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Teachers' Perceptions of an Alternative Evaluation Model

Karen A. Chase

Seton Hall University

Dissertation Committee

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Department of Education Leadership Management and Policy

Seton Hall University

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Department of Education Leadership Management & Policy

Karen A. Chase has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D.during this fall, 2021.

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Abstract

The body of research shows the importance of teacher effectiveness on student achievement. To ensure teacher effectiveness, states have enacted legislation that governs the processes for teacher evaluation. However, these systems have not proven to be as effective as once anticipated. One of the flaws pertains to the evaluation system's inability to differentiate feedback based on teacher ability. For this reason, the New Jersey Department of Education has provided school districts the option to use an alternative evaluation model, The Reflective Practice Protocol. This option is available to teachers who have been rated as highly effective. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of this model as a means to gain further perspective as to how they view its role in their growth and learning. A qualitative study was conducted, which included one-on-one interviews with 10 teachers in a suburban K-8 district. The theoretical framework used to guide this study was zone of proximal development and reflection theory. This study shares the findings of these interviews, which indicate that teachers perceive the Reflective Practice Protocol positively and have suggestions for further enhancing the model.

Keywords: teacher evaluation, evaluation system, alternative evaluation, professional development, teacher perception, New Jersey teacher evaluation, reflection theory, zone of proximal development

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I am also grateful to the first teacher I ever had, my mother. From my mother, I have learned perseverance and resilience. I credit my love of learning to my mother, who put the first books into my young hands.

Dedication

For Michael,

I have never met a more loving and selfless person. Having you in my life provided all that I needed to finish this paper. I love you immensely and eternally and remain grateful that you entered my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Through economic analysis practices, policy leaders and economists have shown the impact and importance of education to a country's wealth, putting K–12 education as one of the country's most vital public investments. Economist Eric Hanushek (2005) spoke of this connection between the quality of the educational system and a country's wealth:

School quality is undeniably important for the nation with future economic success depending directly on the quality of our schools. As noted, not only individual incomes but also the future growth of GDP are related directly to the knowledge and skills of the overall population. Moreover, the skills observed to count in the marketplace are the ones forming the basis for school accountability. Promoting a strong economy is an obvious place for federal leadership. (Hanushek, 2005: 170)

As such, the educational system in the United States has frequently become a focus of national attention. When considering federal policies and practices, education reformists have highlighted the need for improvement in the educational system. Specifically, the weaknesses in student achievement and the need for remediation in the factors that influence student achievement have often been a point of discussion. When the need for educational reform has been brought to the forefront of the nation's interest, researchers have responded by exploring the influences on student achievement and the ways in which student achievement can be measured and improved. These include, but are not limited to, the curricula provided in the educational program, school-related factors, the family and home environment of the student, and the teachers responsible for

instruction (Hattie, 2012). The effect of each of these variables has been shown to vary; however, research has substantiated that the effectiveness of the teacher is the most significant factor influencing student achievement (Chetty et al., 2014; Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002; Heck, 2009).

With research pointing to the importance of teacher effectiveness on student achievement, priority has been placed on creating systems and processes to ensure that teachers are effective (Hull, 2013). This began as early as 2002, when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a 2002 revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was passed by Congress with bipartisan support and signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. At the core of NCLB were measures designed to increase the federal government's role in holding states and schools accountable for the academic progress of all students (Klein, 2015). Such measures included the establishment of academic progress targets, reporting of state progress, an alteration to the Title 1 funding formula to improve resources for primary school students in high-poverty areas, and increased requirements for teacher quality to ensure teacher effectiveness.

In 2009, Barack Obama targeted the importance of teacher effectiveness as part of the American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009 (ARRA). ARRA provided \$4.35 billion through Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grants for the purpose of the effective recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining of highly effective educators. States competed for these grants by outlining measures to improve teacher effectiveness. New Jersey applied for this grant and received \$38 million in federal Race to the Top funding.

The purpose of this grant was to ensure teacher effectiveness by evaluating teacher performance. State legislation was created to guide policies and procedures for this purpose. To support this focus, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie issued an Executive Order on September 28, 2010, calling for the establishment of an Education Effectiveness Task Force (EETT). Charged with the task of revamping New Jersey's teacher evaluation system, the EETT designed a system that offered recommendations for a new teacher evaluation system. This redesigned approach to teacher evaluation included measures of teacher practice and measures for student achievement.

According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2104), these recommendations would later be adopted as New Jersey Administrative Code N.J.A.C. 6A:10. As part of this code, school districts were required to evaluate all teachers in New Jersey using a system that included measuring teacher practice, using a state-approved observation instrument, student growth objectives, and student achievement as measured by performance on state assessments. These criteria would then be calculated to produce a summative evaluation numerical score. This score would align to one of the four rating scale scores: ineffective (1.0–1.84), partially effective (1.85–2.64), effective (2.65–3.49), and highly effective (3.50–4.0).

This approach served as the only evaluation method for New Jersey teachers until the New Jersey Department of Education made recommendations for an alternative evaluation model. Referred to as the Reflective Practice Protocol (RPP), this model provides teachers' ratings as highly effective with the opportunity to digress from the components of the traditional evaluation model. The Reflective Practice Protocol is guided by a handbook that outlines the components, which include requirements for

teachers to film themselves, administer student surveys, and participate in reflective conversations with an evaluator for the purpose of engaging in reflective behaviors as a means to evaluate teacher effectiveness and support teacher growth (Appendix A).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the national attention that teacher effectiveness and evaluation processes have had over the years, it remains a flawed process (Marzano et al., 2011). Although intended to support teacher improvement, the process has not resulted in the intended outcome. As Marzano (2012) stated, “Teacher evaluation systems have not accurately measured teacher quality and have not aided in developing a highly skilled workforce” (p.16). This failure to result in the intended outcomes has subjected teacher evaluation practices to scrutiny and debate (Borman & Kimball, 2005; Weingarten, 2010).

Traditional evaluation systems, a mechanism designed to support and develop effective teachers, have been argued to be problematic with regard to their design. Darling-Hammond (2013) identified six areas of problems with current evaluation systems. These include a lack of consistent and clear standards of good practice, no focus on improving practice, inadequate time and staff for effective evaluations, little or no consideration of student outcomes, procedures that are not considerate of teacher needs, and a detachment of evaluations from professional development. Additionally, evaluation systems have been shown to impede teacher collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Moreover, these very systems designed to support teacher learning are often perceived negatively by those who are directly affected by them. Often, they are viewed as an invalid measure to improve practice (Mielke & Frontier, 2012). According to a

2015 survey, which asked respondents to indicate their perceptions of the value of teacher evaluation practice, 53% of the respondents indicated the evaluation process did not impact their instructional practice (Callaghan & Sadeghi, 2015).

With traditional evaluation systems failing to improve teacher effectiveness, policymakers and educational leaders have sought alternative evaluation models for evaluation. In New Jersey, the Department of Education designed an alternative model whereby teachers identified as highly effective according to the New Jersey teacher rating system could participate in a different process. Referred to as the Reflective Practice Protocol (RPP), this model is designed to foster reflective behaviors through the use of video, assessment of students' perceptions, and conferences with the evaluator, which are designed to be of a collaborative nature (New Jersey Department of Education, 2013).

Although the traditional evaluation models used in the state of New Jersey have been examined, the alternative model has not been. To date, there is little peer reviewed literature from the field of educational leadership that has examined this model's validity, reliability, or effectiveness. Specifically, there is no existing literature that has explored how teachers perceive this alternative model and whether or not they believe it to be effective in improving their practice. Examining this area warrants investigation especially when the literature has shown the importance of teacher effectiveness to student achievement. Understanding how those who have directly participated in this model perceive it is important, as teacher perceptions of evaluation processes are significant to the models' effectiveness with regard to improving instruction (Callaghan & Sadeghi, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers perceive an alternative evaluation model. Specifically, this study explored New Jersey teachers' perceptions of the Reflective Practice Protocol (RPP), an alternative teacher evaluation model used in the state of New Jersey. To examine this area, 10 teachers with current and/or prior experience with participating in the Reflective Practice Protocol were interviewed. Interview questions were designed to gather information about how teachers described the Reflective Practice Protocol process, its components, and their direct experiences with this model.

Research Questions

Question 1: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol is beneficial to their professional growth as an educator?

Question 2: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol creates a forum for reflection about teaching?

Question 3: What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses, if any, of the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol as implemented by the Willowwood School District?

(Willowwood School District is a pseudonym).

Theoretical Framework

There are primarily two theoretical frameworks that serve as lenses for this study: the zone of proximal development and reflection theory. They have been selected for use in this study because of their relation to learning and growth. Reflection theory has been

used to provide further insight into the practice of reflection, which the literature has shown is significant to learning.

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZOPD) provides insight into how one learns. The ZOPD is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent solving and the level of potential guidance as determined through problem-solvings under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Vygotsky’s theory focuses on the learning and development of children; however, Warford (2011) has made a slight modification to the ZOPD applied to adult learning and renamed it the zone of proximal teacher development or ZPTD (Warford, 2011). Warford’s theory provides context for how adults learn through social interaction.

The second theoretical framework applied to this study is reflection theory. This theory helps to understand the concept of reflection and the ways in which to use reflective practices. In his book, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Shön (1983) described how professionals can use reflective practices to develop the skills needed to confront the challenges they face in their respective fields. He specifically identified ways in which teachers reflect during two different times, referring to these behaviors as reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. This framework provides a context for understanding how reflection fosters teacher learning.

Design and Procedures

This study has been designed as a phenomenological qualitative study. Since this type of research, “focuses on the study of an individual’s lived experiences within the

world” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p.93) and attempts to acquire “rich, thick description” (Miller et al., 2018, p.242) from its participants, it was an appropriate design to use when seeking to gather a population’s perceptions: in this case, examining how teachers perceive an alternative evaluation model. Specifically, this research design was used to explore how 10 teachers from a K–8 suburban school district in New Jersey perceive the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol (NJRPP).

Significance of the Study

As the literature has shown, traditional evaluation models have weaknesses that lead to inefficiency in ensuring or improving teacher effectiveness. With teacher effectiveness significantly tied to student achievement, it is crucial to have evaluation models that work. In an attempt to improve the evaluation process, the New Jersey Department of Education (2016) offers an optional alternative evaluation model available to “highly effective” teachers. Referred to as The Reflective Practice Protocol (RPP), this is a model designed to foster reflection for those teachers who the state believes could benefit from a different approach. For New Jersey, this group has been identified as those teachers rated as “highly effective.”

Knowing specifically what, if any, aspects teachers perceived as useful to their instruction, understanding whether or not they perceived the model as having fostered reflective behavior, and hearing their thoughts about the roles of the participants will be valuable information to the field of education. This study will assist education agency policy specialists charged with designing the evaluation practices as it will provide insight into what components teachers believe to be beneficial and which they do not.

This information will be helpful not only to those in New Jersey who oversee evaluation practices but to others in the field of education who are interested in exploring the idea of using alternative evaluation models. Additionally, this study will also benefit those who are responsible for creating systems and structures that support teacher development as it will identify the practices that teachers find impactful to their learning.

Limitations and Delimitations

The school district that was selected for this study was chosen because the administration provides this model as an option for teachers since the model was piloted during the 2015-2015 school year and as such, is vested in its effective use. Additionally, the large population of teachers available increased the possibility for ample teacher cooperation in the interview process. However, because this school district research site is limited in its demographics, it spans only grades pre-K–8 and is located only in suburban New Jersey, the descriptions and findings of this study will not represent the full scale of teachers who teach throughout the state. This includes, but is not limited to, those who teach in grades other than K–8, those who teach in urban or rural communities, and those whose leadership may not have an interest in offering alternative evaluation models to staff.

Additionally, this study only includes the perceptions of those teachers who have been identified as highly effective. As such it will not represent the experiences of teachers who fall outside of this category and have different teaching skills and abilities. Therefore, it is difficult to apply these findings to the many teachers who perform at varying levels of performance such as those who have been rated as ineffective or

partially effective. Finally, this study only focuses on one specific type of alternative evaluation model, the New Jersey's Reflective Practice Protocol (NJRPP), which is designed with certain requirements and components. Therefore, the findings are not representative of alternative models that differ in their processes and the components.

Definition of Terms

AchieveNJ refers to New Jersey's educator support for the implementation of the regulations under TEACHNJ (2014).

Alternative evaluation model: New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol is an alternative observation model piloted in the state of New Jersey during the 2015-2016 school year and allowed as an option to school districts the following year. The protocol includes reflective conferences with an evaluator, self-reflection on video of teacher practice, reflection on student voice measures, and a single classroom observation conducted by an administrator (New Jersey Department of Education, 2016).

Traditional evaluation is an educator evaluation model used in the state of New Jersey. This model uses measures for student achievement and student growth and administrator-conducted observations (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014).

TEACHNJ Act is an acronym for the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act. TEACHNJ is the tenure reform law passed by New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie.

Teacher evaluation summative rating score refers to a rating scale that is calculated using measures of teacher practice and student achievement. The evaluation summative rating

is calculated on a 0–4 rating scale and correlates to one of the following categories:
ineffective, partially effective, effective, or highly effective (New Jersey Department of
Education, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Effectiveness

Understanding the significance of teacher effectiveness and the complexity of this topic is essential to this study. Research has identified many factors that influence student achievement including, but not limited to, school-related factors, the family and home environment of the student, the curricula provided in the educational program, and the teachers responsible for instruction (Hattie, 2012). Of these variables, teacher effectiveness has been shown to be the most significant factor with regard to influencing student achievement (Chetty et al., 2014; Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002; Heck, 2009; Marzano, 2003; Stronge, 2002; Stronge et al., 2011). When other variables have been controlled, it accounts for the greatest difference in student achievement between the beginning and ending of the year (Rivkin et al., 2005). Even when factoring in value-added measures, teacher effectiveness has continued to be the most significant factor contributing to student achievement (Wright et al., 1997).

Gordon et al. (2006) identified “the average student assigned to a top quartile teacher gained 5 points relative to students with similar baseline scores and demographics” (p. 8).

Research has shown that teacher effectiveness is significant because it has effects that extend beyond just student achievement outcomes. Chetty et al. (2014) studied how highly effective teachers affect the lives of students beyond high school. They found that students taught by highly effective teachers are more likely to attend college and are less

likely to have children during teenage years. Additionally, students taught by effective teachers have more secure financial status later in life (e.g., earn more, save for retirement). Hanushek (2014) examined the cumulative benefits of having an effective teacher on income levels and found that being taught by an effective teacher in the 90th percentile can have substantial financial benefits when compared to being taught by a teacher in the 60th percentile.

The concept of teacher effectiveness is complex. There are many different interpretations of what deems a teacher effective, which has resulted in many different definitions of teacher effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness has been defined as a set of skills: having a wide range of knowledge, skills, aptitude, motivation, and personality characteristics (Mitchell et al., 2001). It has also been defined as a set of attributes. Hattie (2003) identified teacher effectiveness through five major dimensions of excellent teachers and 16 attributes, which encompass both a knowledge of curriculum matters and knowledge about teaching strategies. Tucker and Stronge (2005) identified teacher effectiveness as qualities that the teacher possesses such as having participated in a teacher preparation program, having completed a minimum of 3 years teaching experience, and having acquired the required certification.

Regardless of the vast differences surrounding the definition of teacher effectiveness, it remains a significant variable in affecting both educational experiences for students and lifetime outcomes. For this reason, teacher effectiveness remains an important subject especially to reformists and policy makers who have targeted this area

for improvement. This attention has resulted in the creation of both federal and state policies that specifically target improving teacher effectiveness through evaluation practices.

Historical View of Evaluation

Understanding the long history of teacher evaluation is valuable to understanding the trajectory of current evaluation practices. This evolution can be understood examining evaluation through seven distinct phases: Phase 1: community accountability phase; Phase 2: the professionalization phase; Phase 3: the scientific phase; Phase 4: the human relations phase; Phase 5: the second-wave scientific phase; Phase 6: the second-wave human relations phase; and Phase 7: the human development phase (Tracy, 1995). Each phase will be explained in more detail below.

The Community Accountability Phase

This phase stemmed from the colonial period through the early 1800s. During this time, local governments oversaw control of education, and community leaders such as clergy, merchants, and other professional representatives were required to establish school processes, hire personnel, and monitor students' progress in regard to reading and religious principles. Supervisory practices during this time consisted of a group of community members conducting school visits to monitor student progress, content, and the teacher's instructional practice. Teachers were viewed as community servants and hired to respond to community expectations including how to best instruct. Without

having formal training in pedagogy, expectations were based on student outcomes of reading Scripture and understanding the customs and conventions of the community (Tracy, 1995). Supervisors required minimal supervisory skills as the approach was that of an inspector of the teacher's skills. If expectations were not met, or if suggestions were not taken seriously, the teacher would be dismissed (Tracy, 1995).

The Professionalization Phase

Continuing through the 1800s, this phase saw the expansion of populations making it necessary to create school districts. School districts were designed to oversee the operations of multiple schools within a specific geographic area (Tracy, 1995). To provide oversight in this regard, administrative positions were created. County superintendent positions were charged with supervising local school districts, and other administrative positions were created to manage the operations of a school. Improving instruction became a central focus for this time, necessitating the need for teacher training by professional educators. Supervisory practices focused on assisting teachers to become more skilled. Supervisors during the professionalism phase were required to have more formal knowledge of content and instruction (Tracy, 1995).

The Scientific Phase

This phase spanned throughout the 1900s and specifically addressed the increasing complexity of schools. Frederick Taylor's scientific management approach of studying time and motion to measure a worker's output against an established metric was infused in school supervisory practices. To manage this, supervisors were employed to

improve production (Taylor, 1911). In his book, *Public School Administration* (1929), Ellwood Cubberly applied this approach to education, comparing schools to factories and advising administrators to visit classrooms to improve productivity:

Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of the twentieth-century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down. (p. 338)

This phase saw the creation of specialty supervisors hired to supervise the greater range of subject areas and assist teachers in employing specific instructional methods (Tracy, 1995). Observation practices during this time period incorporated data compilation and analysis designed to measure outcomes (Cubberly, 1929). Also referred to as the Tylerian period, named after Robert W. Tyler, the use of instructional objectives and student outcomes became a focus for supervision practices (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 2007). This approach required evaluators to identify whether or not instructional outcomes and student expectations had been met. Data gathering tools such as observation checklists were used in this process (Tracy, 1995). This time period provided structure to evaluation processes; however, it shifted the view of teachers as professionals to factory workers.

The Human Relations Phase

Following World War II, evaluation practices shifted to a more humanistic approach, viewing the teacher as an individual with professional and emotional needs. Referring to the teacher as “a person, different from every other person,” Elsie Coleman (1945) developed the role of the supervisor in this process:

The supervisor visits the teacher in many ways, within and without the school understanding the needs and possibilities, building human relationships, using procedures that are cooperatively planned and evaluated, becoming counselor, guide, friend. (p. 167)

Evaluation practices were designed to foster collaboration between the supervisor and teacher. However, with the focus on the psychological well-being of teachers and relationships, the humanistic approach resulted in supervisors' hesitancy to address areas of deficiencies and provide the necessary feedback needed to improve instruction (Tracy, 1995).

The Second-Wave Scientific Phase

A continuation of the former two phases, this phase continued the practices of the original scientific phase with the inclusion of more complex observation systems designed to measure teacher behaviors, an increase in the use of standardized testing, and behavioral objectives to measure student outcomes. This period focused more on the technical skills of supervision and less on the collaborative relationship between the supervisor and teacher (Tracy, 1995).

The Second-Wave Human Relations Phase

Similar to its predecessor, the second-wave human relations phase shifted the focus back to the relationship of the supervisor and the teacher. This gave rise to the clinical supervision model, an attempt to combine the tools and techniques used in the scientific phases with the collegial/team approach fostered in the human relations phase. The clinical supervision model included five stages: Phase 1: pre-observation conference;

Phase 2: classroom observation; Phase 3: analysis; Phase 4: supervision conference; and Phase 5: analysis of the analysis (Goldhammer, 1969). A colleague of Goldhammer's, Morris Cogan (1973), emphasized the importance of this approach in teacher development:

A cornerstone of the supervisor's work with the teacher is the assumption that clinical supervision constitutes a continuation of the teacher's professional education. This does not mean that the teacher is "in training," as is sometimes said of preservice programs. It means that he is continuously engaged in improving his practice, as is required of all professionals. (p. 21)

The Human Development Phase

This phase focused on the importance of adult learning and its relationship with supervision. It promoted teacher control over their own learning, "By understanding how teachers grow optimally in a supportive and challenging environment, the supervisor can plan the tasks of supervision to bring together organizational goals and teacher needs into a single fluid entity" (Glickman et al., 1998, p. 10).

Contemporary Evaluation Practices

Evaluation practices continued to be examined well into the 21st century. In 2000, Danielson and McGreal (2000) elaborated on the need for communication between the teacher and evaluator. In these practices, a greater emphasis was placed on teacher reflection. To support conversations about instruction, Charlotte Danielson (2009) created a model to provide a language for professional conversation and foster reflection. Referred to as the "framework for teaching" this model identified four domains for

teaching and a series of components to capture the complexity involved in teaching. The Danielson model is a widely used model in current evaluation practices.

Reform to Evaluation

Federal Teacher Evaluation Reform

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This new law, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was designed to specifically address teacher quality. As part of NCLB, states were required to establish qualification standards as a means to demonstrate teacher competency. These qualifications specifically required all educators to obtain a “highly qualified” status through: (1) a bachelor’s degree, (2) a state certification and/or licensure, or (3) by demonstrating evidence of knowledge in the subject matter of which they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). NCLB also required states to provide funding for ongoing professional learning for teachers. Despite policy to ensure teacher effectiveness, determining and measuring teacher effectiveness posed a set of challenges. These deficiencies were highlighted in 2009, when The New Teacher Project (TNTP) identified the failure of U.S. public education to recognize and respond to differences in teacher effectiveness as the “Widget Effect” (Weisberg et al., 2009):

The Widget Effect describes the tendency of school districts to assume classroom effectiveness is the same from teacher to teacher. This decades-old fallacy fosters an environment in which teachers cease to be understood as individual professionals, but rather as interchangeable parts. In its denial of individual strengths and weaknesses, it is deeply disrespectful to teachers; in its indifference to instructional effectiveness, it gambles with the lives of students. (Weisberg et al., 2009, p. 4)

The Widget Effect highlighted discrepancies between evaluation ratings and the perceptions of educator effectiveness finding that the poor performance of teachers had not been addressed. Nearly half of the school districts in the study had not released a single tenured teacher within the past 5 years. The report also highlighted the inefficiency of the evaluation process with regard to identifying proficiency levels of educators (Weisberg et al., 2009). Four districts within the study saw huge discrepancies between teacher effectiveness and evaluations with 81% of all administrators and 57% of all teachers reported having a tenured teacher in their school who was ineffective.

The New Teacher Project's *Widget Effect* report (see Weisburg, 2009) also revealed that the evaluation process did not prove to be effective with regard to providing professional development. In other words, it failed to provide educators meaningful feedback, and it did not convey clear performance expectations for novice teachers.

In 2009, the Obama administration targeted public policy to improve America's public education system. As part of the American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009 (ARRA), Race to the Top (RTT) allocated \$4.35 billion in competitive state grant opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). As part of the RTT program, an emphasis was placed on ensuring teacher quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education's *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010) further emphasized the nation's dedication to this reform effort:

We will elevate the teaching profession to focus on recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding excellence. We are calling on states and districts to develop and implement systems of teacher and principal evaluation and support, and to identify effective and highly effective teachers on the basis of student growth and other factors. (p. 4)

To be eligible to receive any of the financial incentives afforded by the RTT grant, states were required to design systems of accountability to ensure teacher effectiveness. States responded by including multiple measures in their evaluation processes as a means to measure and quantify teacher effectiveness. Such measures included the use of value-added models, additional classroom observations, and the use of observation practice instruments.

New Jersey Evaluation Reform

After being awarded \$38 million of Race to the Top funds for the purpose of educational reform, The New Jersey State Board of Education had signed into law The Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act (TEACH NJ). The TEACH NJ Act required the implementation of a four-level evaluation system that would change the ways in which teachers earn and maintain tenure. As part of this process, districts were required to adopt a state-approved observation instrument to quantify teacher performance. Measures of student achievement were also required. For example, the use of student growth objectives, and for certain populations of teachers, the inclusion of a value-added measure, the median student growth percentile (mSGP) on the New Jersey state mandated standardized test, were used to capture student achievement and growth. Each of these components was calculated as a percentage to arrive at a summative rating score. To measure teacher effectiveness, these scores correspond to one of the following four categories: ineffective, partially effective, effective, or highly effective (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014).

Challenges with Traditional Evaluation Models

Failure to Impact Teacher Practice

Research has shown that traditional evaluation practices have been less successful. Specifically, they have failed to impact teacher practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985; Weisberg et al., 2009). Smylie (2014, p.98) referred to this as the “weak link problem.” The cause of which can be attributed to the traditional evaluation systems’ inability to provide meaningful and specific feedback that helps to improve teacher practice (Weisberg et al., 2009). Research has shown that teachers receive little formative or summative feedback on their teaching activities. In a survey of 15,176 teachers employed in 12 districts, nearly 75% of teachers indicated that they had not received specific feedback on how to improve their instructional practice.

Flaws in the Design and Implementation

The ineffectiveness of teacher evaluation can also be attributed to the ways in which the process is designed and the manner in which it is implemented. First, Hill and Grossman (2013) and Duke and Stiggins (1990) argued that the purpose for teacher evaluation is flawed and that evaluation systems cannot serve dual purposes of ensuring accountability and supporting growth. Others have shown that the components of the traditional evaluation system are designed for the purpose of efficiency and expediency (Hill & Grossman, 2013), and the evaluation process itself is a compliance exercise based on non-informative checklists and with the common conclusive rating of “satisfactory” (Weisberg et al., 2009).

There have also been noted shortcomings with regard to the components and the way in which they are employed. For example, observation instruments have been reportedly misused, and observers have also been shown to be insufficiently trained in providing the necessary feedback needed for teachers to improve practice (Bridges, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Good & Mulryan, 1990; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 2007). Also, the rubrics used to measure teacher practice have also been thought to focus more on the measurement of insignificant items instead of focusing on important items such as learning outcomes, school improvement efforts, or professional development (Donaldson, 2008; Varlas, 2009).

Additionally, the use of value-added models—measurements of student achievement designed to measure teacher effectiveness—have failed to capture a teacher’s true instructional ability (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Darling-Hammond, Beardsley, Haertel, Rothstein (2013) found that only 20% to 30% of those teachers who have been ranked in the bottom 20% in one year received similar ratings the following year. Additionally, 25% to 40% of the same 20% bottom of teachers, received above average ratings the following year. The differences in tests used to measure student performance and in the statistical methods used to calculate value-added scores lead to this discrepancy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2013). Using value-added measures have additional limitations in that they provide teachers with a score but do not provide teachers with the information needed to learn or grow (Papay, 2012).

Inability to Differentiate Performance Levels

Traditional evaluation systems have also failed to distinguish teacher performance levels. For example, von Frank (2011) investigated the ratings in a high-

performing district and found that “nearly half of high school teachers received perfect scores” (p. 32). Linda Darling Hammond (2014) stated, “Existing systems rarely help teachers improve or clearly distinguish those who are succeeding from those who are struggling” (p. 4). Danielson and McGreal (2000) also identified that the observers’ inability to differentiate based on the ability of the teacher failed to provide the targeted feedback needed to improve practice (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Recommendations to Improve Evaluation Models

As a result of its findings, the *Widget Effect* (2009) report included a series of recommendations to improve the evaluation process. The report called for the design of evaluation systems that fairly and accurately differentiate performance levels of educators. Additionally, it advocated for focused professional development targeted at specific areas of performance (Weisberg et al., 2009). The research on professional development has also shown that teacher involvement in the process is valuable to the effectiveness of the model. When provided the opportunity to inform professional development training, there is a greater realization of positive learning outcomes and the more effective transfer of knowledge (Alexander & Swafford, 2012; Edmond & Hayler, 2013).

Others have argued for the need to provide different approaches of evaluations for the purpose of addressing the vast differences that exist in teachers. Nolan and Hoover (2011) elaborated on this concept calling for evaluation systems to specifically recognize the differences in teachers, specifically those who perform at a high level. Darling Hammond (2013) addressed the failures of traditional evaluation methods and suggested

a more supportive process that recognizes the individuality of the teacher. “In short, what this country really needs is a conception of teacher evaluation as part of a teaching and learning system that supports continuous improvement, both for individual teachers and for the profession as a whole” (p. 5).

Other researchers have also argued for the need to support ongoing teacher development through a collaborative evaluation system. Such a system would engage teachers in activities and professional conversations that promote learning, specifically those that foster self-assessment and reflection on practice (Danielson, 2009; Kraft & Papay, 2012). Danielson elaborated on this idea, specifically advocating for the use of observation instruments that are explicit and processes that have the ability to promote professional learning in a collegial and collaborative manner (Danielson, 2009).

New Jersey Reflective Practice Model

In the 2015–2016 school year, the New Jersey Department of Education conducted a pilot study involving 16 New Jersey school districts. The pilot was designed to gather input from local school districts regarding an alternative evaluation model called The Reflective Practice Protocol (RPP). Designed as a model to promote reflection, the New Jersey Department of Education argued that a flexible model to support the growth of teachers with high levels of effectiveness was needed. The rationale included the need for a different type of feedback than what was provided with the traditional evaluation method. It also included the need for teachers to have the opportunity to experience the benefits of intense study and reflection of practice (New Jersey Department of Education, 2016).

Several districts piloted this model, participating in discussions about their experiences with the model, and based on their feedback, the RPP was modified. It became an available option the following year for all teachers identified as highly effective. The Reflective Practice Protocol became a viable option: “If a tenured teacher was rated highly effective on his or her most recent summative evaluation, one of the two required observations may be an observation of a Commissioner-approved activity other than a classroom lesson” (New Jersey Department of Education, 2016, p.29). The following parameters were provided as part of the Reflective Practice Protocol:

- The Reflective Practice Protocol is available as an option for tenured teachers who have been rated “Highly Effective” on their most recent summative rating.
- Participation in this protocol is optional and based on mutual agreement of the participating teacher and his or her direct supervisor.
- The Reflective Practice Conference between the teacher and supervisor will replace one traditional, announced classroom observation. Participating teachers must still receive at least one traditional, unannounced classroom observation as part of the Teacher Practice rating. As with any announced classroom observation, teachers should receive pre- and post-conferences for the Reflective Practice Conference.
- The Reflective Practice Conference will be based on teacher reflection in several required components. Administrators are responsible for conducting and scoring the conference based on available evidence. Additional guidance regarding scoring is located in Determining a Practice Score and Summative Rating for Highly Effective Teachers. As when multiple traditional observations are used to

provide a practice score, districts must use the Reflective Practice Conference plus any traditional observations to produce a practice rating that contributes to a 1.0–4.0 summative score. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2016, pp.25–29)

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, both a social constructivist view of learning and a reflective view of learning will serve as tandem frameworks. The former views learning through social interaction while the latter provides a view of learning, which refers to a process of recalling, analyzing and evaluating an experience. Together these theories provide a framework for understanding both how one learns and how one can use reflection to further develop a concept of learning (al Mahmud, 2013).

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

In the late 1920s, Lev Vygotsky, a sociocultural theorist, developed the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to describe how cognitive growth occurs in children. Influenced by socio-cultural theory, the ZPD is defined as

the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978 p. 86).

The ZPD provides a framework for explaining how a child learns by constructing new knowledge through social interaction. Vygotsky's theory espoused that a child could potentially do more than he or she could do alone with the assistance of someone more capable. This type of assistance is usually referred to as scaffolding and is most effective when it is designed specifically for the learner, adapted and gradually released when the

learner has developed a target skill or skills (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011). Tharp and Gallimore (1998) clarified that scaffolding is not simplifying the task but rather maintaining the difficulty of the task with a graduated level of support from the adult or expert. They explained this process as consisting of four stages of performance: (1) expert other assistance stage, where performance is assisted by someone more capable; (2) self-assistance stage, where performance is carried out without the assistance of others; (3) automatization stage, where performance is developed and automatized; and (4) the de-automatization stage, where performance leads to recursion back through the ZPD (Tharp & Gallimore, 1998).

Even though Vygotsky theorized about learning, particularly how a child learns, he never extended his theory to adult learning. However, other researchers have elaborated on how the ZPD is a suitable model to view how adults learn. According to Lempert-Shepell (1995), the application of Vygotsky's view of learning is appropriate for adult learners because of the complex and evolving nature of schools and classrooms. Coupled with the belief that learning is situational, holistic, and authentic, the ZPD is a viable lens through which to view the way adults learn. As such, Warford applied ZPD to teacher candidates and renamed it as the zone of proximal teacher development (ZPTD; Warford, 2011).

Warford's Zone of Proximal Teacher Development

In 2011, Warford applied Vygotsky's ZPD to teacher candidates coining the term *the zone of proximal teacher development (ZPTD)*. He described the space in the ZPTD as the distance between what a teaching candidate is able to do on his or her own and what a teaching candidate might be able to do with mediated assistance from someone

more capable, or an expert (Warford, 2011). Warford advocated for what he refers to as a “Vygotsky genetic method” because of its ability to foster a “situated, more transformative approach to teacher development” (p. 253).

Warford applied the four stages that Vygotsky included in the ZPD, only switching the first and second stages, to define the four stages of ZPTD as (1) self-assistance stage, (2) expert other assistance stage, (3) internalization stage, and (4) recursion stage (Warford, 2011). Warford believed that this adjustment was warranted because of the prior experiences the teacher candidate brings with them to the learning process. Recognizing the value of these experiences, Warford believed, they should be used to foster reflection (Warford, 2011)

In the first stage, the self-assistance stage, Warford (2011) argued for the importance of reflection and the need for the teacher to explore how these experiences have influenced her thinking. Warford suggested that the teacher educator plays a role in this stage by facilitating reflection and helping the teacher candidate to see how past experiences influence her beliefs about teaching. The teacher educator can then direct the teacher candidate to reflect on this and to consider how much she can learn about motivation (Warford, 2011). Even though the teacher educator may play a role in this stage, Fani & Ghaemi (2011) believed the focus should be on the importance of reflection, “The emphasis is on setting the field by promoting reflection on one’s experiences and tacit beliefs with regard to teaching and learning” (p.1550). To facilitate this process of reflection, teacher educators can use certain tools such as having the teacher candidate write his or her own autobiography, respond to prompts, and participate in reflective discussion (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011; Warford, 2011).

In Warford's (2011) second stage of the ZPTD, the expert other assistance stage, the expert teacher plays more of a role in the learning process. The expert should design interventions with the intention of having the teacher candidate examine teaching practices. Warford (2011) argued for teacher candidates' needs to experience live and videotaped, as well as field-based demonstrations on how innovative teaching practices are carried out in actual classrooms. Tools such as filming live instruction, role playing, and journaling are useful to this process because they promote analysis, which assists the teacher candidate in recognizing the complexity of pedagogy (Warford, 2011).

In the final two stages of ZPTD, internalization and recurrence, the teacher candidate begins to internalize what has been learned and begins to demonstrate their new learning. The focus of the internalization stage is what Warford (2011) described as "the candidate's capacity to reflect on the strengths and needs reflected therein" (p. 253). In other words, this is the stage where the teacher candidate processes what has been learned and considers how it can be applied to classroom instruction. During this stage, the teacher expert should continue to provide opportunities for reflection, support, and collaboration. Once through the internalization stage, the candidate enters the recurrence phase. Warford described this stage as the "theory into practice" stage or a place where candidates "prepare to confront the dichotomy of theory and practice in all its intensity" (p. 253). This is the stage where the teacher candidate has the opportunity to demonstrate learning by transferring the knowledge to teaching practice (Warford, 2011).

Reflection

Reflection is not a new subject. It has been a topic of interest ever since Dewey (1900) wrote about its role in learning, “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience” (p.78). Over time, the subject of reflection has gained attention because of the complexity of teaching and its perceived value in helping teachers improve effectiveness. Reflection has been thought to provide the knowledge needed to improve and develop (Fullan, 2005; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Monthie, 2006). As Sparks-Langer & Colton (1990) stated, those responsible for teacher development need to view professional knowledge as coming from two sources: those outside the teacher and the teachers’ own perceptions of their everyday experience.

Reflection was further elaborated on by Donald Shön (1983) who examined the concept of reflection and its role in education. Shön stated that reflection occurs in two different ways and times. He referred to these distinct manners as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Shön believed each of these types of reflection plays an invaluable role in helping one learn and grow.

Reflection-on-action (Shön, 1983; 1987) defines reflection as happening anywhere before or after an event. In this regard, this is anytime other than when the teacher is in the act of teaching. Shön believed that reflection-on-action occurs when a teacher reflects in the time periods before and after the actual teaching has occurred. This enables the teacher to review, analyze and evaluate the teaching that has occurred. Reflection in this manner allows teachers to consider the effectiveness of the lesson and ways to improve effectiveness or extend student learning. Often this new insight transfers to improved effectiveness in instructional practice.

Reflection-in-action, Shön (1987) suggested, is thinking about teaching as it is happening. This is the time when teachers are able to consider all the things that could lead to maximum student success; it is the act of teachers thinking about what is being taught and how students are meeting success while in the actual act of teaching. Shön also believed that teachers have tacit knowledge and that practitioners usually know more than they can say. He described this as “knowing in action” (p.133). Shön believed that reflective practitioners engage in both kinds of reflection and provided an example of how this process would happen:

The situation talks back, the practitioner listens, and as he appreciates what he hears, he reframes the situation once again ... In this reflective conversation the practitioner’s effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action and reappreciation. The unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it and changed through the attempt to understand it. (Shön, 1983, p. 132)

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the design and methods used to explore teachers' perceptions of an alternative evaluation model, specifically the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol (NJRPP). This chapter will explain why this study was designed as a qualitative phenomenology research study. It will also describe the methodology used to conduct this study, a description of the study participants, the procedures used to collect data, and the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, this chapter will address the ethical concerns of this study.

A qualitative phenomenological approach was applied to this study, because the researcher intended to explore the participants' experiences with a phenomenon, participation in an alternative evaluation model. In this case, the phenomenon is teacher participation in the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol. Creswell (2007) stated that this methodology is appropriate when a goal of a study is to empower individuals to describe their experiences. Since the purpose of this study is to garner teachers' descriptions of both the components of the model and their perceived value in improving instructional practice, this methodology is most suitable; it provides the researcher with detail and description needed to thoroughly answer the research questions.

There were several artifacts that were explored prior to the collection of qualitative data. These artifacts included the documents that the research site provides to staff regarding the operationalization of the district's Reflective Practice Protocol. This

information included an overview of the components of the Reflective Practice Protocol and an explanation of the process. It also included the tools used to document participation in this process.

A letter regarding the purpose of the study and the need for participants was sent to district staff. The letter directed those interested in participating in the study to provide contact information via an electronic form. Each participant was then contacted and sent a brief questionnaire, which included basic demographic information (e.g., name, years of teaching experience, teaching assignment, and contact information). Once teachers provided informed consent, interviews were scheduled.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with the 10 teachers who volunteered for the study. The interviews were conducted virtually using Google Meet. Standard interview questions were used in each of the 10 interviews, and I only asked follow-up questions when clarification was needed to capture the participant's response. All interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, with 2 extending beyond an hour. This is noted because of the situation in which the interviews were conducted. Despite the additional workload and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these teachers were willing to give of their time to share their thoughts and opinions of the evaluation model used to measure their performance.

Background

For as long as I can recall, I sought to explore a career whereby I could be involved in the education of others. As such, I chose the specific field of K–12 public education. During my 8 years as a teacher, very few federal or state mandates were

required for teacher evaluation. Rather, practices for such were guided by district board approved policies. As a teacher, I was observed once a year by an administrator who used a district observation tool designed to include a measurement (via a checklist) of teaching behaviors. This tool also included a space for the observer to write narrative commentary regarding the observed practice. As part of this evaluation process, I also participated in a summative meeting with an administrator.

When I transitioned into a leadership role as an instructional supervisor in another district, I was charged with conducting observations using a different evaluation tool. This tool was vastly different from the one that was used to observe me in my teaching capacity; it included only a blank space for the objective of the lesson and a description of what the teacher had done to try to achieve this objective. It did not include a checklist. Not only was this tool different from the one used in the previous district, there was very little consistency with regard to how the evaluation processes were conducted. As such, teachers had very different evaluation experiences based on their evaluator.

When I transitioned to the role of assistant superintendent, I was charged with overseeing the district's compliance with TEACHNJ, a state mandate requiring all New Jersey school districts to employ the observation and evaluation practices outlined in ACHIEVENJ. As part of these requirements, districts were required to use a state-approved rubric to quantify teacher observation and to incorporate measures of student growth into the evaluation process. This change to standardize evaluation processes within the state of New Jersey was controversial with regard to its rigid implementation and its use to reform tenure. To allow for greater flexibility, the NJ Department of

Education offered an alternative evaluation model to provide as an option for districts to evaluate highly effective teachers.

I was drawn to the subject of evaluation because of my experiences with it and because of the controversial nature of the subject. With the alternative evaluation model being new, very few educational leaders were aware of its use. With very little research around this topic, and specifically no literature exploring how teachers felt about or perceived this new approach, I chose to explore this topic.

Teaching is complex; it requires ongoing study, support, and oversight. Unfortunately, traditional evaluation models fail in regard to providing teachers with the support needed to navigate the challenges of teaching. In an attempt to address the differences that exist among teachers and the various supports they need to grow, The state of New Jersey offers the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol (NJRPP) to highly effective teachers as a means to oversee their effectiveness and professional growth. However, there is little known about this model with regard to how teachers perceive it, particularly how teachers perceive the components and what they find most impactful to their growth (New Jersey Department of Education, 2013).

Research Questions

There were several factors that influenced the design of the research questions. This included information learned from the review of literature, details from the evaluation process used, and my own experience.

Question 1: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol is beneficial to their professional growth as an educator?

Question 2: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol creates a forum for reflection about teaching?

Question 3: What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses, if any, of the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol as implemented by the Willowood School District?

Design and Methodology

A qualitative phenomenological study design was an appropriate design for this study because the purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions, specifically their perceptions about an alternative evaluation model. A qualitative study with a direct interview process enabled the researcher to hear directly from those who have direct experience with the model. Creswell (2007) explained that a researcher can gather information by "talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context" (p. 37). As such, open-ended interview questions were used in an attempt to capture the voices of the participants and their perceptions of their experiences with this model.

Participants and Sampling

To conduct this study, I established contact with the Superintendent of a K–8 suburban New Jersey school district that uses the NJRPP. All participants of the study have participated in the Reflective Practice Protocol. For eligibility to use the RPP, they all had to have earned a highly effective rating as determined by the evaluation scoring guide of AchieveNJ. All participants also had to have completed all aspects of the

reflective practice experience as outlined by the New Jersey Department of Education and as required by the participating district. To recruit participants, an email was sent to all teachers in the district inviting them to complete a Google form should they wish to be a participant in this study. Twelve teachers responded to the initial request; however, only 10 responded to a subsequent request to be interviewed. The remaining 10 teachers were interviewed for this study.

Profiles of the Site and Participants

To protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study, a pseudonym was used to replace the name of the district. The K–8 New Jersey suburban school district used in this study will be referred to as Willowood School District. Willowood School District is located in an upper-middle-class community. The Willowood School District has a board of education approved policy mandated by the guidelines of the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act (TEACHNJ) and the requirements of ACHIEVENJ. As required by New Jersey Administrative Code, the Board of Education adopts the evaluation instruments and processes on an annual basis.

As part of the evaluation process, all certificate staff are rated within one of the following categories: Highly Effective, Effective, Partially Effective or Ineffective.

The participants in this study are tenured teachers who have been identified as highly effective based on a previous evaluation rating. The participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 4 years to 23 years. When described in Chapter IV, the participants were referred to as the letter “T” for teacher and a randomly assigned number ranging from 1 to 10.

Data Collection

Permission to conduct this study was requested and approved by the superintendent of the Willowood School District. The superintendent provided consent via a letter and directed me to send all communications about the study to the director of curriculum. The director of curriculum provided copies of all evaluation policies, procedures, and documents related to the Willowood School District's evaluation practices. The director of curriculum also forwarded my initial email regarding the study to all district staff.

Interview Procedures

Interested participants expressed such via a survey, which the researcher used to establish interviews. I used a consistent set of interview questions for each interview, which was conducted via Google Meet. Each participant was informed that I would not deviate from the interview questions unless a follow-up question was needed to clarify understanding. A standard set of interview questions were used during the interview process (see Appendix A).

To garner information related to teachers' perceptions of the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol (NJRPP), qualitative data were gathered through an interview process with 10 teachers. Each of these interviews was conducted via Google Meet. Following each interview, I transcribed the interview to text and allowed the participants the opportunity to review this information. After all interviews were transcribed, I conducted multiple readings of this information. After the second reading, I began to identify categories that emerged in the interview text. These categories were

then grouped together according to the research question they asked. Once grouped as categories, I identified the common themes that existed among the categories. These themes, which stemmed from the initial 10 interviews, provide information about how teachers perceive the process, their opinions on the aspects of the NJRPP, and thoughts about the Willowood implementation of this process.

Protection of Human Rights and Ethical Considerations

This study consistently adhered to practices that would ensure that ethical measures were followed. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring anonymity for participants, maintaining confidentiality, and securing informed consent by the participants. Informed consent included a description of the purpose of the study, the potential role of participants, the identity of the researcher, the associated institute, and an explanation of how the study will be published. Additionally, interviewees were provided an opportunity to review interview transcript notes and to omit any information they wanted removed from the study.

Validity and Reliability

In this study, validity refers to the accuracy of the interpretation between what participants expressed and what was recorded by the researcher. Reliability is related to generating understanding in a qualitative study that extends beyond the representation of facts or results. To ensure these two aspects were met, I followed the guidance of what Creswell (2007) referred to as member-checking; all interviews were transcribed, and

participants were provided with the opportunity to review their comments for accuracy and completeness.

Role of the Researcher and Researcher Bias

Creswell (2007) referred to the researcher as a key factor in a qualitative study, “We represent our data, partly based on participants’ perspectives and partly based on our own interpretation, never clearly escaping our own personal stamp on a study” (p. 43). As an educator with over 20 years of experience, I bring the experience of having been an evaluator of teacher practice. Additionally, I directly participated in the pilot of the Reflective Practice Protocol. As such, I recognize that my personal bias affects my role as primary researcher and consider how this may surface. To account for this, I have attempted to avoid bias by allowing the participants to review transcripts of their statements.

Additionally, to avoid influencing participants’ responses, I did not disclose my prior experience with the Reflective Practice Protocol, nor did I, in any way, pressure the participants or coerce them in answering in a specific manner. During the interview, I remained cognizant of the flow of the conversation, the tone that I projected while asking the questions, and any verbal or nonverbal feedback that I may have conveyed.

Summary

Chapter III provided an explanation of the methodology used in this qualitative study. Additionally, it included descriptions of the researcher’s background. It also addressed data collection, methodology and analysis. Additionally, the researcher’s bias

was described, and validity and reliability were addressed. Chapter IV presents the findings of this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers perceive an alternative evaluation process. Through structured interviews, I explored teachers' experiences with the phenomenon of an alternative evaluation process, called the Reflective Practice Protocol. As such, this chapter presents an analysis of the key findings of a qualitative study that focused on the perceptions of 10 teachers in a K–8 district located in a suburban area of New Jersey. The participants were identified for this study because they have been rated as highly effective based on the New Jersey teacher summative rating scale. To be designated as highly effective, a teacher's calculated summative score must fall within the range of 3.5–4.0.

The chosen district, Willowood School District, was purposefully selected because of its use of the Reflective Practice Protocol since 2013. The district's consistent use of this protocol allowed for a larger population of educators from which to offer voluntary participation in this study. The study was conducted during the spring of the 2020-2021 school year, a time when educational institutions faced the effects of a global pandemic, COVID-19. Despite the challenges of this time, 10 teachers willingly responded to an email requesting their participation in this study.

The interviews were conducted virtually with each one lasting at least 30 minutes. Two interviews extended beyond this time extending beyond an hour. The teachers appeared eager to share their experiences with the Reflective Practice Protocol despite

facing the challenges of educating students during a pandemic. At the completion of each interview, each teacher expressed gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences with the RPP.

As part of the interview process, each participant was asked a series of questions specifically designed to elicit their perceptions of the Reflective Practice Protocol.

Interview questions were designed to obtain information that would answer the three research questions guiding this study:

Question 1: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol is beneficial to their professional growth as an educator?

Question 2: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol creates a forum for reflection about teaching?

Question 3: What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses, if any, of the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol as implemented by the Willowood School District?

Research shows that meaningful teacher evaluation has the potential to improve instruction and help teachers grow professionally (Mielke & Frontier, 2012). As such, an exploration of teachers' perceptions of an alternative evaluation process will be helpful to educators and policy makers who make informed decisions about evaluation practices. Knowing specifically how teachers perceive the Reflective Practice Protocol will be beneficial to those who use this specific model and for those who use alternative models for evaluation. It will provide insight into which components are most helpful and which aspects teachers find useful. Additionally, understanding how teachers perceive this model will prove helpful when designing alternative options for evaluation practices.

This research study was guided by three primary research questions. This chapter will present the findings of teachers' responses to these questions by listing the themes that emerged during the interviews. When viewed holistically, these themes help to answer the research questions.

Theme 1: Traditional Evaluation Compared to Reflective Practice

Teachers view the traditional evaluation model and alternative evaluation model as being different in regard to process and purpose while viewing the reflective practice more favorably.

Traditional Evaluation

With regard to the purpose of the traditional evaluation process, the participant responses suggested three main purposes: ensuring teacher accountability in meeting expectations, supporting teacher growth and improvement, and improving instruction. Three of the 10 teachers interviewed stated that the purpose of evaluations is to ensure teacher accountability in meeting expectations. Teacher 4 directly spoke to the idea of ensuring compliance. She stated that the purpose of the traditional evaluation is to “make sure we are meeting the needs of the students, as well as doing curriculum, and following things like that.” Teacher 8 stated that traditional teacher evaluation allows for the supervisors to measure whether or not expectations are being met and to “see our performance, and whether we’re meeting our own set expectations, and then our supervisor’s expectations.” Teacher 3 spoke of how a traditional evaluation process engages the teacher in a review of instructional practices and a discussion about how instruction could be enhanced for improved student outcomes. Two of the participants

mentioned the word “improvement,” and another described how teacher evaluation is designed to help a teacher “fine tune” instruction so improvements can be recognized.

The participants also identified another purpose for traditional teacher evaluation. Nine of the 10 teachers interviewed referred to its purpose as being that of a process designed to foster professional growth. Specifically, 4 of the 10 teachers mentioned some variation of the word “grow” in their responses. Teacher 2 elaborated on how a traditional observation process should work if it is designed to support teacher growth.

What should happen is that somebody comes in, gets a snapshot, maybe one or more times, and identifies areas where a teacher can grow and also encourages a teacher in areas where they are doing well to even improve upon that.

Reflective Practice Protocol

Six teacher responses identified the purpose of the Reflective Practice Protocol as being that of an experience designed to allow teachers to develop. Teacher 10 spoke directly to the role of reflection in this process, “The idea is for you as an educator to reflect on your practice and to think about what you could change and what you could do differently.” Teacher 5 stated that the alternative evaluation process provides an opportunity or “chance” for teachers to examine their own practice and decide what they can learn from doing so.

When responding to the interview questions, seven teachers compared the traditional evaluation model to the reflective practice protocol, viewing the latter in a more positive manner. Teacher 4 described the Reflective Practice Protocol as being “a million times better than a person coming in and just randomly seeing me on whatever day it fits in their schedule.” Teacher 2 stated that the Reflective Practice Protocol “helped me to reflect so much more, I think, than the individual lesson where an

administrator comes in, and then, you know, really observes you on just that day.” Two teachers described how the process engages the teacher throughout the year rather than just being a one-time event.

Theme 2: Role of the Teacher and Role of the Evaluator

Teachers specifically describe the role of the evaluator and teacher in the Reflective Practice Protocol in two distinct ways; the teacher as a self-directed learner and the evaluator as a facilitator. Teachers also described how these roles affect conversation during the evaluation process.

Role of the Teacher

Teachers spoke to the changed role of the teacher in the Reflective Practice Protocol. This change enabled them to be in a position of autonomy and continuous reflection. Several teachers stated that the Reflective Practice Protocol permitted them to be in control of their growth and learning. This was specific to how they chose to use their time, which goals to set, and how to evaluate their learning.

When speaking of autonomy with regard to the RPP, Teacher 1 used the phrase “teachers to have ownership” to describe what this evaluation model allows. Teacher 2 further elaborated on the concept of ownership and how the RPP process allows her to “have ownership of what I want to do with my time, what my goals are and what I think is important and what I want to investigate.” In addition to having control over selecting an area of focus, teachers spoke to the control they are given over how they manage the actual process. Teacher 3 stated, “We have more control over the situation.” Five teachers

spoke to having control with regard to deciding how to allocate time during the evaluation.

The interview participants also spoke about how the Reflective Practice Protocol enabled them to have a more significant role in the evaluation of their teaching. One teacher described how being more involved in the scoring process affected her, “It changes the whole perception of the whole thing, whereas you have more of a say in the scoring aspect of it.” Three teachers also mentioned the idea of being a self-evaluator. Teacher 4 explained how being in this role affected her, “I feel like I learned a lot more when I evaluate myself and do the alternative evaluation.” Teacher 5 spoke to how being an evaluator of her own teaching affects the role of the administrator in the process, “I’m really doing the evaluating, I feel like my supervisor is usually facilitating, just letting me explore it and letting me discuss it.”

Teachers also spoke to how the Reflective Practice Protocol fosters reflective behaviors enabling them to serve in the role of a reflective practitioner. Teacher 6 described that this model requires the teacher “to reflect upon their practices and their lessons.” Teacher 10 described how being in the reflective mode forces metacognition, “really forces you to think about your own instruction” and makes the teacher “reflect on their teaching and what they noticed.” Teacher 7 stated that the teacher serves in this reflective role throughout the entire process reflecting both on the video of being in the act of teaching and on other components of the process including, but not limited to, the conversations with the evaluator.

Role of the Evaluator

There were primarily three ways in which the teachers described the role of the evaluator: as a facilitator of learning who guides the teacher to resources that may help during the process, as a supportive force who encourages reflective behaviors, and as a collaborator who works with them through the learning process. With regard to being a facilitator of learning, teachers spoke to how the evaluator provided helpful resources. Teacher 1 stated, “They offer to connect teachers with others who may be resourceful, or to resources such as professional development opportunities.” Teacher 10 explained how the evaluator listens to the teacher and “potentially provides some resources or some opportunities to help the teacher grow in the area they were looking to grow in.” Teacher 2 spoke of how the administrator facilitates learning through collaboration by connecting teachers who share similar interests or topics in the Reflective Practice Protocol, “They help connect you to others who may be interested in similar areas as you are.” Teacher 2 explained how helpful this is in that it helps to avoid having the “teacher work in isolation.”

The teachers also spoke of the ways in which the evaluator acts as a supportive force in the process. When describing how an evaluator may offer a resource in a supportive manner Teacher 5 said the evaluator may say, “This is something that you need” to a teacher who may be in need of a resource. Another teacher spoke to how the evaluator supports a teacher in setting a focus for the Reflective Practice Protocol. This teacher described the evaluator as someone who supported their learning by helping them to refine the objective of the study. Teacher 5 spoke to how the evaluator provided support to the teacher by encouraging them to think about ways in which he or she could

further apply what was learned and transfer to other areas. When describing this process, Teacher 5 used the phrases “to support” and “to extend what I have learned.”

Teachers also described the evaluator as being more collaborative in the learning process. Being collaborative meant that the evaluator did certain things such as finding resources for the teacher and allowing the teacher to take more ownership of the process. Additionally, engaging in conversation with the teacher about the process and findings was also perceived as being collaborative. Teacher 3 described the dialogue between the two during this process as “more of a running dialogue,” while Teacher 7 described it as a “sounding board” or a “mirror.”

How Roles Affect Conversation

The participants also described how the shift in roles during the Reflective Practice Protocol affected the entire evaluation process. For example, teachers perceived the process as being more collegial in nature. When speaking to the process directly, Teacher 5 spoke to the shift from the evaluator as an observer during the traditional evaluation and the role of the evaluator during the Reflective Practice Protocol. Teacher 3 explained that having the interaction between the evaluator and teacher as more conversational in nature changes the process. Two teachers referred to this exchange as a conversational approach with Teacher 4 calling this interaction a “discussion with evaluator,” Teacher 5 referring to it as “talking with evaluator,” and Teacher 3 describing it as “a dialogue, less formal.” Teacher 5 described this by making a comparison to the traditional evaluation model:

More than the other process, this process gives the teacher a sense of ownership which allows for more of a conversation than just being in a situation where you are being graded. Sometimes asking about a score may come across as

challenging the evaluator. This process, you are not nervous. There is more open dialogue.

With regard to collegiality, teachers were asked the specific question, “To what extent, if any, does the Reflective Practice Protocol foster professional and collegial conversation between the teacher and the evaluator?” Ten of the 10 teachers responded favorably. With regard to collegiality, one teacher stated that the overall process, “totally changes that conversation and the level of collegiality” between the teacher and evaluator. Two teachers spoke of how the protocol allows for more impactful collegial conversation. Teacher 6 spoke to how this impacted growth, “It’s a conversation so you’re getting good feedback and you’re getting their point of view and what your strengths are and what you need to improve on.” Teacher 1 also spoke to collegiality and its lasting impact, “It’s the continual conversation that I think is more valuable in terms of professional growth throughout the school year. Using the reflective practice should kind of carry you throughout a lot of other instructional instances throughout the year.”

Two teachers spoke to how collegial conversations impacted the conversation and relationship between the evaluator and teacher. They spoke of how the process affected collegiality and the emotional component of learning. One teacher described the latter role shift and its impact on the relationship, “I would say it has taken away the intimidation factor where somebody is coming to observe you.” One teacher stated that the process “raised the level of discourse” between the teacher and evaluator. This teacher also spoke to how the Reflective Practice Protocol will “level the playing field a bit” suggesting that the traditional evaluation model has an unequal balance of power.

This teacher also spoke to how the overall process of the reflective practice protocol affects the relationship between the evaluator and the teacher:

It shows that there's kind of a level of trust and professionalism that the admin have for their staff. It's the admins saying, "I trust you enough, and I believe in what you're doing. And I know that you've got the skills and I don't have to give you this information. I don't have to come in and watch you. I know you're good, I know what you're capable of. Now it's time that you see what you're good at and what you are capable of."

Theme 3: Reflective Practice Protocol Fosters Reflection

Teachers spoke of the Reflective Practice Protocol's ability to foster reflection. When asked specifically about the process of the Reflective Practice Protocol, several teachers described the process as being completely reflective in nature. Specifically, six of the 10 teachers interviewed used words such as "completely," "whole," "entire," and "all" to describe how much of the process was self-reflective. One teacher spoke to the continual nature of reflection during the RPP, "You are constantly thinking about something." Another teacher stated, "The whole process from beginning to end can really just be one big reflection."

When speaking of reflection, teachers also indicated how the Reflective Practice Protocol impacted their thinking. One teacher described this impact as "pretty significant," while another described it as having "a major impact on practices." When discussing how the Reflective Practice Protocol was able to foster the process of reflection, Teacher 3 described, "reflecting in the sense that I'm trying to figure out what I need to get there on the rubric." Teacher 8 referred to the process as being educational in nature "like constructivism." Teachers also described how participating in the Reflective Practice Protocol affected their instructional practice, "made me rethink social

emotional learning,” “definitely changed the way I coach students,” “made me rethink how I do behavior management.” Teachers indicated that the process continually engaged them in reflection about their teaching and ways to improve their teaching.

Perceptions of Components

Teachers also spoke to the components and their role in the process. The use of the video was viewed most favorably with regard to being the most beneficial aspect of this process. Teachers spoke to how the video enabled them to gain a different perspective other than the one of being a teacher in the act of teaching. Teachers felt that they were able to see things they were not aware of while they were teaching such as the interactions between themselves and the student(s), the way the teacher sounded during the lesson, and the way students behaved that they may not have noticed while in the act of teaching. The next two components to be viewed most favorably are the conversations the teacher has with the evaluator and the practice of self-scoring with the use of the rubric. These two aspects were viewed as being helpful in fostering reflection about instructional practice. The survey was mentioned by two teachers who felt that it was helpful in giving them even more perspective about their teaching. Having more perspective was viewed as being important to the reflection process thereby leading to potential improvement to practice.

Theme 4: Teachers and the Process

Teachers have suggestions to improve the manageability of the process and to foster collaboration.

Structure and Process

With regard to the process, four teachers spoke to the actual timeline and structure of the Reflective Practice Protocol. For example, one teacher suggested offering training at the start of the process but did not elaborate on what that training would include. Two teachers suggested that the scoring process use the domain factors instead of the components. Scoring at the component level was perceived to be time consuming and overly cumbersome. Several teachers also suggested allowing more opportunities for collaboration. This included adding more classroom visits to be conducted by the evaluator. This teacher felt that this would allow the evaluator to have more data points that would help foster reflection during the reflective conversations. Another teacher suggested there be some process whereby they could share the “findings” or learning from the Reflective Practice Protocol with colleagues. This was perceived to be beneficial as it would allow for more collegial collaboration.

With regard to the overall process, one teacher spoke of the importance of process fidelity stating, “When used with fidelity it gets at the heart of what it’s meant to do.” Another teacher spoke of the limitations of providing this option to only teachers identified as highly effective on the summative scoring range. This teacher felt that this process should be extended to those outside of this rating. Another teacher also recommended removing any limits as to the number of times a teacher could participate in this alternative evaluation process.

Teachers also suggested that having a forum in which to share their own findings about their specific process would be helpful in gaining additional feedback. They also expressed the importance of hearing from others who have experienced the same process.

The ability to share and learn from colleagues was viewed as a way in which to enhance the Reflective Practice Protocol allowing for more collaboration with peers.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of teachers' perceptions of the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol is beneficial to their professional growth as an educator?

Question 2: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol creates a forum for reflection about teaching?

Question 3: What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses, if any, of the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol as implemented by the Willowood School District?

The findings of the 10 interviews were presented under four themes outlining teachers' perceptions of the process, the value of the process, and their recommendations for improvements to the process. Under each theme, certain categories emerged, which spoke to the purpose of both the traditional and alternative evaluation models, the roles of the participants, the value of the process, and the impact of the components included in the Reflective Practice Protocol. Additionally, teachers' suggestions for improving the process have been included. Chapter V will include a more detailed discussion of these findings and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the study beginning with the identification of the problem and the purpose of the study. This will be followed by the research questions that guided the investigation. This chapter includes a discussion of literature of a relevant nature and two theoretical frameworks on which this investigation was developed. Finally, this chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for further study and considerations for the field of education.

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of an alternative evaluation model, specifically New Jersey's Reflective Practice Protocol. The research about teacher effectiveness indicates that it is one of the most significant factors affecting student achievement. As such, ensuring teacher effectiveness is paramount and having structures in place such as teacher evaluation systems are instrumental to this process. However, traditional evaluation systems often do not result in teacher development or improvement. Some models are also not perceived positively by some teachers. As a result, those in the field of education have looked to alternatives to the traditional approaches of evaluation, seeking models that better support teacher development and learning. Having an understanding of how the teachers involved in these alternative models perceive them is of great importance. As such, this study explored teachers' perceptions of one example of an alternative evaluation model called the Reflective Practice Protocol.

Summary and Discussions of Major Findings

Findings Related to Research Question 1

The literature has shown the importance of teacher effectiveness on student achievement. Teacher effectiveness can be viewed as having a range of specific skills and knowledge (Mitchell et al., 2001). Opportunities for professional learning such as the observation and evaluation process are one of the mechanisms to support growth in this regard. Research Question 1 states: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol is beneficial to their professional growth as an educator? This question was designed to gain understanding of how teachers view this alternative evaluation model and its role in their own learning as an educator.

With respect to its ability to benefit teachers' growth and learning, a majority of the teachers indicated that the process fostered reflection, which, in turn, helped them to examine their instructional practice for effectiveness. Throughout the Reflective Practice Protocol process, the teacher would consider ways to improve their lesson design for the purpose of improving student outcomes. Teachers also spoke to the continuous nature of learning that the Reflective Practice afforded. They described it as being better than a traditional observation event because it was not random in nature. Rather, the alternative model allowed for an ongoing process. This put them in the role of a self-directed learner.

Teachers attributed being in continual learner mode during the Reflective Practice Protocol to the roles that the teacher and evaluator both served in this process. In the role of self-directed learner, teachers described themselves as having more ownership of their learning. They spoke to the idea of being in control and having more decision-making about the effectiveness of their teaching and the areas in which to improve. Teachers felt

they had more involvement in the scoring process or evaluation of their practice, viewing the Reflective Practice Protocol as the more preferred evaluation approach when compared to the traditional evaluation approach.

Teachers also spoke to the role of the evaluator in the Reflective Practice Protocol and how it differs from that of the role of the evaluator during a traditional evaluation model. Viewed more as a facilitator of learning, the teachers perceived the evaluator as being a resource to the teacher, introducing her to more knowledge and information related to the area of investigation. The responses also indicated that the teachers viewed the evaluator as being supportive of their learning, creating an open and ongoing dialogue for discussion about instruction whereby the evaluator serves to encourage reflection. Additionally, teachers explained this approach as being more beneficial to their learning both by helping the teacher think of ways in which to improve and to extend their instructional practice. They spoke to the level of collegiality in these conversations and described how the evaluator provided them with meaningful feedback, offered a different perspective, and encouraged the development of strengths. One teacher spoke to how the interaction between the teacher and evaluator in this context allowed for the development of trust on the part of the teacher.

Findings Related to Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: To what extent do teachers perceive that the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol creates a forum for reflection about teaching? When asked about the role of reflection in this process, teachers felt that it was continual and ongoing. It differed with regard to how one thinks when compared with the traditional observation model, which focuses on reflections about one specific lesson. The

Reflective Practice Protocol is a process that extends beyond one event. Teacher responses indicated that they perceived the Reflective Practice Protocol as an ongoing reflective experience whereby the teacher continually engaged in metacognitive processes about instructional practice. Reflection of this nature is fostered by the role of the evaluator who acts in a supportive and encouraging nature throughout the process.

Teachers, without actually stating the terms, spoke to the ways in which reflection happens. They spoke about how watching the video of themselves in the act of teaching enabled them to gain insight that they might otherwise not have had. Additionally, they spoke about how their interactions with the evaluator enabled them to think about their instruction or area of focus in a new and different manner. Having the evaluator provide support in the form of connecting them to other resources, and even teachers, proved helpful in this regard. Also, having information about the way in which their students perceived learning allowed the teacher to have greater empathy for the learning, which, in turn, allowed them to consider new ideas and perspectives. Overall, the Reflective Practice Protocol's design created an ongoing forum in which teachers were able to think reflectively both about themselves in the act of teaching and how they might consider new instructional techniques for the purpose of student achievement.

Findings Related to Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked teachers: What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses, if any, of the use of the Reflective Practice Protocol as implemented by the Willowood School District? When provided the opportunity to offer their opinions, teachers spoke to the strengths of the Reflective Practice Protocol and offered improvements to make the process more manageable.

Teachers repeatedly spoke to the sense of control they felt throughout the process. They explained that the process was less intimidating and anxiety producing than that of the traditional model that they had previously experienced. They also spoke to how the process allowed for relevancy with regard to meeting their individual learning needs and interests. These aspects and attributes are perceived by teachers in a positive manner and as such can be viewed as strengths of the Reflective Practice Protocol.

With regard to weaknesses of the Reflective Practice Protocol, teachers suggested modifying certain components of the model that they felt were unnecessary to their growth or that caused elements of anxiety. One recommendation made in an attempt to reduce anxiety and stress was to adjust the level at which performance is scored referring to a change from scoring at the element level to the component level. Teachers stated that this would result in a less cumbersome process, which would allow the teacher to focus on other aspects. Also, making these adjustments would potentially help to avoid the anxiety teachers may feel when perseverating over the hyper nuances involved in scoring detailed, specific attributes of teaching.

Teachers also suggested the addition of another aspect to the Reflective Practice Protocol as an opportunity. This addition would provide teachers with the opportunity to learn in a collaborative manner by sharing and discussing their own process and their colleagues' process with the Reflective Practice Protocol. Teachers stated that having such opportunities would support their own growth. They felt that their colleagues could offer them suggestions for further improvement. They also felt that they would learn from the experiences of their colleagues with the Reflective Practice Protocol.

Findings Related to the Theoretical Frameworks

Zone of Proximal Teacher Development

Applying the lens of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, Warford (2011) applied components of this theory to teacher candidates making a slight modification and switching the first two stages in Vygotsky's model. Warford reordered the stages as (1) the self-assistance stage, (2) the expert other assistance stage, (3) internalization, and (4) recurrence and named this new framework as the zone of proximal teacher development (ZPTD). The teachers at Willowood School District, when describing their experiences, spoke to these stages and their roles in the learning process.

With regard to the self-assistance stage, Warford (2011) spoke to how reflection enables the candidates to identify the beliefs they have about teaching and how this may impact their instruction. Teachers in the study specifically stated how they reflected on the choices they made about instruction and the changes that would have led to improved practice and increased student achievement. They also spoke to things they could do differently in the future. Teachers also spoke to the preconceived ideas they had about evaluation models and how the Reflective Practice Protocol changed their perceptions about how an evaluation process could be used to support teacher learning.

Warford's (2011) second stage speaks to the role of the expert teacher. In this study this would pertain to the role the evaluator plays in this process. Teachers spoke to the evaluator as being able to support their growth. They shared examples of how the evaluator facilitated their learning by sharing resources, promoting new ways of thinking, and by connecting them with others who may be of assistance. This view has a strong connection to the original Vygotskian theory for children. It is reminiscent of the stage

where the teachers serve in the role of a coach to the student, scaffolding activities and providing resources to support student learning.

Teachers also spoke to certain attributes of this process that are reflected in the final two stages of ZPTD, internalization and recurrence. With regard to internalizing learning, teachers spoke about what they had learned from participating in the Reflective Practice Protocol. They specifically named examples of how participation with each of the components led them to new discoveries and understandings of their practice. After processing this information and making adjustments to instruction, teachers would then elaborate on its benefit to their learning. They would speak about continuing to use this strategy again and in the future. Grounding evaluation in learning theories that are aligned to how one learns is more likely to lead to effective professional development (Eun, 2008).

Reflection

Teacher responses indicated that the process lent itself to what Shön (1987) referred to as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Teachers spoke of the value of viewing the video of themselves. This component put them back into the act of teaching, only with further awareness; they were able to envision themselves back in the act of teaching and they were able to watch themselves in the act. This fostered both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action processes. As a result, teachers looked to find ways to improve what was happening as they were happening. They were also able to contemplate what they would have done differently in an effort to be more effective and what they would do in the future.

Teachers also spoke about how the reflective conferences with the evaluator fostered reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. When the evaluator offered areas that the teacher should consider, this made the teacher reflect and consider the implications of such on their instruction and their students. When the evaluator asked the teacher reflective questions, this also prompted the teacher to think in reflective ways about their instruction.

During these conversations, teachers described being able to revisit ideas about instruction, consider alternatives, and think about future implications for their new learning. Viewed as supportive in nature, teachers viewed these conversations as impactful. They spoke of how these conversations foster reflection throughout the entire process and sometimes even thereafter.

Recommendations for Theory, Policy, and Research

There is a disconnect between the intended purpose of teacher evaluation—to ensure teacher effectiveness—and how evaluation practices are effectuated. The literature shows the importance of teacher ownership in learning, how learning occurs, and the significance of reflection to one’s growth and development as a practitioner; however, often traditional evaluation practices are not successful in fostering these attributes. The current study suggests the need to provide alternative models for evaluations that empower teachers to take a more active role in their learning, support them during the learning process, and encourage them to continually reflect about their teaching practices. As such, it is strongly recommended that policy:

1. Revisit the design of current evaluation systems and revise those components or procedures that do not align with the attributes that teachers found more effective. For example, current evaluation systems focus on elaborate scoring processes that try to capture the value of teacher effectiveness. The findings in this study have shown that teachers find this process stressful and cumbersome rather than important to their improvement. Additionally, because of the positive perceptions that teachers had about the use of video for reflective purposes and its impact on their instruction, it is recommended that evaluation practices include a requirement for teachers to film themselves in the act of teaching. Doing so will help to foster additional reflection in that may not happen otherwise without this component.
2. Consider the importance of how teachers perceive the structures and processes that are designed to support their own learning. As such, teachers should be provided with the opportunity to provide input about these systems and their benefit to their learning. Having an understanding of those who are more directly affected by these systems, the very people these systems are designed to help, is vital to knowing if they are working.
3. Align teacher evaluation systems with how one learns. Evaluation systems to include the teacher in the learning process, allowing her to be a more active participant in the process. Put evaluators in the role of supporters, rather than judges of teachers' performance. Setting norms or focus questions for post observation conferences that promote more active thinking on the part of the teacher would be helpful to this process.

4. Incorporate an aspect of reflection in evaluation systems. Reflection has shown to be important to one's growth and learning. Including opportunities for such during the evaluation process suggests the importance of this practice and will likely lead to more educators participating in reflective thinking about instruction, students, and learning.

Prior to conducting the observation, the teacher should complete a reflection document that prompts thinking about the intended outcomes of the lesson and the design of the lesson. These responses can serve as a point of conversation during the pre-observation conference. Part of the evaluation process can include the completion of a reflection document after the observation has been conducted and prior to the post-observation conference. The reflection document would include questions designed to engage teachers in thinking about whether or not the objective was successfully met and whether or not the instructional design could be modified for further improvement. As part of the post-observation process, the teacher can become more actively engaged by sharing the content of his or her reflection. In turn, the evaluator can prompt more reflective thinking by asking follow-up questions about the reflections that the teacher shared.

Recommendations for Practice

This study is useful to educational leaders who design evaluation systems as it provides insight about how and what teachers find beneficial to their learning. It also provides insight into which components they view as needing to be adjusted. Knowing this, it is recommended that school district education leaders implement the following

elements into their models of professional growth including, but not limited to, the evaluation process. The following are ways in which this can be accomplished:

1. Create professional development opportunities that examine the use of video for teacher growth. Providing teachers with the opportunity to watch themselves in the act of teaching has great benefits; it promotes reflective practices that lead to examining one's instruction and effectiveness. This process will promote teacher growth and improvement thereby helping to increase teacher effectiveness. This process can be supported by the use of specific questions used to guide reflective thinking. For example, asking the teacher to reflect on any of the following would facilitate this process:
 - a. Were the students actively engaged in the lesson and how do you know that? Is there any other way in which to further engage students?
 - b. What evidence was there that every student met the learning objective? How might the lesson design be modified to provide further evidence of such?
 - c. In what ways did the instructional design account for the vast differences in students' abilities? What other techniques or lesson modifications may further allow for more students' needs to be met?
2. When designing evaluation practices, it is important to keep certain concepts at the forefront of decision making. Evaluation models should be cognizant of the role that humanist components play in this process. For example, leaders need

to account for the emotional aspect of learning as there is a sense of vulnerability when one's performance is evaluated and this can cause stress, anxiety, or worry on the part of the person being evaluated. Evaluators should be sensitive to this and avoid punitive measures for addressing deficiencies in instructional practice. Rather, they should focus on the learning process and act in a coaching capacity by being an encouraging force. Evaluators should act in supportive ways, acknowledging strengths and providing feedback. Acting in this manner will help to recognize the human aspect and remove some of the stress and anxiety that is the formality of the traditional evaluation process. As one teacher stated, the highly supportive role of the evaluator in the Reflective Practice Protocol "raised the level of discourse" between the teacher and evaluator and helped to "level the playing field a bit," suggesting the importance of the emotional aspect of learning. Redesigning evaluation practices that encourage the evaluator to be more supportive of learning is imperative to supporting teachers in reflective practices. Leaders should examine the strategies used to prompt reflective thinking, as well as other factors that lead one to be perceived as supportive. Whenever possible, these strategies should be incorporated into professional learning structures.

3. Understanding the perceptions of students can provide valuable insight that the educators may not otherwise have. Whenever possible, teachers should seek opportunities to get student voices into the classroom both during and outside of evaluation processes. Using surveys to assess students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the instructional design, the most effective learning

processes, and any other relevant information that may be of value to the teacher is recommended. Additionally, it will help to convey a message that students are part of the learning process, thereby reinforcing the social aspect of learning.

4. Leaders should design forums and provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate with others. In this study, teachers spoke to their desire for more opportunities to discuss learning with other educators. Specifically, teachers wanted to discuss what they learned as educators and want to share these insights with others. Teachers also expressed an interest to hear from other educators. The desire for collaboration speaks to the social constructivism aspect of learning and its perceived value to the learning. Whenever possible, educational leaders should create forums for teachers to collaborate with others to discuss teaching and learning.

Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation to this study was the time in which the research actually took place. Participants were interviewed during a pandemic, which put an incredible drain on education. As such, the participant's time and perceptions of the observation may have been affected by these conditions.

Another limitation pertains to the population of this study. As the study included only 10 teachers employed in a K–8 high-performing, suburban, affluent school district, the perceptions are limited in scope, which has been restricted to a relatively homogeneous group of teachers. As such, the perceptions that were analyzed in this study

and the conclusion of such cannot be applied to teachers in general. For example, a population in a different school with different grade configurations and socioeconomic needs may not be represented by the perceptions of the teachers involved in this study.

Another limitation in this study is that it was conducted only in one district, and that district included a very strong leadership who expressed their support for this alternative evaluation model. As such, there was a district expectation surrounding this practice. Understanding the perceptions of teachers in other districts would allow for a more vast understanding how different demographics of teachers perceive the model.

Recommendations for Future Research

Examining any aspect of a system provides information. As such, this study provided information about how one group of teachers from one specific school district perceived one type of alternative evaluation model, the Reflective Practice Protocol. To add to the field of research around alternative methods to evaluation, teacher growth and learning, and supportive leadership, it is suggested that the following topics be explored:

1. Examine the perceptions of the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol by expanding this study to a wider, more diverse population of teachers. Specifically, interview teachers who have more diversity in their demographics, for example, differing levels of experience and different school configurations in which they work, or any other variable that may be examined in the literature review.
2. Explore the perceptions of teachers who are less effective with regard to their instructional effectiveness. In addition to exploring the questions in this study,

- explore the differences in how less effective and more effective teachers view this study.
3. Explore how evaluators perceive the Reflective Practice Protocol and its effect on the teacher learning process. This can be examined by exploring certain aspects of the process. For example, how does participation in the Reflective Practice Protocol affect teacher self-efficacy, motivation, and teacher practice.
 4. Explore how evaluators perceive the Reflective Practice Protocol and its role in supporting teacher learning. Future research can examine how the evaluators view their role as a leader in this process and the level of importance they give to teacher growth. It can also provide information about the ways in which to help educational leaders better support teacher learning. It would also be helpful for them to know which components teachers find useful to their growth so that these components can be infused within other professional development structures.

Implications of the Study

First, I believe this study has implications both for the educational field and the greater organizational management field. With regard to educational implications, this study can help those in education who play a role in either designing or implementing evaluation practices. For those leaders in New Jersey, this study can help inform decision-making regarding evaluation practices under ACHIEVE NJ. Also, the findings from this study may help in determining whether or not to extend this alternative option to those educators whose ratings fall outside of the highly effective ranking category or

whether or not it should remain an option only for those teachers identified as highly effective.

This study is designed to examine evaluation practices specific to the field of education. However, because the theoretical frameworks for this study are applicable to areas such as reflection and learning, I believe the findings of this study are applicable to anywhere the performance of an employee is valued and recognized as important. Knowing the benefits of self-directed learning, knowing how management can support learning, and knowing how those affected by the very systems designed to support growth perceive them is transferable to any system designed to make people more effective.

Conclusion

Teachers are significant to student learning. For this reason, they need to be effective in their instructional practice, and educational leaders have a responsibility to ensure teacher effectiveness. Although educational leaders have designed these systems intended for this purpose, most systems have been designed with a greater focus on compliance and accountability rather than teacher growth. However, alternatives to these traditional practices do exist. In the state of New Jersey, teachers have opted to participate in one of these alternative models referred to as the Reflective Practice Protocol. As several studies show, when perceptions of evaluation are favorable, teachers are more inclined to improve their practices (Donaldson, 2012; Sutton, 2008; Tuytens & Devos, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand how teachers perceive alternative models such as the New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol. This insight into whether or

not alternative models can be an effective tool to ensure teacher growth and improve teacher effectiveness. The results of this will have exponential effects that will benefit the education of students both immediately and in the long term.

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March 11, 2021

Karen Chase
Seton Hall University

Re: 2021-177

Dear Ms. Chase,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled, "Teachers' Perceptions of an Alternate Evaluation Model" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. If your study has a consent form or letter of solicitation, they are included in this mailing for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Sincerely,

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN
Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

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