeaway. She knew she needed to give me some feedback, so when she heard that student ask that, she's like, "I've got feedback. I can check out now"...It just feels like they're kind of checking boxes to do things and it's not authentic. And so with her I'm like, "I'm not necessarily going to take feedback from you because I know you're just giving feedback to give feedback."

Lucy’s experience with the evaluators unauthentic feedback led her to perceive evaluation feedback as meaningless rather than as an avenue to reflect upon and make changes to her practice. Authenticity came up throughout a variety of interviews, and will become clearer in finding three, discussing trusting relationships between teachers and evaluators.
Lack of Time

Time is a challenge in many school environments. Teachers and administrators often feel they do not have enough time in the school day to complete the many tasks needed of their jobs. Having enough time for meaningful conversations is another point of contention with teachers interviewed for this study. A finding from this research is that teachers perceive that lack of time impacts the feedback they receive; Their experience is that evaluators lack the time to both observe at purposeful times of day and have the time for reflective, post observation conferences to give feedback. Multiple teachers explained the time factor and how it contributes to the evaluation system. Erin described:

I think it makes it very hard for [evaluators] to have enough time to observe and give feedback in a way that really gives people time to have conversations about what's happening, why they did what they did, and what other ideas could be next.

To help save time, the district’s reformed evaluation system developed an online system for teachers and evaluators to track evaluation data. While this tool was intended to improve the time for both teachers and students, Courtney explained how it removes the personal nature of the evaluation. She stated, “With the online system, there’s no in person details or even truly any time for you to schedule a conference to follow up with questions you have with observations you received, or your goal, or how they could support you.”

Through the teacher voices presented in this section, it is clear that purposeful, actionable feedback is important to teachers. The teacher participants perceived they are able to use feedback to make changes to their practice when they receive authentic feedback that allows them to reflect upon their practice. Meanwhile, teachers who believed feedback is
ineffective to making changes to their practice do not feel they are receiving enough feedback or they feel the feedback is generic and is given simply because it is a required component to conducting classroom observations. This generic or lack of feedback may be due to the evaluators’ absence of knowledge of the grade level or curriculum or the amount of time the evaluator has to both observe and follow up with the classroom teacher.

**Finding 3:** *Trusting relationships are a critical component to how teachers’ experience reformed evaluation practices. How a teacher views her evaluator, and the level of trust displayed by the evaluator, significantly contributes to the teacher’s willingness to make changes to her practice and perceive the evaluation system as a means to support teacher growth.*

While there is extensive documentation demonstrating that relationships are important to any healthy working relationship, how school administrators can develop and maintain these relationships depends on multiple factors, which influences the level of trust teachers have in their administrators (Moye, Henkin, & Egley, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Time is an essential factor to developing a working rapport with teachers. Over time, school leaders can support and build confidence with their teachers to cultivate a trusting relationship (Tarter & Hoy, 1988). This can be significant in terms of evaluation because often administrators need to begin evaluating a teacher, specifically a new teacher, before trust has been established.

Within the context of this study, trust is defined as “confident expectations regarding another’s conduct” (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998, p. 439). Because trust is so complex, the manner in which it develops will not be the same for all individuals or schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Trust is visible in schools when the relationships between leaders and teachers
is both honest and supportive (Moye et al., 2005). Though it may seem simplistic, research indicates several effective characteristics leaders need to engage in to establish trusting connections with teachers:

[Leaders need to be] kind, considerate, and principled toward teachers. [They] need to demonstrate competence, use power wisely, make sensible decisions; promote curriculum and professional growth. They need to be confident and focused and they need to empower teachers. (MacNeil, Spuck, & Ceyanes, 1998, p. 9)

In addition to the characteristics stated above, responsibility, dependability and reliability are other essential components to interpersonal trust-building (Moye et al., 2005). In this study, when teachers felt their evaluator lacked competence in their grade level or overall pedagogy, trust was low. Erika articulated this point when she said:

[Trust is low because my evaluator] has very limited knowledge on best practices, teaching and learning, and the ability to provide productive feedback. And so, while I know I'm not a perfect teacher, I feel like my evaluations in the past have always been regarded very highly and I don't receive much constructive feedback, which is frustrating because I do want to get better.

Trust plays an important role in the findings of this study in relation to teacher evaluation. If teachers felt that they trusted their administrator to support them and have meaningful, reflective conversations or provide valuable, actionable feedback, they were much more likely to want to change their instruction to grow their practice. Trust, therefore, played a pivotal role in how teachers perceived their evaluation to influence their development. Of course, teachers at both schools discussed various levels of trust (some directly and some indirectly). If teachers trusted their evaluator to make informed decisions, support the teachers’ best interests, and development and accurately assess their performance, they were much
more likely to find the evaluation system purposeful and make changes to their practice.

Luanne shared insights on her trusting relationships with evaluations:

I pretty much always felt pretty trustful...I'm sure there are lots of ways that they can find out [about your teaching performance] even though they're not with you every day...I feel pretty trustful that they know me and kind of what's going on.

On the other hand, if teachers had lower levels of trust or poorer relationships with their evaluators, they were more likely to disregard feedback from evaluation and viewed it as a useless practice in terms of teacher growth and development. Courtney described this at length:

I don't think my current evaluator, or my evaluator in the past, knows me as a teacher personally. Because they're not in my classroom enough. Or ever. I think in seven years I have had three evaluations. Which makes the trust very small, because I feel like when they do come in my room, they're not really seeing me as a whole teacher. And yes, they might be there for thirty or forty minutes, whereas if they had the small snippets of me throughout the year, they could get a better image of who I am as a teacher. I also don't think my current evaluator has a thorough understanding of best practices in education. So, I think the practices are coming from the county, and our school is currently trying to do everything at once, which is not working because there's no professional development on it.

So, when the evaluator comes in and they're expecting to see XYZ and XYZ is not happening, it's probably because the training or the support has not been there. But then I am also not confident, again, when I think about feedback and how important feedback is, I have never sat in a meeting with my evaluator where they have given me feedback on, "Hey, I would love to see this in your room." Or "Hey, have you considered this in your practices?"

I think [my perception] comes from the lack of communication with my evaluator, the lack of support, the lack of observation, the lack of feedback, and the lack of professional development the school provides for teachers, surrounding specific goals, if that makes sense.

From the teacher statements above, it is evident that trust can vary within a school.

Trust was impacted by the overall culture of the school but also by the individual evaluator.
Teacher participants rationalized how trust can vary depending on the evaluator assigned. Jen explained that, for her, trust varies at her school based on the evaluators’ prior experiences. She stated:

I think with the principal of our school, I think the trust is much higher. But the assistant principal of our school has only ever taught middle school. So, coming down to my first-grade classroom, things that he was looking for are things that you might not see in a first-grade classroom. So lacking that knowledge of what a first-grade classroom should look like or should sound like rather than a middle school classroom, or what the expectations are, or what the kids might look like is hard.

Similarly, with feedback, if teachers believed their evaluator was knowledgeable about best practices, grade level content, and developmental expectations they were more willing to have higher levels of trust in their evaluator’s ability to evaluate them fairly and purposefully.

Beyond knowing the pedagogy, teachers believe it is critical for evaluators to know them; their teaching style, their goals, and their classrooms. When evaluators treat evaluation as one more thing to check off their to-do list, teachers have less faith in the process and feedback. Lucy summed up this idea by saying:

I think that the administrators need to get in classrooms and check the box and say, ‘Yes, I did this observation, and yes I gave this feedback, and yes,’ whatever it is they need to do. I don’t know if it’s really authentic. They’re checking off boxes and teachers are performing. And I feel like I’m performing less now just because I know [my evaluator] more, but it kind of feels like a checked box. They’re looking to make sure you’re doing this, this, and this. They’re looking on your wall making sure you have your can-do descriptors.

While trust may be an inter-woven theme throughout many of these findings, in this section it stands alone to demonstrate how critical trusting relationships are to how teachers’ experience reformed evaluation procedures. How a teacher views her evaluator, and the level of trust displayed by the evaluator, significantly contributes to the teacher’s willingness to
make changes to her practice and perceive the evaluation system as a means to support teacher growth. Trust takes time to develop yet teachers perceive it must be present in order for them to take administrator feedback seriously and apply it to their practice.

**Finding 4:** *Time constraints prevent evaluations from being as meaningful or intentional as teachers would like them to be. Limited time, to both conduct observations and provide feedback, inhibit teachers’ ability to make meaningful changes to their practice.*

Time is an eternal issue with schools, and evaluation systems are not immune to the time crunch felt by many educators. In the description of the second finding, I gave evidence of how time impacted the amount and quality of feedback received. In this finding, evidence is provided of teacher frustration with the amount of time completing and preparing for the evaluation takes, particularly the time it takes to collect evidence for all seven evaluation areas. A Mountain Ridge teacher, Erika, explained: “I think that it can be, and feel, overwhelming to teachers and myself. When I'm on summative, it feels like these are the things that I'm doing every day and I'm just spending busy work proving it.” Teachers at Piney Creek shared similar sentiments. Phyllis stated:

Ooo, time... We have to show a lot of documentation. So, we store so many things; student samples and photographs and pictures of our anchor charts and lesson plans. Then you have to decide which category you're going to put them in. This year, I haven't had to worry about that [because I’m on formative cycle], but when you do, it's a big chore. It's more of an organizational thing. It shouldn't take very long. But, it can. It can add up.

Teachers felt the evaluation system, along with all the other district and school wide initiatives rolled out each year take up too much time that they simply do not have. During her interview, Brooke vented her frustration with the lack of time by saying, “We don't have extra
effort, and time. [Administrators] have so many new initiatives every year at this school. It's like we don't have time to be trying to research something that we haven't already done or are not doing." While the first finding shared teacher sentiments about choosing a goal they are already working on to streamline the process and save time, collecting data to meet each of the seven performance standards requires the skills of time management and organization.

Teacher participants also expressed frustration with the amount of time the evaluation takes them out of the classroom (to attend goal meetings, etc.) which prevents them from instructing their students. Teachers spend a great deal of time completing evaluation paperwork in order to prepare for the district-required evaluation meetings. They often feel this time takes away from valuable instructional time with their students. Savannah illuminated this idea:

It's a lot of paperwork. At midyear, we have the choice of doing a structured interview or doing a records review. It's a lot of work to sit there and have to show evidence of proof that you're a good teacher through writing lesson plans, or data dialogues with your team, or just having all that collected, or finding all that evidence to just say, 'Yes, I am doing this. Here it is.' But the time it takes to organize all of that stuff is time that you're taking away from me planning a lesson for my students, or really diving deeper into some content that I need to dive into with them. Now, I'm thinking, 'Oh, man. I have this meeting coming up. It's going to take an hour out of the day from my students. Now I have to find something to fill that time with...’ Because that's another thing. It's time-consuming, not just prepping, but also being out of the classroom to have the meetings. My kids hate it when I'm out of the classroom. Then, you have other people's meetings running longer. Then, it messes up my schedule.

Through her statement, Savannah explored the disruption evaluation causes to her teaching both in taking time away from preparation and taking time in her school day away from her students.
Finally, teachers commented upon the amount of time it takes administrators to evaluate a large number of teachers; due to the size of administrator workload, evaluators do not often have time to have post-evaluation conferences or other academic discussions which could lead to teacher reflection and change in teacher practice. Because all teachers are being evaluated within this school district, either summatively or formatively, administrators are stretched thin to complete the number of observations and goal-setting meetings required of the evaluation system. Sue said:

The administration doesn’t really have time to observe, or don't really have the time to sit down and talk with you, or really give you that feedback and that constant. They’re in your room seeing it, like, we're gonna come in and see this math lesson, and then we're gonna come in a few weeks later and see a reading lesson. It's just this little snapshot. They don't see the whole picture.

Evaluators spend the bulk of their workday carrying out evaluation tasks, including observations and evaluation meetings. The teachers notice how this impacts administrator workload; Erin lamented:

Time. I think that there's not enough time for evaluators in particular. Their plates are extremely full and I think it makes it very hard for them to have enough time to observe and give feedback in a way that really gives people time to have conversations about what’s happening, why they did what they did, and what other ideas of what could be next.

Lucy also noticed how bogged down administrators are with evaluation tasks. She empathized by saying:

I know it's a burden for them [administrators] and I feel bad. I can see that weight for all of them, that it's kind of always weighing on them, on their to do lists, and with the zillion other things they've got going on, I don't know how they do it.
In discussing the issue of time and workload with school administrators, they discussed how important the work of evaluation is and the feeling of being unable to dedicate the time they would like to it. The principal at Mountain Ridge Elementary said:

I think it's one of the most important things that we can do when you're supporting teacher growth is, follow up. Go back in. And there's your mini observation. Now you've established a climate in your building that the principal's always in and out of my room. And the problem is, and why I vented a little bit about having so many people on summative, is it's not realistic. Kind of like you want to do a whole bunch of stuff kind of okay. Or you want to do, take on not so many priorities and do them really well. It's like talking about school priorities every year. We can have a million priorities. Everything's important that we do. But after a couple years in this job it's kind of like let's boil it down, what is the high leverage practices?

Similarly, the principal at Piney Creek Elementary shared similar sentiments about the time constraint impacting her ability to implement evaluation. She said:

I think we talk a lot about how it's an opportunity for growth, but I feel each year, progressively that I am an administrator, that it becomes more and more something I'm meant to do, a list that I just need to check off and get over with. It's become incredibly time consuming, laborious, and something I dread.

Both school administrative teams want to make the process seamless and useful to their teachers, yet the demands on their time often prevent them from implementing the evaluation system in a way that significantly contributes to teacher change. Teachers are understanding of the administrative time crunch but realize how it impacts their evaluation. As Susanne described, “I would guess that they're [administrators] limited in the feedback that they're able to give, simply because of the number of teachers that may be on evaluation cycle in any given year.”

In summary of this finding, the two primary time issues found in this study are (1) the time it takes teachers to collect data as well as complete the evaluation paperwork and (2) the
time it takes evaluators to complete the evaluation process. These two time factors play a
critical role in how teachers’ experience evaluation. Some teachers believe that the amount of
time both teachers and evaluators spend on evaluation is an unnecessary burden with little
result. Teacher and administrator participants in this study want to have observations and
evaluative feedback that support teacher development, yet they frequently lack the time to
make teacher evaluation purposeful.

**Finding 5:** Teachers experience a subjective evaluation system, despite the district’s efforts to
standardize the evaluation process across schools, practices, perceptions, and ratings.

According to the district’s teacher evaluation handbook, “the primary purpose of the...

[DISTRICT] Teacher Performance Evaluation Program is to help both teachers and their
evaluators collect more comprehensive and accurate assessment data for judging teacher
effectiveness and, then, to support quality teaching every day in every classroom.” (DISTRICT,
2015, p. ii). For consistency, evaluators use seven performance matrices (see sample in
Appendix D) as a means to “increase reliability among evaluators and help teachers focus on
ways to enhance their teaching practice” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 4). Evaluators are required to have
two observation data sources in addition to two other data sources for each teacher on
summative cycle. The teacher evaluation handbook outlines what constitutes as observational
data and requires evaluators to use a district provided observation form. The handbook also
describes what constitutes an “other data source” such as documentation log, student surveys,
structured interviews, other relevant information such as a time on task chart, and measures of
student progress. Evaluators are required to inform staff of the specific evaluation procedures
within the first 30 days of the new school year. Three concerns emerged from this finding: (1) teachers perceive practices are being implemented differently from school to school, (2) administrators and teachers have different perceptions of the feedback and practices utilized within a particular school building and (3) administrators within the same school are employing different practices or varying types of feedback to teachers.

**Teachers Perceive Practices Being Implemented Differently from School to School**

Despite the handbook’s transparency on the process, evaluators implement measures differently and teachers seemed unsure of the process. Teachers perceive that practices are implemented differently across the district. Jen commented on the disparity in evaluation ratings among schools. She stated:

> The percentage of teachers receiving highly effective, effective, not effective, whatever, varies from school to school, but you know that the people don't vary, I don't know, that much. So, there are some principals I know give almost everyone a highly effective, whereas some principals give like one person a highly effective. And from school to school within the same county, that's hard, because if you were going to interview against someone else that came from another school, do you know what I mean?

One Mountain Ridge teacher, Erika, described evaluation practices by saying, “The county keeps changing their protocol and some of the technology tools that they've implemented but typically before a planned observation, lesson observation, I don't think anything happens as far as review of the lesson, but afterwards there is a follow up meeting.”

Though the district has not changed their protocol, Erika perceived a change based on the school-level variances from year to year and evaluator to evaluator.

**Variations by School**
While the district has produced a number of documents to instruct evaluators on the implementation, including the evaluation handbook and follow-up memos for evaluators, there are discrepancies between school sites which leads to differing experiences for teachers. In creating the reformed evaluation system, the district considered “the importance of fidelity in training and implementation. Ongoing training, calibration, transparency, and monitoring for consistency are key to maintaining a fair and consistent evaluation system” (Silverberg and Jungwirth, 2014, p. 36). Notwithstanding the district’s intention for on-going training and calibration to ensure consistency with the system, all five administrators across the two school buildings stated there have been no additional evaluator trainings beyond the initial induction when the system was initially rolled out for implementation. Because there has not been follow up training, administrators have implemented components of the evaluation in differing ways. While on the surface, it appears both sites are implementing evaluation in the same way (goal setting, required number of observations, etc.) the consistency of processes and follow-up vary greatly. In this section, the critical variances that contribute to teachers’ perceived experiences with the evaluation system, will be addressed by school site.

**Mountain Ridge Elementary**

When I interviewed the principal at Mountain Ridge Elementary, he talked at length about the specifics of the district evaluation practices and those that he puts in place within his school building. He focused specifically on observations and described clear processes. The district requires three formal observations throughout the school year for teachers on summative evaluation cycle. A formal observation is 60 minutes in length. However, the district
also allows for “mini-observations” (referred to as “minis”). For these shorter observations, three minis equate to one formal observation. The principal at Mountain Ridge explained that his goal is to complete six to nine mini observations for each teacher on summative cycle because they are easier to fit into his schedule than the 60-minute formal observations. He conducts his mini observations for ten to twenty minutes and uses a personalized iPad app to document the observation. The app he uses is customized for his observations; it includes teacher look-fors, student look-fors, and a place to document notices and wonderings. The principal explained that the customized walk through forms are important because he wants to “evaluate and provide feedback to teachers on the practices that we are not only supporting in the building, but are expecting in the building.”

After these observations, the principal said he most often requests a post observation conference to debrief. He asks that these conferences be scheduled within three school days for ten to fifteen minutes and said he requests them approximately 75% of the time, following a mini-observation. He stressed the impact time has on his ability to have meaningful conferences; because he had so many teachers on his evaluation caseload, he can only debrief for ten to fifteen minutes. He explained:

There’s just not enough time to really dive into peoples’ practices to reflect with them, to coach them, to have these conversations and those follow ups. It is not realistic. And that’s a shame because that’s a big reason I got into the work is to be able to support teachers. We want to assist them in the work that they do on the front lines. It’s got to be realistic.

While the principal at Mountain Ridge recognized the importance of regular observations and following up to debrief with teachers, the teachers at the school did not share
the experience. Savannah said she is not asked to come in for a post-observation conference. Rather, she described her feedback as the administrator emailing “‘Great job. I saw this...’ It’s mostly what he just saw...It’s just like, ‘I saw you do...’ and there’s a list of things the saw me do. [Then the email reads] ‘keep on’.” Brooke also felt she receives limited feedback as well as few observations. She described:

They’re [evaluators] not in here a lot; which I’m not complaining about.... I think she’s [the assistant principal’s] done two observations on me [all year]. So, I don’t feel like she’s in here a lot to give me feedback...They [evaluators] email us with ‘here’s what I noticed from today when I was in your room’ and then the assistant principal puts a wondering... It can be something that she’s concerned about, or it can just be something to say, a comment.

Brooke did not mention having any post-observation conferences, only receiving email feedback after an observation.

When I interviewed the assistant principal at Mountain Ridge Elementary, she described the processes less formally than the principal. She emphasized only doing six min-observations throughout the school year. She talked about two different types of follow up, either asking teachers to respond to her emailed comments via a reflective email or she asks them to come in for a quick debrief meeting. She mentioned the “I wonder” statements that Brooke addressed above to give teachers a question to reflect upon based on her observation notes. She emphasized, too, that time prevents her from observing often and giving the feedback she would truly like to give. She reflected:

With everything on our plate, how do you really balance time to get into the classrooms? And we [administrators] also recognize that the power of instructional improvement is getting into those classrooms and being able to provide that feedback and have those coaching conversations and really promote that reflective thought process.
The assistant principal confirmed the processes the principal brought up, though she describes them more fully. She said:

We do do records reviews, we choose to do mini-observations rather than more formalized observations. The belief behind that is we really want to get a true picture of what’s going on in a school day, rather than kind of formalized, like a one-shot, really well-developed lesson. We want to make sure that’s happening all year long. So, the drop-ins and those short mini-observations are more important. We do a records review where you have an opportunity to go through lesson plans. Typically, that’s the only opportunity we do that, unless we’re seeing evidence in the classroom of instructional delivery not being strong, then we have the option to request more formalized lesson collection, but it’s more of an as-needed basis.

The assistant principal went on to describe a specific process where teachers pick a few students to focus on in the beginning of the year. Then, at the mid-year goal setting conference, she specifically asks about these students. She appreciates the opportunity to have specific conversations about these students’ academic achievement. She explained this was a school-wide initiative. When I inquired about this practice, as the principal did not mention this process at all, she said, “He did not do it in the beginning of the year...But we’re talking about it again.” She also does not use the same iPad app with the look-for checklists as the principal. She described “dabbling” with it but defaulting back to a memo style that she feels the most comfortable using. She confirmed what many teachers at Mountain Ridge have described as discrepancies in practices depending on who the specific evaluator is. Brooke explained, “I don’t feel like the two [administrators] are equal...People have said ‘Oh, I didn’t get this person.’ This person’s harder. They’re not doing the same thing and grading us the same way.” These variances within the building, including which administrator is assigned as a teacher’s evaluator, significantly impact how the teacher experiences the evaluation system.
Piney Creek Elementary

Piney Creek Elementary has three administrators, a principal and two assistant principals. One assistant principal addressed the dual purposes of the district’s evaluation: accountability and teacher growth. She said:

I think there's an accountability purpose to it. I think that having the oversight and making sure that there is oversight is another piece, but I feel like it's intended to provide opportunities for growth and have those conversations, but I also believe it's a place where it's the accountability measures, long-term over HR, where the kids are, making sure that we are holding teachers accountable.

The Piney Creek administrative team also conducts records reviews and observations, as described by the Mountain Ridge administrators. However, one primary difference is calibration. They described meeting together to discuss the type of data they will collect, how many times they are going to go into classrooms, minis versus formal observations, and the type of flexibility they will allow. They stressed the importance of consistency across their evaluation team. Unlike at Mountain Ridge, the Piney Creek evaluators do a mid-year structured interview as one piece of their data collection. They sent out specific questions and ask teachers to reflect on them (in writing) and they review them and provide written feedback on the teachers’ reflective responses.

The teachers at Piney Creek noticed the attempts at consistency across their evaluators. Luanne described:

I think the administrators do a good job of communicating that [consistency], especially at [Piney Creek]. I feel like they made it clear that like, 'Look we’re all just in this together.' So I think that's an important message I feel I'm being sent. I don't know if that's everybody's experience [at other schools].
The teachers also seemed to have a clear understanding of the process. Lucy clarified that formal observations have both pre and post conferences while informal (minis) do not have follow-up conferences. Though, she also mentioned some discrepancies amongst evaluators by saying, “I definitely think that it might depend on the administrator giving the feedback and how that administrator gave the feedback.” While she acknowledged that the processes are the same (observations, conferences, structured interviews, etc.) the type and format of feedback received may vary depending on the evaluator.

Overall, the consistency that the Piney Creek administrative team strives for led to a culture where evaluation is a collaborative process. The principal feels that if teachers are afraid of the evaluation process,

then that probably speaks more to the building culture than it does to the actual evaluation system, because in order to have a situation where anybody’s willing to take risks, it has to be a learning community for the adults as well as the children. If teachers who say, ‘I don’t want to try this new thing because you’re gonna ding me on evaluation,’ well, then that says something entirely different [about the school culture].

Her view of the school culture is evidenced by many Piney Creek teachers who commented that they trust their administrators to give accurate and purposeful evaluation feedback. For instance, Susanne stated plainly, “I felt like I trusted the administrators’ ability to evaluate.”

While there are teachers at both schools that find the evaluation experience purposeful and also teachers at both schools who express feelings that the evaluation is a waste of time, how the school administration introduces, implements, and follows up on practices can significantly impact the teachers’ experience. Variances among evaluators within one building
can cause tension among the teaching staff and differences across schools can prevent the system from being equivocal to all teachers.

Administrators and Teachers Have Different Perceptions of the Feedback and Practices Utilized Within Their School Building

The principal at Mountain Ridge Elementary spoke at length about the importance of frequent feedback throughout his interview. He reflected on the amount of feedback summative teachers receive and his belief about targeted feedback to enhance teacher performance. He mentioned the need for post-observation conferences whether positive or negative. He also expressed frustration with the lack of feedback opportunities for teachers on formative cycle. He stated:

We want to evaluate and provide feedback to teachers on the practices that we are not only supporting in the building, but are expecting in the building...More often than not I will request or require a post conference, a debrief. I usually ask for that to be scheduled within three school days for ten, fifteen minutes. You always have wonderings when you leave a classroom no matter how good it is. I have a little [VOICE] on my shoulder and he's like whispering in my ear. "[Principal name], request a follow up." Even if it's great, just look them in the eyes and tell them it was amazing. And it can just be a compliment conference. So, I try to do that as much as I can. Everyone deserves to get feedback. I mean if you're an educator and you're in this work for the right reasons, you want feedback. You should be craving feedback and it's unfortunate as a teacher on formative cycle that you pretty much know you're not going to get that. And a whole year's going to go by and you're not going to get that. Some teachers who have a different lens about this work might be like, yay. But for teachers I could see how it would be very disappointing.

Nevertheless, the teachers at Mountain Ridge more regularly stated their lack of feedback, compared with teachers at Piney Creek Elementary. Mountain Ridge teachers often stated they
rarely received feedback or if they did, it was generic comments. Brooke lamented, “I don’t think the evaluators are following up [on observations].” While Savannah admitted, “I haven’t made any changes at all [to my practice.] My feedback is just like, ‘Oh, great job.’” Sue connected the lack of feedback to the issue of time. She explained:

The administrators don’t really have time to observe or don’t really have time to sit down and talk with you, or really give you that feedback...I feel like we just don’t get enough feedback or enough conversation about what we did in the classroom to facilitate [change in practice].

Finally, Courtney expressed her frustration, which was shared among multiple Mountain Ridge teachers, by saying:

I have not received much feedback. I receive the feedback at mid-year and I’ve received feedback at the end of the year...It’s very robotic...There’s no communication. Which, when you think about our job as teachers, we communicate all day long to kids. But then we’re not getting that critical feedback we need as teachers to support us and help us grow, which impacts student learning. So, if teachers aren’t receiving support and the feedback they need in the way it should be done, students are not benefiting from that either. Which is really a shame when you think about it.

While the teachers at Piney Ridge definitely felt the impact of administrator time in regards to feedback in the evaluation process, they seemed to have a more relaxed perception of evaluation as a whole within their school. For example, Sue appreciates the flexibility her administrative team provides with evaluation. She stated:

I think our admin team is really great in that they give us a lot of wiggle room. They have look-fors, but they know that teaching is constantly evolving and changing and there are going to be some lessons that flop. You may try something new. And so, there's not this expectation that it goes perfectly every time.

Regarding feedback, the Piney Creek administrative team feels that meaningful feedback is important, but the amount of work administrators have to do, in addition to
evaluation, prevents them from giving the type of feedback they would like. The principal at Piney Creek described this dilemma:

I think when I first became an administrator, I actually enjoyed doing observations. I don't really feel that way anymore. There're so many pressing demands on my time that I don't feel that I can do the job of actually getting in and giving meaningful feedback on a regular basis effectively, and the more I'm unable to get into classrooms, the harder it is for me to get into classrooms, because then I feel like, ‘Oh my God, I haven't done this.’ It just becomes this horrible procrastination game, and then I feel really guilty because I have new teachers who I feel like they really do need support, but then when I look back at my own career, I've never really had meaningful feedback in any role that I've been in other than when I was a university professor, and there are those evaluations that people wrote at the end. I actually found those to be useful. That's about the only forum of evaluation that I've found useful in my life as an educator.

Yet, despite the principal feeling as though she is not able to support her teachers, many of the Piney Creek teachers felt differently; they expressed receiving meaningful feedback and having the process of evaluation push them to improve their practice. Many teachers commented on the reflective conversations they have with their principal as a result of the evaluation cycle. Susanne described:

[The post-observation feedback] was more of a coaching conversation, helping me facilitate my own thinking. It wasn't necessarily her saying, ‘You need to do this,’ but, ‘Let's talk about this,’ right? [We have] coaching conversations that happen over the course of the year as opposed to as part of the formal evaluation cycle, whether I'm on formative or summative. It's more been, ‘Hey, can we have a quick reflecting meeting on how the CLT [Collaborative Learning Team] went? Because I'm just not quite sure how it landed, can you help me process through that?’

Luanne believes her evaluator pushes her to become more reflective, leading to changes in her practice. She stated:

I think it makes me more of a reflective teacher. I don't know if it's like that for everybody, but I feel like I'm a constant learner. I always wanna improve my teachings so I don't feel like it's a thing they're trying to catch me on. I think it's [feedback’s] a tool
to use to help me develop as a teacher. In that regard, I don't feel intimidated by the evaluation process, I feel like it's there to help me and not that it's not. I've never felt like an administrator was trying to catch me, you know?...I think all the feedback I've received has been constructive, so I feel encouraged.

With the two schools included in this study, two perceptions, discussed above, emerge:

(1) at Mountain Ridge, the principal believes the evaluation is resulting in feedback to help teachers change their practice while the teachers disagree. Meanwhile, at Piney Creek Elementary, the principal is discouraged by her limited feedback and opportunities for constructive conversations yet the teachers believe the evaluation feedback provides them with opportunities to reflect with their administration on their teaching. (2) Teachers perceive that evaluation practices and how teachers are rated vary greatly from school to school, interfering with fidelity of the evaluation system within the district.

**Administrators Within the Same School Employ Different Practices or Types of Feedback to Teachers**

One additional difference in implementation of the evaluation system emerged from the data: within one school, various administrators evaluate teachers differently. Teachers perceive that who your evaluator is significantly impacts the amount and quality of feedback you receive, as well as the number of observations conducted as a part of the evaluation system. This finding stretched across both school sites; teachers described the subjectivity of the evaluation process within their own school buildings.

For clarity, the administrators at Mountain Ridge Elementary sent a memo in the beginning of the year, which they provided me a copy of. The memo outlines each task, who needs to complete it and when the task needs to be completed by. The requirements included
the required goal-setting, self-assessment, documentation log, mid-year evaluation conferences, records review, mid-year goal reflection, end of year evaluation, end of year goal reflection, and observations. The memo states that post-observation conferences will be scheduled “at times” and does not mention pre-observation conferences. While the memo streamlines the process and provides transparency for all teachers, regardless of the assigned evaluator, teachers report variances in practices depending on who the evaluator is. For example, Brooke explained:

I think that [the principal] is a little more loosey-goosey about it. I don't think he puts a 'wondering' in the [post observation] email. So that's another issue; ... I don't feel like the two are equal. People have been like, ‘Oh, I didn't get this person [as my evaluator].’ They're not ... This person's harder. They're not doing the same thing and grading the same way.

While the administrative team at Piney Creek did not describe how they inform teachers of evaluation practices, some teachers expressed similar thoughts regarding varying evaluators. Jen said:

Based on who your evaluator is in our building, you get very different responses. So I've had all three evaluators in my years. And I have had the formal sit-down, meet, come watch a lesson. Then we're going to do the post-talk. Then I've had other evaluators just do a pop-in and write up like a really long thing about it. And then I've had evaluators like, ‘Yeah, I watched you in CLT, and you have great ideas.’ So, I think it really depends, but most evaluators have done pre and post and watching the lesson, pop-in observations, a records review.

Jessica elaborated further by comparing two evaluators:

It really depends on who your evaluator is, too. I know my first year my evaluator gave me a lot more feedback. She was a lot more rigid and structured and there was [SIC] things I could work with versus my one now is a lot more, for lack of a better word, it's just almost too chill.
As evidenced throughout the explanation of this finding, teachers within this school district experience a subjective evaluation system. While the district seeks to streamline the evaluation process by providing a detailed handbook of practices and matrices, the perceptions by teachers of how these tools are utilized within schools and even evaluator to evaluator vary greatly. The two school sites studied are described in depth from both teacher and administrator perspectives to demonstrate the differences across the two schools and also within the school. This subjectivity prevents teachers from having trust in both the evaluation system and in their evaluator’s ability to accurately access their teaching performance.

**Chapter Summary**

The findings from this phenomenological research study illuminate teachers’ experiences with the reformed evaluation system within the school district. Additionally, the findings convey teachers’ perceptions of changes to their practices due to the evaluation process. As such, throughout this chapter, teacher quotes were used to provide a preponderance of evidence to illustrate five core findings from this study. This study found that the significance of the evaluation goal matters; if teachers believe their goal is authentic and will lead to an increase in student achievement, they are willing to make changes to their practice to achieve it. In addition to the goal, actionable feedback from evaluators enable changes in teacher practice. When teachers receive evaluative feedback that they perceive to be accurate and meaningful, they are empowered to make changes to their practice. In order to be accepting of feedback, trusting relationships are a critical component to teachers’ experiences with evaluation. How teachers view and trust their evaluator significantly
contributes to teachers’ willingness to make changes to their practice and trust in the evaluation system as a means of teacher growth. Time constraints prevent evaluations from being as meaningful or intentional as teachers would like them to be. Often, evaluators are not observing teachers at the most opportune times and/or they do not have the time to provide focused follow-up conferences with teachers to allow them space to reflect upon their teaching. Finally, teachers experience a subjective evaluation system, despite the district’s efforts to standardize the evaluation process across schools, practices, perceptions, and ratings. Each finding was discussed independently with data directly from the survey and interviews intertwined to support each statement. The following chapter will describe the significance of these assertions in regards to teacher evaluation.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 4, this mixed-methods phenomenological study investigated teachers’ perceptions of reformed evaluation systems on their practice and revealed five key findings. The previous chapter explained these assertions using the teachers’ voices to describe both their experiences of evaluation and their perceptions of the potential for change in practice; it outlined what was found through the study. In light of the findings gleaned from teachers’ perceptions and experiences with the reformed evaluation system shared in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 will explore what we have learned about the ways reformed evaluation methods can lead to change in teacher practice. Table 5.1 aligns the new learning that will be discussed in this chapter, with the findings of this study discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter will discuss the major contributions to the literature on teacher evaluation including: (1) building teacher-evaluator relationships, (2) emphasizing goal-setting and individualized feedback for professional growth, and (3) developing structures where evaluation purposes and methods align. The chapter will conclude with implications for reformed teacher evaluation systems for (1) the school district, and (2) for the academic community in order to further research around reformed evaluation systems.

Discussion

We know from this study that teacher evaluation has the potential to lead to changes in teacher practice based on teachers’ perceptions and experiences within a reformed evaluation
system. We can learn a lot from the participants in this study who experienced changes in their practice based on evaluation, as well as those who did not perceive changes in practice based on evaluations. In the sections that follow, each new learning will be explored with reference to the findings and academic literature on teacher evaluation. Recall from Chapter 4 that participants had varying experiences based upon how the administrative team has established trusting relationships with the teachers within the school (finding 3). Further, the type, quality, and amount of feedback teachers received from their evaluator significantly impacted the experience a teacher had (finding 2). The feedback contributed to teachers’ believing evaluation practices are a meaningful component to their development as an educator or whether it was simply “one more thing” that teachers’ had to do in addition to regular teaching responsibilities. Another factor contributing to teachers’ experiences was the amount of time both teachers and evaluators have to spend on teacher evaluation (finding 4). While teachers had varying experiences, both positive and negative, through the findings it became clear that varying practices within each school site tremendously contributed to teachers’ experiences with reformed evaluation. While the experience of evaluation has been well documented in the literature (Delvaux et al., 2013; Range et al., 2013), this study adds to the conversation by elaborating on the importance of the evaluator/teacher relationship, the importance of purposeful evaluation processes, and the possibility of working within systemic restrictions to better meet the professional goals and growth of teachers.
Table 5.1 New Learning

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<th>New Learning:</th>
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<td>Build teacher-evaluator relationships</td>
<td>• Actionable feedback from evaluators enable changes in teacher practice (finding 2)</td>
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<td>• Trusting relationships are a critical component to how teachers’ experience reformed evaluation practices (finding 3)</td>
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<td>Emphasize goal-setting and purposeful feedback for professional growth</td>
<td>• The significance of the evaluation goal matters. If teachers believe their goal is authentic and will lead to an increase in student achievement, they are willing to make changes to their practice to achieve it (finding 1)</td>
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<td>• Actionable feedback from evaluators enable changes in teacher practice (finding 2)</td>
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<td>Develop structures where evaluation purposes and methods align</td>
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<td>• Actionable feedback from the evaluators enable changes in teacher practice (finding 2)</td>
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**Build Teacher-Evaluator Relationships**

Interview participants in this study indicated that trust, feedback, and time determine what the overall experience of the evaluation system is like for teachers. Therefore, the evaluation process itself is less important than the teachers’ relationship with the evaluator. Teachers who perceive the experience as helpful for their development have trusting, positive relationships with their evaluator and believe they receive actionable feedback to help them
move forward in their practice. These teachers feel their evaluators make time not only to have reflective conversations with them about their teaching performance but also time for purposeful observations and constructive feedback. In their summary of this district’s evaluation model, Silverberg and Jungwirth (2014) write: “As part of this evaluation process, teachers benefit from ongoing conversations with their evaluator with the shared goal of refining the teachers’ craft and improved practice” (p. 25). Teachers in this study provided evidence of this statement through their interview responses; however, I learned that the benefit of these “on-going conversations” did not stem exclusively from the reformed evaluation model. Instead, it depended greatly on the relationship between the teacher and evaluator, the type of feedback the teacher received, and the amount of time the evaluator had for professional conversations with teachers.

For instance, when Erin, a Piney Creek teacher, talked about enjoying the process of teacher evaluation, she explicitly referred to trust, feedback, and time when sharing the ways the evaluation process encouraged her to be more reflective upon her practice. She said:

I prefer having feedback and I love getting people’s insights, and I think that I really crave that. I’m somebody who likes collaboration. I’m somebody who thrives off of having that opportunity to brainstorm with others, and get people’s perspective, and that evaluation piece really can be a part of that, and if you have that opportunity to really sit down and dive into it in a way that’s authentic and there’s enough time, then you can really provide that. Through her statement, we learn of two essential components of the teacher evaluation process for her growth: that the conversation between teacher and evaluator must be authentic, and that there must be time to have the meaningful conversation.
Beyond feedback, though, this study highlights the importance of having a trusting relationship, and for teachers to have the time to sit down and have conversations with their evaluators. These relationships take time to build and are often not easily established (Heineke, 2013; Ippolito, 2010). Trust, as described in this study, includes not only an evaluator helping teachers feel supported, but also that the evaluator is knowledgeable about classroom practices and that he or she knows the teacher in different capacities. Trust is the critical element to support school relationships and raise teacher efficacy (Lofthouse & Leat, 2013). When faculty have high trust in their principal, school climate and student achievement are improved (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Thus, if teachers trust their evaluator, they are more likely to experience evaluation in a positive light and are therefore more likely to utilize the evaluation process to make positive changes to their practice.

In sum, the evaluation system itself, including particular processes used such as post-observation conferences, mattered less to teachers than the trusting relationship they had with their evaluator. Some teachers longed for more feedback from their evaluator, yet the feedback they did receive, they applied to their practice because they believe their evaluator to be knowledgeable and trust the advice or suggestions they received. Teachers who had a collegial trust in their evaluator were less likely to complain about the quality or amount of feedback; instead, finding ways to apply the feedback they received to their practice. These teachers yearned for open and on-going dialogue with their evaluator to discuss and reflect upon their teaching. This study indicates the need for evaluators to develop positive, trusting
relationships with their teachers in order for evaluation practices to have meaningful impact on teacher practice.

**Emphasize Goal-Setting and Purposeful Feedback for Professional Growth**

If administrators and teachers are able to form trusting, professional relationships, then we know from this study that it is next important to develop authentic goals that invite purposeful feedback related to professional growth. This study found two main factors contributing to whether or not teachers made changes in their practice: feedback from the evaluator and individual goal setting. The study’s findings explained two different types of feedback teachers wanted in order to make changes to their practice based on teacher evaluation: suggestions and reflection. Given an established, trusting relationship, teachers can then develop more meaningful professional growth-related evaluation goals developed around content or practices they legitimately want and need to work on. Because these two evaluation practices contributed to teachers’ perceptions of changes to their practice (or lack thereof) it is recommended that administrators focus on developing cultures in their schools where teachers want and believe that their evaluations are based on authentic goals that meaningfully connect teacher and student learning in ways that will improve practice. In doing so, evaluators could then provide feedback to teachers that align with teachers’ goals with the intention of professional growth. This intentional feedback would support what previous research has found in that teachers are regularly looking for constructive criticism to help them refine and improve their practice (Donaldson, 2016; Range, Young, & Hvidston, 2013).
As described in the previous section, the relationship the teacher has with the evaluator can significantly contribute to the teacher taking the feedback as meaningful. Once a positive, collegial relationship is established, teachers are open to feedback. We learned from this study that teachers want suggestions from their evaluator to have actionable ways to make a change to their practice and some gave examples of specific feedback that encouraged them to make positive changes to their instruction. For instance, Lucy talked about receiving helpful suggestions early in her career. She said, “In the beginning of my career, {the principal} was like, ‘Well, have you considered this?’ It was often stuff I hadn’t considered. I still think back to those things.” Other teachers did not perceive they were getting suggestions and expressed wanting more ideas during their feedback. Based on what we know from this study, suggestions for improvement from both classroom observations and individual goals, would encourage teachers to move their practice forward and try new strategies within their instruction.

In addition to suggestions for improvement, this study revealed that teachers want reflective feedback that can help them make sense of their practice and determine next steps on their own, with guidance from their administrator. We know from this study that there are deliberate techniques evaluators could use, such as questioning strategies, positive feedback to allow a teacher to reflect upon what went well during a lesson, and coaching conversations to encourage teacher reflection. For example, Susanne noticed how coaching conversations impact her practice. She described, “I think that probably the changes to my practice have come more through coaching conversations that happened over the course of the year... That
has definitely impacted my practice is substantive ways.” Susanne’s example teaches us that intentional feedback can support teachers in making changes to their practice. Yet, because teachers (and administrators) are so busy during the course of the school day, there is not often time for teachers to reflect upon their practice. If post-observation conferences are a necessary part of teacher evaluation, evaluative feedback is an opportunity for teachers and evaluators to reflect together on teaching.

This study found that nearly all of the teachers surveyed believed that setting an individual goal helped them to make changes to their practice. Luanne summed up teachers’ perceptions of goal-setting nicely when she said: “I think [setting a goal] encourages me. It keeps me mindful of one of the things I’m really focusing on for the year.” Luanne’s statement aligns with current research that recognizes when teachers have input into areas for their own improvement, it fosters a culture that values the professional opinions of teachers (Mette et al., 2017). With this culture, we learned that the process of setting an authentic goal led teachers to have more intentional instruction in their classrooms. Knowing they had to provide data on their goal required them to be more thoughtful about the implementation of the goal. Teachers who set authentic goals regularly made changes to their practice in order to accomplish their goal.

In light of teachers desiring actionable or reflective feedback and support for purposeful goal setting, evaluators could align these two practices to support teacher professional development. The administrators interviewed for this study frequently commented on the large caseloads they have for evaluation. Because teachers are in a summative evaluation cycle
every three years, most evaluators have 15-20 teachers to evaluate during the school year. Having such large caseloads prevents evaluators from having the time they would like to be intentional with observations and feedback. Yet, from this study we know teachers are looking for support with achieving their goal and implementing purposeful feedback. If evaluators are able to align their feedback with teacher goals, there would be greater potential for teachers to improve their practice. Evaluators are advised to conduct observations around teachers’ goals in order to provide feedback that would support the teachers’ individual professional goals. For instance, if a teacher set a goal around mathematics instruction, an evaluator could conduct an evaluative observation during math in order to provide follow up feedback to support the teacher’s goal. This would emphasize goal setting as an important component of both evaluation and teacher development and provide focused feedback on long term professional growth, rather than simply feedback on an individual lesson, which may or may not be useful to the teacher.

**Develop Structures Where Evaluation Purposes and Methods Align**

We know from this study that if schools have positive teacher-evaluator relationships, then teachers are able to use evaluation feedback and set professional goals to make changes to their practice. When those two elements are in place within the culture of a school, there is greater possibility in aligning the purposes and the practices of evaluation to improve teacher practice. In the absence of positive relationships and authentic goals and feedback, the evaluation system itself is minimally influential in impacting teacher change. Therefore, once the culture is firmly established, the methods and procedures used during teacher evaluation
should be aligned with the purposes. In the district studied for this dissertation, the evaluation handbook specifically states learning purposes for teachers, through evaluation, such as to “promote self-growth through a variety of opportunities such as goal-setting, reflection, action research and professional development plans” and “promote continuous professional growth and improved student outcomes” (DISTRICT, 2015, p. 3).

If a goal for the district is for evaluation to support teacher growth in their practice, then evaluation design must set up processes (including quality time) and practices in order to achieve it. The evaluators from the two schools in this study often conducted 6-10 mini observations for each teacher in summative evaluation cycle. Is the evaluator’s time purposefully spent during these mini observations and subsequent write-ups or would time be better spent having fewer observations but aligning them with the teachers’ goal or development needs? The amount and length of time observations consume should be acknowledged in the evaluation design. We know from this study that teachers recognized the strain and burden on administrators to evaluate the teachers on their case load. Both teachers and evaluators believed evaluation feedback could be more intentional and purposeful if administrators had fewer evaluations to complete. This might mean adjusting the evaluation cycle; perhaps having teachers in summative evaluation every five years rather than every three. Given that the ESSA Act (2015) has lifted some of the mandates surrounding teacher evaluation requirements, reformed evaluation systems can better align their measures to focus on teaching practice to support teachers’ development in order to meet the dual purposes of evaluation: improving teaching performance and documenting teacher accountability (Stronge
The change in required mandates gives states and district’s more flexibility in the procedures they use for evaluation meaning that the learning from this study could be more readily implemented into teacher evaluation. Now would be an ideal time for states and districts to explore including practices teachers feel help them develop their practice if the purpose of using evaluation to improve teaching practice remains a goal.

**Implications for Professional Practice**

**Ongoing professional development for evaluators**

Nearly all of the teachers interviewed for this study commented on the discrepancy between evaluators either within their school building or from building to building across the district. For instance, within Mountain Ridge Elementary, the teachers noted that the principal and assistant principal used different practices during and following their classroom observations. One conducted classroom observations using an iPad-walkthrough-checklist, then immediately sent feedback to the teacher, while the other administrator observed then sent a follow up email with an “I wonder” statement for teachers to respond to. They also vary in conducting post-observation conferences. At Piney Creek, the teachers did not discuss discrepancies within their school as much as they shared discrepancies between there school and other schools. One teacher specifically commented on knowing that other school administrators simply give all of the teachers the highest rating regardless of their performance within the seven evaluation domains. These discrepancies cause tension among teachers and cause the evaluation system to remain extremely subjective to the evaluator.
The administrative teams at both schools discussed the lack of continued training and support; beyond the initial roll-out of the reformed evaluation system, evaluators do not receive opportunities for continued learning around evaluation practices. In their report on linking teacher evaluation to professional development, Goe et. al. (2012) state “evaluation may be a tool to help teachers improve, but school leaders often lack training in how to use evaluation results to guide teachers toward professional growth” (p.1). The results of this study confirmed this idea; many school leaders do not have the continuous training need to truly hone teacher evaluation to meet teachers’ professional development needs. Where training lacks, however, is not necessarily directly connected to the evaluation procedures themselves but rather in how teachers view their evaluator and how fairly they believe evaluators are rating teachers. One recommendation is to implement ongoing evaluator training to support administrators throughout the process and allow opportunities for them to share successful practices within their schools and develop climates where teachers are willing to learn from their evaluative feedback.

Based on this study, high quality professional development for evaluators should include (1) ways to develop a school culture of trust, (2) build relationships with teachers, and (3) establish inter-rater reliability to create more equity with the evaluation process. Developing a positive school culture and trusting relationships go hand-in-hand. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) describe specific constructs principals need to develop a culture of trust which can then lead to building positive teacher relationships. They found that the climate of the school is impacted by three things: Teacher professionalism, academic press, and school
community engagement. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis define professionalism as the “behavior that shows that teachers are committed to their work and willing to work cooperatively with one another” (2015, p. 73). School administrators cultivate the norms and structures within their school that support teacher professionalism. Therefore, if administrators know how to engage their staff in shared decision making around instructional practices they are developing a trusting culture. Further, academic press, defined by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, focuses on strong academics and the belief that all students can reach high academic standards (2015, p. 73). They found when schools have high academic expectations, the faculty had positive attitudes about the school culture and greater trust in the principal. Finally, community engagement includes engaging parents and community members in being an active part of participating in school activities, including decision making. The involvement of the community helps to establish a positive, trusting school culture for students, teachers, and the local community.

In referencing Tschannen-Moran and Gareis’s 2015 article, I am outlining specific content for professional development for evaluators. If administrators are able to develop trusting school climates within their school buildings, then they can begin to work on building individual rapport and trusting relationships with teachers. This study found that the level of trust teachers had in their administrators significant contributed to their willingness to accept feedback for their evaluator. Therefore, focused professional learning around school culture and relationship building can support the use of evaluative feedback for teacher growth.
The third need for evaluator training revealed in this study is inter-rater reliability. A recommendation is for evaluators to have opportunities to practice using the evaluation protocols and tools and compare scoring to help streamline how various evaluators rate teachers on the matrices. When there is inconsistency across evaluators or across schools, it de-motivates teachers from viewing teacher evaluation as a potential to improve practice (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003). Professional development for evaluators could include a variety of formats. For instance, all the administrators in one school could evaluate a lesson together and then discuss and compare the ratings to come to a consensus. Evaluators could collaborate to define the areas on the matrices and give clear examples of what a teacher performance might look like in each category. While these are simply examples of what evaluator training might look like to develop inter-rater reliability, what is clear from this study is that there is a need for a more streamlined approach to evaluative scoring. In order for evaluation to influence teachers’ practice, teachers need administrators “to standardize the evaluation process for all teachers and to be as objective as possible” (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003, p. 33). Having on-going training can streamline the process and develop consistency of practices within and across schools. Streamlining the evaluation process by having all administrators within the district using the same tools, procedures, and ratings would be a step towards making the district’s evaluation system more objective and consistent across and between schools.

In sum, this study suggests that districts would be well served in looking at how to create a more streamlined approach to evaluation within and across schools. Beginning with
supporting administrators in developing a culture of trust would allow teachers to be more open to suggestions, feedback, and reflective conversations with their evaluators. Trusting relationships proved to be a critical component to how teachers experienced their own evaluation, as well as their willingness to make changes to their practice based upon administrator feedback. Relationships are an essential component to school culture because “principals and teachers who trust each other can better work together in the service of solving the challenging problems of schooling” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Additionally, building consistency within the evaluation system is critical. Having on-going professional development with evaluators to include checks for inter-rater reliability, consistency in ratings, and commonly implemented evaluation procedures would be steps towards ensuring more objectivity within the evaluation system.

**A streamlined, purposeful process**

While it was of no surprise, time played a critical factor in nearly all of the assertions of this study; from the amount of time teachers spent outside of their classrooms to meet with evaluators, to evaluators not having enough time to provide meaningful feedback to their teachers. The teacher evaluation system examined in this study consists of multiple measures to assess the seven performance standards. While this study focused primarily on the evaluation practices of observations, feedback, and goal setting (as these were the processes teachers identified as leading to, or deterring from a change in their practice), many of the teachers within the study commented on the amount of time it takes them to complete records reviews or mid-year interviews. When asked about evaluation measures that encouraged them
to make changes to their practice, none of the teachers interviewed mentioned either a records review or a mid-year interview; they all focused on feedback and goal setting as the two areas to help them move their practice forward. While records reviews and mid-year interviews may help administrators assess accountability, the school district may want to reconsider using such time-intensive measures of assessment if there is little to no impact on teachers’ practice, especially given the new flexibility warranted within the Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015. The focus could then be on the measures that teachers perceive could be useful in improving their practice, such as purposeful goal setting and authentic feedback. An implication from this study, then, is for districts to develop a process for teachers to set authentic goals and having measures in place for teachers to continually update and reflect upon their goal process with their evaluator. Regular feedback on an authentic goal creates a willingness for teachers to use both their goal and their feedback to make changes to their instructional practice.

**Further Research**

With the recently implemented ESSA Act (2015) lifting some of the mandates on federal funding linked to teacher evaluation, now is an ideal time for restructuring teacher evaluation to include both goals of teacher accountability and teacher learning. We know from this study that teachers believe elements of evaluation can encourage them to make changes to their practice. This study implies that, with proper training, administrators can develop a trusting school culture where teachers are more willing to accept feedback and use observations and other evaluation procedures to focus on improving their practice in the name of student
learning.

**Goal Setting.** As I touched upon in chapter 2, there is limited academic research on the impact of teacher goal setting. This study found that authentic goals do, in fact, encourage teachers to reflect upon and improve their practice by making changes to their instruction or engaging in risk-taking to try something new in the attempt to increase student achievement. The caveat, though, is that the goal must be meaningful and teachers must be willing to develop an authentic goal. Therefore, understanding how to use goal setting to emphasize teacher professional learning is an area worth exploring. While this study has a small sample size and looked at two schools within one district, further research could be conducted to explore elements of teacher goal setting and their impact on teaching practice. Some questions that arise from this study include: How can districts structure goal setting to develop an intrinsic willingness for teachers to pursue authentic goals around student achievement? How does working towards a goal focus teacher instruction or support student achievement? In what ways can administrators structure goal setting to encourage teachers to set meaningful goals? Additionally, teachers in this study addressed inconsistencies within goal setting practices with some teachers feeling that the goal was decided for them, others using a team goal, and others still selecting the same easily-achievable goal year after year. Research into how teachers design and select goals may shed more light on how goal setting can influence teacher change in practice.

**Evaluator Feedback.** While there is a great deal of academic literature on the type of
purposeful administrator feedback to support teaching (see chapter 2), examining how administrators can provide more meaningful and actionable feedback within the evaluation process can contribute to the body of literature. Specifically, teachers in this study commented on the need for both suggestions and reflective conversations as the most preferred feedback. Research could be conducted to determine measures evaluators can take to incorporate these types of feedback in their regular post-observation feedback and/or conferences and how teachers utilize this feedback in order to make changes to their teaching practice. Questions for future research, based on this study, might include: How do reflective conversations with administrators motivate teachers to make changes to their practice? What types of feedback suggestions are most influential for teachers? How can evaluators structure feedback conferences to maximize their time and provide the necessary support to teachers?
implication/recommendation: the significance of the evaluation goal matters. Future research on evaluation goal setting is needed from the academic community. Actionable feedback from evaluators enable changes in teacher practice. Future research on actionable feedback is needed from the academic community. Trusting relationships are a critical component to how teachers’ experience reformed evaluation practices. The district should encourage building a school culture of trust between administrators and teachers. Time constraints prevent evaluations from being as meaningful or intentional as teachers would like them to be. The district should streamline the evaluation process to reduce the impact of time on teachers and administrators. Teachers experience a subjective evaluation system. The district should provide on-going training to develop consistency among evaluators.

Table 5.2 Alignment of Findings and Implications

Future Work

This study’s assertions and implications leave many areas for me to consider for future research. To begin, I would be interested to see if years of experience contribute to teachers’ experiences with evaluation. For instance, do experiences and perceptions of change vary between beginning (1-3 years of experience) and veteran (3+ years) teachers? Participants had a wide range of experiences and this study focused primarily on the evaluator actions that contributed to these perceptions. Future research may include the teachers’ perceptions based
on their experience, beliefs, and willingness to make changes to their practice.

Many teachers discussed authenticity throughout their interviews. Whether they addressed authenticity in the feedback they received after an observation of the authenticity of the goal development, teachers made it clear that authenticity is a critical component to further developing their practice and to teacher evaluation. Additional research regarding authentic evaluation practices could contribute to further development of evaluation systems. Determining how to develop more authentic evaluation practices that improve teachers’ experiences and perceptions could make reformed evaluation systems more beneficial to both teachers and administrators, given the time commitment both parties spend on evaluative work.

The study conducted for this dissertation was limited by time restrictions. For future work, I would like to delve further into the ideas presented through the assertions and analysis. In doing so, I desire to conduct follow up interviews with these teachers and perhaps sit in on some the evaluation meetings between teachers and evaluators to collect further data to support, refine, and develop the findings presented in this study. If impossible, conducting a similar study, with new school sites, where I could have multiple interviews and opportunities for observation would be beneficial to further validate the findings of this dissertation research.

**Chapter Summary**

To elaborate on the assertions discussed in chapter 4, this chapter synthesizes the findings to present new learnings based on this study. Three primary learning statements are
explored. The findings from this study indicate the need for positive teacher-evaluator relationships. These relationships establish a foundation where a teacher is willing to seek support from her evaluator in order to improve her practice. As setting an annual achievement goal and receiving observation feedback are required parts of this district evaluation system, establishing both as a means of supporting teacher development, rather than as simply something to do or check off a list are critical. Teachers desire multiple types of feedback from their evaluator in order to make changes to their practice. Teachers perceive that feedback which is directly actionable, such as a suggestion of a course to take or a strategy to try, encourages them to change up their instruction. Also, teachers want time to debrief and reflect upon their practice. Many teachers value feedback by having their evaluator ask reflective questions or hold a coaching conversation with them. Through reflection on practice, teachers find ways to make meaningful changes to their practice to better meet their students’ needs.

The act of setting a goal as part of the evaluation process lead teachers to perceive positive changes in their teaching practice. Overall, teachers felt that setting the goal encouraged them to focus their instruction and collect meaningful data. The goal gave teachers a focal point for the school year and the flexibility to work towards the goal over the duration of the academic year. As some teachers raised concerns that goals are not authentic (see teacher quotes in chapter 4) the district would be wise to streamline the goal-setting practice so that all teachers have a realistic and valid goal to work towards as part of the evaluation process which can then contribute to meaningful change in their practice.
The findings from this study open the door for further research in the field, specifically in the areas of teacher goal setting and evaluator feedback. Based on the data presented, teachers perceive that purposeful, authentic goals combined with meaningful feedback from their evaluator can lead them to make changes to their practice.

Dissertation Summary and Final Conclusions

In recent years, schools have made large-scale changes to their accountability efforts in order to meet new policy guidelines and to qualify for available federal funding. While the newly implemented Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA] (2015) has caused a shift in evaluation and no longer requires that states uses student achievement test scores in teacher evaluation, the policy still requires every state to have both a comprehensive teacher evaluation system and student achievement accountability for teacher retention (DiPaola & Wagner, 2018). There is a great deal of literature discussing teacher evaluation. However, as reformed systems involving teacher goal setting and student achievement practices are relatively new, there is limited research to date on how teachers experience these reformed evaluation systems as well as how they perceive changes to their practice from teacher evaluation. This study sought to understand how teachers experience a reformed evaluation system as well as how they perceive evaluation encourages or inhibits them to make changes to their practice.

Goals of most reformed evaluation systems are two-fold: teacher accountability and teacher professional growth (Goe et al., 2012). This study addressed teacher growth by examining teacher perceptions of changes they make to their practice due to teacher evaluation. The research questions were: What is the experience of reformed teacher
evaluation like for teachers? How do reform-based evaluation practices being employed in one district enable or inhibit teachers’ ability to make meaningful changes in their practice?

The district selected for the study has implemented a reform evaluation system that requires teachers to set annual individual achievement goals which account for 40% of their overall evaluation. Additionally, the district attempts to build consistency with teacher evaluation by implementing standard matrices for evaluators to use to measure teacher performance (see Appendix D). As well as accountability, the district school board states that the primary objective of teacher evaluation is “continuous growth and improvement” for the teachers being evaluated ((2012, Regulation 4440.13). Two elementary school sites within the district participated in the study. Across the two schools, 61 teachers completed the survey and 14 teachers surveyed volunteered to participate in interviews about teacher evaluation. The teachers shared their experiences with the reformed evaluation systems as well as their perceptions of how evaluation leads to change in their practice, and, ideally, the continuous growth and improvement the school board is hoping to achieve through the evaluation system.

The methodology utilized for this study was a mixed-methods phenomenological approach (MMPR) that combined survey and interview data to reveal the lived experiences of teachers, and their perceptions of evaluation, through their own voices. As both the survey results and interview transcripts proved to be critical data for analysis, this study justifies the use of a concurrent MMPR methodological design (see chapter 3), as opposed to a straight phenomenological methodology. This interpretive phenomenological methodology allowed me to analyze the collected data by drawing on my own “valuable expert knowledge” (Mayoh &
Onwuegbuzie, 2015, p. 97) of the evaluation system to interpret meaning and make sense of the teachers’ experiences with the reformed evaluation practices.

The survey results and interview transcripts were thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis which requires the researcher to look across data sets seeking patterns of meaning. For this study, codes were developed both *a priori* and emergent through the analysis process. Interviews were transcribed in their entirety and analyzed using NVIVO 12 software. From the initial thematic analysis, five assertions were conceptualized and explained in detail in chapter 4; This study found that the significance of the evaluation goal matters; if teachers believe their goal is authentic and will lead to an increase in student achievement, they are willing to make changes to their practice to achieve it. In addition to the goal, actionable feedback from evaluators enable changes in teacher practice. When teachers receive evaluative feedback they perceive to be accurate and meaningful, they are empowered to make changes to their practice. In order to be accepting of feedback, trusting relationships are a critical component to teachers’ experiences with evaluation. How teachers view and trust their evaluator significantly contributes to teachers’ willingness to make changes to their practice and trust in the evaluation system as a means of teacher growth. Time constraints prevent evaluations from being as meaningful or intentional as teachers would like them to be. Often, evaluators are not observing teachers at the most opportune times and/or they do not have the time to provide focused follow-up conferences with teachers to allow them space to reflect upon their teaching. Finally, teachers experience a
subjective evaluation system, despite the district’s efforts to standardize the evaluation process across schools, practices, perceptions, and ratings.

These five assertions were synthesized into three new learning statements, described in the beginning of this chapter. How teachers experience evaluation depends on their relationship with their evaluator, therefore, it is necessary for schools to establish a culture of trust. The purpose of goal setting and observation feedback should directly connect to teachers’ developmental needs. Finally, aligning the structures and practices used within an evaluation system is critical to meet the dual purposes of both accountability and teacher learning in order for evaluations to lead to teacher change in practice.

In conclusion, this study found that while teachers have varying experiences with reformed teacher evaluation within one school district, there are components of evaluation that lead to teacher change in practice. Teachers desire feedback that helps them reflect on their practice or try something new in their classroom. By setting a meaningful annual goal for their evaluation, teachers had a focal point for the year and something to work towards which often lead them to refine or make changes to their instruction. Through a survey and teacher interviews, this study contributes to the academic literature by demonstrating that teacher evaluation can result in more than simply accountability; it has the potential to bring about change for teachers if the right conditions are in place through the evaluation process.
Teacher Survey

Teacher Evaluation

This survey is intended to gather teacher perceptions of reformed teacher evaluation practices. Please answer each question to the best of your ability. All individual responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your administrator or evaluator.

If you are willing to take part in an interview about teacher evaluation, please provide your name and email address at the end of the survey. Your survey and/or interview results will not be connected to your name.

Your participation in this survey implies your voluntary consent to participate in the research.

Q1 As part of the evaluation process, does the administrator make recommendations for you to change your practice?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q2 When an administrator makes a recommendation, does he/she follow up on it?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
Q3 Do you make changes to your practice based on your teacher performance evaluation?

- Never (5)
- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q4 When setting an evaluation goal, which of the following influences your goal: (select all that apply)

- An aspect of my practice I feel I could improve (1)
- An area of teaching at which I know I am already successful (2)
- Ideas I've learned but haven't yet tried in my classroom (3)
- School-wide initiatives or goals (4)
- A practice my evaluator has suggested for improvement (5)
- Other (please specify) (6)

Q15 Specify your evaluation goal for the current school year.

Q16 According to district evaluation procedures, each teacher sets a goal at the beginning of the school year. Does your evaluator help you determine your goal?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
Q5 Do you believe teacher evaluation leads to a change in teacher performance/practice?

- Definitely yes (1)
- Probably yes (2)
- Probably not (3)
- Definitely not (4)

Q12 Has it been your experience that teacher evaluation leads to a change in your performance/practice?

- Definitely yes (1)
- Probably yes (2)
- Probably not (3)
- Definitely not (4)

Q6 Do you believe teacher evaluation leads to positive changes in teacher performance/practice?

- Definitely yes (1)
- Probably yes (2)
- Probably not (3)
- Definitely not (4)

Q13 Has it been your experience that teacher evaluation leads to positive changes in your performance/practice?
Definitely yes (1)

Probably yes (2)

Probably not (3)

Definitely not (4)

Q8 Select a gender:

Male (1)

Female (2)

Prefer not to say (3)

Q14 How many years have you been teaching?

the current school year is my first year teaching (1)

2-3 years (2)

4-6 years (3)

7-10 years (4)

11-15 years (5)

16-20 years (6)

20+ years (7)

Q9 How many years of experience do you have with the current evaluation system?

0-1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)
Q7 What is your degree/highest level of education:

- Bachelors degree (1)
- Masters degree (2)
- Masters +30 (3)
- Doctorate (4)

Q17 What is your school site:

- Mountain Ridge ES (1)
- Piney Creek ES (2)

Q10 Are you willing to participate in a brief interview to discuss your experiences with teacher evaluation? If so, please list your name and email in the space below and I will contact you to arrange a time at your convenience. If not, you can leave the space below blank.

________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Teacher Interview Protocol

Opening Remarks: “I am a researcher looking at how evaluation practices influence teacher learning. I am interested to know about your experiences with teacher evaluation. I am not at all involved in any part of your teaching evaluation. Anything you share with me will be used for the purposes of the research and will not be shared with your administrator or anyone in the district. I will assign you and any names you mention during the interview a pseudonym [fake name] and I will remove any identifying information so that you remain anonymous. Do you have any questions?... If it is okay with you, I would like to record this so that I can listen better. You can ask me to stop the recorder at any time. Ok?”

Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching? What are your experiences in education? How many years have you worked in this school? (Background, rapport)

2. Are you currently on formative or summative evaluation? (these terms are specific to this district; teachers are on summative evaluation every 3 years with formal evaluator write-ups and they are on formative on the two years in-between where they provide evidence but do not receive formal observations and feedback)

3. How many times have you completed summative evaluation since the revised teacher evaluation went into practice?

4. How do you decide on your annual evaluation goal?
a. what goal did you set for this year?

b. How are you working towards achieving it?

c. How will you measure your goal?

d. How is your building administration supporting you in achieving your goal?

e. to what extent is your evaluation goal a “real” goal that you want to work on for self-improvement?

f. What types of feedback do you get on your goal?

5. What processes are used for evaluation within your building? (For instance, does the administrator do a pre-and post-conference?)

6. What are the benefits, to you as a teacher, of evaluation?

7. What are some of the drawbacks?

8. How would you describe your evaluator’s experience in regards to evaluation? (On a trust scale of 1 to 10 with your evaluator, where would you rate yourself?)

9. Do you think teacher evaluation influences the development of teachers’ practice? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

10. If you believe so (or not) in general, do you think it is true for yourself and your practice?

11. Can you give an example (personal or one you know of from a colleague) of evaluation practices influencing teacher practice?

12. What changes have you made to your own practice because of evaluation? (either feedback received, working towards a goal, etc.)
a. How has feedback from an observation contributed to or discouraged changes in your practice?

b. How does setting an annual goal encourage or discourage you to make changes to your practice?

13. What evaluative actions does your administrator take that leads to or deters from teacher growth?

14. Share some overall survey results (will fill this in with specifics once the survey is administered). What do you notice or wonder?

Additional interview questions may arise after receiving survey responses.
Appendix C

Administrator Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: Questions are numbered. Underneath, sub-questions are possible supplemental/follow up questions to elicit more detail.

Opening Remarks: “I am a researcher looking at how evaluation practices influence teacher learning. I am interested to know about your experiences implementing teacher evaluation.

Anything you share with me will be used for the purposes of the research and will not be associated with your name. I will assign you and any names you mention during the interview a pseudonym [fake name] and I will remove any identifying information so that you remain anonymous. Do you have any questions?... If it is okay with you, I would like to record this so that I can listen better. You can ask me to stop the recorder at any time. Ok?”

To begin, please tell me about yourself such as how long you have been an administrator, your background in education, etc.

1: In your professional opinion, what is the purposes of teacher evaluation?

a. Do you believe these (purposes) have an impact in improving the professional growth of teachers? Please explain.

b. Do you believe these (purposes) have an impact in improving school improvement goals? Please explain.

c. Does your school have any specific goals for the teacher evaluation? Can you give examples of such goals, if any? How are teachers informed of such goals?
2. Can you describe the process of the district’s teacher evaluation.
   a. How are teachers informed of the process?
   b. What is the specific criteria for teacher evaluation recommendations?
   c. Do evaluators undergo training on the evaluation process? What does this look like?
   d. What’s the difference between summative and formative evaluation? How do your interactions with teachers differ depending on which cycle they are on?

3. Can you name and explain some of the teacher evaluation practices at your school?
   a. Are there any staff meetings or group discussions scheduled specifically to discuss teacher evaluation?
   b. In what ways does the evaluation process encourage or discourage teachers to make changes to their practice?
   c. How much attention is given to ensuring that the teacher evaluation process focuses on improving teacher practice?
   d. Do you think there is purposeful effort in ensuring that teacher evaluation in your school impacts teacher practice? In what ways?
   e. About how much time do you spend on teacher evaluation? About how much time do you estimate teachers spend on their own evaluation?

4. How do you support teacher goal-setting in the teacher evaluation process?
   a. How do teachers set their goals?
   b. How do teachers receive feedback on their goals?
c. In what ways does the progress teachers make towards their goals influence their evaluation?

d. How do teachers’ goals influence their practice? Do teachers make changes to their practice because of their goal?

5. How do you give feedback to teachers?

a. How often and timely is feedback given?

b. How do teachers respond to feedback?

c. How does feedback impact teachers’ practice? Give specific examples, if possible.

6. What are your perceptions of teacher evaluation in terms of teacher growth?

a. Do you believe teachers make changes to their practice based on evaluation feedback?

b. Do you believe evaluation is structured/implemented in a way to support teacher growth?

Conclusion: Do you want to share anything about teacher evaluation that I have not asked?
Appendix D

Sample Evaluation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Developing or Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is expert in the subject area and has an understanding of current research in child development and how students learn.</td>
<td>Knows the subject matter well and has a good grasp of child development and how students learn.</td>
<td>Is somewhat familiar with the subject and has a few ideas of ways students develop and learn.</td>
<td>Has little familiarity with the subject matter and few ideas on how to teach it and how students learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designs highly relevant lessons that will challenge and motivate all students and highly engage active learning.</td>
<td>Designs lessons that are relevant, motivating, and likely to engage students in active learning.</td>
<td>Plans lessons that will catch some students’ interest and perhaps get a discussion going.</td>
<td>Plans lessons with very little likelihood of motivating or involving students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Screen shot from the DISTRICT teacher evaluation handbook.
Appendix E

Goal Setting for Student Progress Form

Goal Setting for Student Progress

Teacher’s Name ___________________________ Employee ID No. __________________

School _________________________________ Evaluation Year __________________

Grade/Subject ____________________________

Directions: This form is a tool to assist teachers in setting a goal that results in measurable learner progress. Teachers should submit the goal to their evaluator and schedule a goal-setting conference to review the goal. Goals must be finalized by October 31.

Initial Goal Submission (due by _________ to the evaluator)

| I. Setting (Describe the population and special learning circumstances) |
| II. Content/Subject/Field Area (The area/topic addressed based on learner achievement, data analysis, or observational data) |
| III. Baseline Data (What is shown by the current data?) | Data attached |
| IV. Goal Statement (Describe what you want learners/program to accomplish) |
| V. Means for Attaining Goal (Strategies used to accomplish the goal) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
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Teacher's Signature ___________________________ Date _____________

Evaluator's Signature ___________________________ Date _____________
Appendix F

Member Checking Email

Participants were individually sent the following email and their raw transcript:

Thank you, again, for participating in my dissertation research! Your interview will contribute significantly to the findings of the study. I am sending you your raw transcript as a form of member checking. This gives you an opportunity to review our discussion. Read through your comments and please let me know if there are any updates you would like to have added. For instance, if you feel you should elaborate on an idea or you feel something misrepresents what you meant, we can add information to the transcript. Please let me know of any additions or updates to your transcript by Friday, May 25 at 5 pm. If I don’t hear back from you, I will assume your transcript accurately represents your ideas and experiences with teacher evaluation. Please be aware this is a raw, unedited transcript so it reads like a conversation. Therefore, there are times when we had cross-talk (both speaking at once), used “ums”, “uhhs”, and other awkward pauses and had incomplete sentences. Don’t fret over how informal the transcript reads, just be sure the opinions and ideas accurately represent your experiences with teacher evaluation. Thank you so much for your participation!


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VITA

Amy Morton Long, NBCT

Education
Pennsylvania State University, 2014-present, Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, Anticipated Graduation May 2019
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Publications (Selected)

Presentations (Selected)

Grants and Awards
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- October 2015, *Blumberg/Pajak Scholar*, Council of Professors of Instructional Supervision