The Muted Expert: A Qualitative Study on the Principals’ Perceptions and Experiences of the Current Teacher Evaluation System

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THE MUTED EXPERT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE PRINCIPALS’
PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE CURRENT
TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

A Dissertation in Education
with a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

Principals are responsible for evaluating millions of teachers through a formal teacher evaluation process (US Department of Education, 2012a). Students’ achievement relies on effective teachers (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2015), and principals are expected to use teacher evaluation systems to accomplish that goal.

This qualitative study examined how five principals perceive the current teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers. It also explored their experiences implementing it. Three themes emerged from the interviews: principal into coach, increased principal-teacher communication, and empathy about challenges. Based on the data, findings were analyzed through the lens of Bass’ Transformational Theory (1985) and Greenleaf’s Servant Leadership framework (1996). The principals’ extensive leadership practices and individualized teacher supports were an illustration of their commitment to serve and transform behaviors that contributed to teachers’ growth and thus improve student outcomes.

Findings from the analysis suggest that the teacher evaluation system successfully accomplished the goal of supporting the development of teachers. Through the increased communication efforts, the teacher evaluation system was perceived as a fair and empowering process for teachers. The training and natural emergence of the principal into the role of a coach originated from the teacher evaluation system. Although the principals acknowledged the existence of challenges, they felt the issues were outweighed by the net benefit the entire system had to offer.

This study informs researchers, practitioners, and policymakers on the value of principals’ perspectives as related to the development and implementation of teacher evaluation systems.
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I would like to dedicate this study to my grandmother, Geneva Stringer, who moved my mother, Marguerite Butler “to the North” so she could have better educational opportunities. My children and I have benefitted from that decision. For that, I am forever grateful.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Principals’ understanding of the implementation and use of the teacher evaluation system is critical to the public school system. The current teacher evaluation system, including teacher observations and a student growth measure, has been widely adopted across the nation. Approximately 98,000 public elementary and high school principals (US Department of Education, 2012a) will potentially be facilitators of the system. There are 3.7 million public school teachers (US Department of Education, 2012b) who will possibly be evaluated by the system. The current surge of this updated teacher evaluation system has influenced the principals’ role, and principals are at the center of these teacher evaluation expectations.

Principals have been noted as the key personnel who directly affect student achievement through the supervision and evaluation of teaching (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012; Marshall, 2009). The principal’s presence as the school building leader has evolved into different roles and responsibilities, but teacher evaluation, with the goal of improving teacher performance, has remained a common practice. As significant players in the teacher evaluation process, principals’ perceptions are relevant to the success of teacher evaluations.

Political pressures, policies, and societal phenomena have in some capacity influenced the variations of teacher evaluations. Regulations and legislation were driven to improve education for all children in America, particularly for children and youth who have historically been denied equal opportunities to learn due to economic disadvantage and other barriers to academic success (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Cross, 2010). The federal goals for the current teacher evaluation system are for principals to increase students’ achievement by helping teachers improve their instructional practice, to use evaluation to inform their personnel decisions, and to include student growth data to measure and judge teacher effectiveness.
(Marshall, 2009; Shakman, Breslow, Kochanek, Riordan, & Haferd, 2012). Many stakeholders, such as legislators, parents, and taxpayer groups, agree that student growth data should be used in teacher evaluation as an indicator of school quality (Peterson, 2004). Students’ growth is calculated from students’ standardized testing results over time. Standardized testing has been used as the data for all 50 states’ accountability systems under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a federal law authorizing federal spending on K-12 education. Regardless of the criticism on the emphasis of testing that exists (Irons & Harris, 2007), the federal government found it relevant by including it as a criteria for teacher evaluations in the competitive grant program, Race to the Top (RttT).

Historically, the evaluation of teacher performance was measured against checklists administered by a principal once a year accompanied by a perfunctory conference. With the RttT regulations, principals are implementing a formal process that includes observation, reflective conferences, and student growth data as evaluative measures. Prior to this regulation, some states such as Tennessee, California, and Florida (Goldhaber, 2010; Sanders & Horn, 1998) implemented a value-added model of student progress tied to teacher evaluation. RttT offered states the option to adopt the teacher evaluation regulations in exchange for federal funds. Many of these districts have a large number of children living in poverty, histories of below average student achievement, and struggles with funding. For these reasons, districts are likely to apply for the grant, and principals are required to implement the teacher evaluation system regulated by the RttT.

Principals are those most accountable for judging the quality of teachers’ performance (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). They are expected to implement the teacher evaluation system their district adopts to improve teacher performance and in turn increase student achievement.
What view do principals have about the teacher evaluation system adopted by a public Midwestern school district? In the following section, a way to examine principals’ perceptions about the use of the current teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers and their experiences with implementation is reviewed.

**Research Problem**

Principals, as key agents for managing schools, are responsible for supervising and evaluating teachers and must understand the current teacher evaluation system. Danielson (2007) suggests that observing and evaluating teachers, as part of the principal’s role, is extremely valuable because it is a resource that aims to prepare teachers for their work and to improve their practice. The principals’ contributions to these efforts are important because there is a direct relationship between the quality of a teacher and his/her students’ learning (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002). Principals are responsible for ensuring that there are effective teachers in the classrooms, so optimal student learning takes place. For these reasons, principals use teacher evaluations as tools to fulfill that obligation.

Teacher evaluation systems have varied over the years, but the federal government regulates the current model. In exchange for federal funds, many states responded to the 2009 federal competitive grant program, Race to the Top (RtT). RtT encouraged states to design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals that differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories and data on student growth as factors. It was also recommended that the system should allow principals to provide timely feedback for professional development from a structured observation process as well as use the process to inform personnel decisions (Office of Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, 2012). In the past, student growth data had never been a requirement in teacher evaluation systems linked to
federal legislation. As a result of the enactment of RttT, Hull (2013) indicated that 35 states provided evidence that some form of student statistical model existed in their new teacher evaluation. In spite of widespread use of this model, limited research has been done to identify how principals understand the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers as well as principals’ experience with implementation.

Recent research contributes to what is already known about the current teacher evaluation system. Studies were centered widely on the implications of using student data (Baker et al., 2010; Chetty, Friedman, Rockoff, & National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011; Harris, 2011; Kane & Staiger, 2008; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Toch & Harris, 2008), multiple measures of teacher quality (Cohen, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Ellett & Teddlie, 2003; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Stronge & Tucker, 2000), and use of teacher evaluation as professional development (Danielson, 2007; Glanz & Sullivan, 2000; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). While such research has contributed to better understanding the current teacher evaluation system, the principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to improve teacher performance and principals’ experiences with implementation was not emphasized.

A limited number of studies have researched principals’ perceptions with teacher evaluations through a different lens. Derrington and Campbell (2013) and Hill (2013) studied the current teacher evaluation system that meets the criteria of the RttT grant in Tennessee and Colorado, respectively. Derrington and Campbell examined the principals’ perceptions of teacher evaluation, specifically as it relates to accountability measures. Hill explored the role of the secondary school principal in the context of the new teacher evaluation system. Although the two studies examined different aspects of teacher evaluation, both found that principals perceived the current teacher evaluation process as timely in completing the administrative tasks,
principal/teacher relationship as central to the evaluation process, and the observation cycle as
beneficial for collaboration with teachers about their practice. Hill, who studied high school
 principals exclusively, also found that principals grapple with their role as middle managers, and
they seek autonomy in their positions.

More recently, Jiany and Sporte (2014) looked specifically at the degree to which
Chicago Public Schools’ principals perceive their teacher evaluation system as a fair and
accurate measure of teacher effectiveness and how useful they find it for improving practice
from year one to year two of implementation. Overall, they learned that principals and teachers
were optimistic about the new system; however, they were less enthused about it in the second
year than the first year of implementation because of the changes. The changes referenced were
that tenured teachers’ evaluations counted toward their rating in the second year as opposed to
the first year. This consideration was intended to increase tenured teachers’ level of familiarity
with the teacher evaluation system. The additional evaluations for tenured teachers required of
principals affected their time and relationships with all teachers. Jiany and Sporte also found that
principals believed student growth can measure teacher effectiveness, and the observation
process was useful in targeting support. Indeed, Jiany and Sporte’s study is a significant
contribution to the literature, but the limitation of collecting data prior to the distribution of
summative evaluation reports may have influenced teachers’ and principals’ perceptions and, in
turn, resulted in biased findings.

The principals, as the facilitators responsible for the new teacher evaluation system,
should be included in the current body of scholarship. While recent research has focused on
accountability measures, the principals’ role, and their perception relative to its fairness and
accuracy of determining teacher efficacy, more information is needed on principals’ perceptions
about the use of the system to improve teacher performance, and their experience with implementation. My research built on that body of knowledge and helped fill the gap that exists.

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand K-8 principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers. A secondary purpose was to understand principals’ experience with implementation.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- How do K-8 principals understand the intentions and priorities of the current teacher evaluation system?
- How do principals perceive the teacher evaluation system improves teachers’ instructional practices?
- How has the teacher evaluation system impacted your role as a principal?

**Significance of the Study**

The study is significant because of the added value it brings to the existing body of scholarship centered on principals and their interaction with teacher evaluations. In 2014, it was reported that 35.1 million students attended pre-K to 8th grade public schools (US Department of Education, 2010). Students rely on effective teachers. For the same reason, principals are expected to ensure teachers are effective and to use teacher evaluations as one way of accomplishing that goal. Principals have a significant role in the teacher evaluation process and are responsible for leading the transformational change in improving teacher practice, but there are few teacher evaluation studies that include principals’ perceptions and experiences. Future studies should be able to replicate this study’s methodology for other K-8 districts to broaden the
literature on principals’ perceptions and experiences with teacher evaluation. Likewise, the study has practical significance. It provides policymakers the perceptions of principals who will help shape legislation, policy and guidelines as related to teacher evaluation. Along with policymakers, the results from this study will have implications for school districts because the findings express ways principals and teachers understand and engage with these new evaluation systems.

**Limitations**

The design of this study included a small number of principals within a public Midwestern school district. A small number of participants is not enough to generalize, but the intent is to obtain a deeper understanding.

**Delimitations**

Teacher evaluation is important in both elementary and secondary schools, but this study purposely focused on elementary principals in one public Midwestern school district for several reasons. This decision was made since my experience has been in an elementary school setting, and I’m interested in studying the world with which I am most familiar. The one public Midwestern school district was selected because it had launched pilot studies and completed research around past teacher evaluations. As evidenced by the district’s current research, the district continues to make a concerted effort to learn more about this area of study, so I will add my research to the body of literature that already exists. Additionally, there are more teachers impacted by teacher evaluations in this grade band compared to the high school grade band (US Department of Education, 2012). Elementary school teachers typically teach core subjects to one group of students, whereas high school teachers are content specialists and teach the same content with several groups of students who are rotated throughout their classes each day.
Mixing both groups would lead me to study principals’ perceptions of different processes within the teacher evaluation system. I recognized that assistant principals sometimes conduct teacher evaluation, but they aren’t included in this study because their roles and responsibilities are contingent on the principals’ discretion, which leads to variation across schools. Although the current teacher evaluation system includes student growth data as a measure to determine teachers’ effectiveness, it was not the focus of my study. This study did not examine teachers’ perceptions, the evaluation instrument, value-added evaluative measures, or high school principals’ perceptions; the focal point of this study was to understand K-8th grade principals’ perceptions of the use of the new teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers and principals’ experience with implementation.

Assumptions

The study was based on the assumption that the principals in the study had the required credentials to serve in this role and facilitate teacher evaluations. Also, the study assumed the principals had the knowledge and experience to conduct the new teacher evaluations in an accurate and consistent manner.

Definition of Terms

This section includes definitions of terms used in this study that do not have a common meaning. Clarification of these terms is necessary to prevent misunderstanding of words central to this qualitative study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

- Principal: the designated leader of an elementary school (grades K-8).
- Student growth data, as defined by Race to the Top Inviting Applications (Office of Deputy Secretary, DOE, 2012): the change in student achievement for an individual student between two or more points in time.
• Supervision as defined by Glanz and Sullivan (2000): a school-based activity, practice, or process that engages teachers in meaningful, nonjudgmental, ongoing instructional dialogue, and reflection for the purpose of improving teaching and learning.

• Teacher evaluation as defined by Race to the Top Inviting Applications (Office of Deputy Secretary, DOE, 2012): (1) is used for continual improvement of instruction; (2) meaningfully differentiates performance using at least three performance levels; (3) uses multiple valid measures in determining performance levels, including, as a significant factor, data on student growth for all students (including English language learners and students with disabilities) as well as other measures of professional practice (which may be gathered through multiple formats and sources such as observations based on rigorous teacher performance standards, teacher portfolios, and student and parent surveys); (4) evaluates teachers on a regular basis; (5) provides clear, timely, and useful feedback, including feedback that identifies and guides professional development needs; and (6) is used to inform personnel decisions. According to Nolan and Hoover (2005), teacher evaluation provides a picture of the quality of teaching performance across the staff, and the results are in some form of a summative rating, which can be numerical and/or qualitative.

To better understand the perspectives and experiences of principals with teacher evaluations, the following chapter reviews pertinent literature related to principals and teacher evaluations. The subsequent chapter includes my research strategy, methodology and methods for answering my research questions.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two includes literature pertaining to principals and teacher evaluations, which will provide background to understand the entry point into this research. The literature review begins by providing a description of the principals’ changing role, and the influence policy had on their specific responsibility of evaluating teachers. Then, the review examines the historical shifts of teacher evaluations with opposing views and closes with an analysis of a public Midwestern school districts’ teacher evaluation system that is currently used by the participants in this study.

The Changing Role of Principals

Principals, as the overseers of schools, have a range of responsibilities that have varied over decades. The purpose of this research was to understand K-8 principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers. A secondary purpose was to understand principals’ experiences with implementation. For these purposes, it is beneficial to understand principals’ changing set of obligations, alongside the constant role of evaluating teachers. In this section, I contextualize the principals’ role by analyzing scholarship that was used to describe their roles decades ago and to trace it to that of modern day principals.

In the Beginning: Efficiency to Democracy

Before the 1960s, principals were perceived as a school executive (Callahan, 1962), managing both the operational and instructional responsibilities of the school (Glasman, 1984; Nutt, 1918). They were record-keepers, schedulers, attendance clerks, disciplinarians, and teacher evaluators. According to Tracey (1995), during this time principals assessed teachers’ performance. Principals visited classrooms and documented what they observed. The
observational data was gathered and measured against a checklist influenced by Ellwood Cubberley, a university dean, who laid out criteria for principals to use as a method of ensuring teachers and schools were productive (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). The process of developing the checklist was shaped by the work of Frederick Taylor, who was an engineer, noted for his efficiency methods. His work in the field of efficient scientific management became attractive to K-12 education, and it was believed to be a process to help determine efficient practices to produce student outcomes (Popham, 1988; Tracey, 1995).

Principals assumed additional responsibilities that began to slightly change their roles. The launch of Sputnik, the first satellite launched in Earth’s orbit by the Soviet Union, led to a demand for more math and science for students. Although principals continued to manage their obligations and evaluate teachers, they began to organize curricular materials, solicit teacher input on curricular programs, and serve as an instructional resource for teachers, also known as coaches or mentors (Wiles & Bondi, 1991). The process of evaluating teachers changed from checking off behaviors or practices observed on a checklist to a more collaborative supervision approach that required multiple conversations and an observation focused on improving the teaching-learning process (Beck & Murphy, 1993).

Besides evaluating teachers, the demands for principals’ attention and the evolving job descriptions created a state of role ambiguity. Principals, as well as the teachers who reported to them, became unclear of the principals’ specific roles (Burnham, 1976). Gross (1965) suggested that there was ambiguity in the principals’ role because they were responsible for too many assignments, such as managing the instructional programs, dealing with students’ and teachers’ personal needs, leading housekeeping functions, maintaining external relations, and reporting to higher administration.
Parker (1986) suggested the principal's role evolved into the position of a democratic leader seeking insight from stakeholders to plan some of these educational experiences and to solve educational problems (as cited in Beck & Murphy, 1993). In doing so, they became less of a power figure and more of an icon of shared leadership, which is the practice of distributing responsibilities between a team or an organization. As a practice of democratic leadership, Burden and Whitt (1973) explained that principals became concerned about the community and provided opportunities for others to become full partners in the school. Gibb (1967) reported that the trend he saw in the principals’ role was more “suited to the society we are trying to become” (p. 59). He saw principals as humans who were interested in the growth and development of the teachers and students, as opposed to one who dictated aims and objectives. A principal with democratic practices became known as the modern principal.

**Modern Principals: Democracy and Accountability**

The modern principal continued on the trajectory of democratic principles, but the increased accountability of student achievement became the goal for educational reform (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Wiles & Bondi, 1991). Principals still followed the collaborative process to improve teaching. There were positive pressures encouraging their staff to learn more about the characteristics, performance, and educational goals of their students. This was possible through the overwhelming number of standardized tests and assessment programs developed during this time. Principals were responsible for gathering data and interpreting measures of student achievement using the results from the tests and programs offered.

Accountability continues to have a strong presence in the role of principals. Principals are the school leaders and responsible for all school-based duties. They continue to tackle the massive amount of instructional, administrative, and operational expectations in their school
buildings. Most importantly, they are responsible for teaching and learning, and policy has a significant role in how that is done (Berman, 1989; Cross, 2010; Elmore, 2004).

**Policy Impacts Principals’ Role: Evaluating Teachers**

As a result of the implementation of key federal policies, principals' roles have varied over recent decades, and their responsibilities have been affected (Fowler, 2009). In many cases, states and school districts adopted and responded to legislation in order to reap the financial benefits of the policies (Cross, 2010; Fowler, 2009; McGuinn, 2006). The previous section reviewed literature on the general responsibilities of principals, but in this section the literature reviews policy that specifically impacts their role in regard to evaluating teachers.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)**

One of the policies that led to the historic breakthrough and changed the landscape of education was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The ESEA emerged out of President Lyndon Johnson’s effort widely known as the “War on Poverty.” President Lyndon Johnson, as a former teacher, felt as though his personal success was a result of the public education he received. His goal was to create and fund legislation that would help eradicate poverty through education with the intention of offering all children the same opportunities he received in becoming successful. The end result became known as Title I funding (ESEA, 1965).

Federal dollars tied to ESEA developed a new perspective on educational funding because states were accustomed to financing their own education. President Johnson’s vision supported the states by providing federal aid. The US Congress enacted legislation that provided federal aid for education at a record high for the first time (Irwin, 1992; Kirst & Gifford, 1988; NCES, 2011). ESEA provided states the financial means to offer equitable educational opportunities for
children living in poverty. The goal was to improve academic outcomes and close the achievement gaps in reading and math between socioeconomic groups. The funds were not intended to supplant the existing state funding but supplement it (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). ESEA began with a one billion dollar authorization level (Cross, 2010; Graham, 1984; Irwin, 1992; NCES, 2011) and increased drastically over the years.

With increased funding from federal and state sources came increases in the level of accountability and what was expected of schools and the learning outcomes for the students. Popham (1988), Graham (1984), and Fowler (2009) credited Senator Robert Kennedy for leading the charge that encouraged mandatory evaluations of school districts to justify the usage and efficacy of the ESEA funds. Stufflebeam (1966) recommended that programs, materials, and methods should be coordinated and include some form of evaluation since the federal government was a new funding source. Program objectives and criteria were established at the federal level, so the data gathered at the local and state level could provide educators with information in order to improve or discontinue the programs. School districts evaluated their programs, with the support of principals, and provided the data to the government if they wanted to continue to receive the federal funding. The federal government had to be able to justify the increase of funding and the impact it had served on the children most in need.

Evaluations during ESEA were focused on program outcomes but also contributed to the shift of principals’ responsibilities in evaluation of individual teachers. Michael Scriven is attributed with distinguishing two purposes of evaluation (Popham, 2013). Formative evaluations are focused on program improvements, and summative evaluations are focused on continuing or terminating the programs. This distinction was also applicable to the teacher evaluation process. Principals used teacher evaluations as formative and summative
assessments. Formative evaluations focused on teachers’ growth and development. Summative evaluations were used more frequently to decide whether teachers were retained or dismissed (Stronge & Tucker, 2003).

Evaluation tools were developed that conceptualized effective teaching practices, methods, and behaviors for summative and formative purposes. Observational checklists were created that were grounded in the philosophy of behaviorism in psychology and education (Medley & Mitzel, 1963; Simon & Boyer, 1967). Increased emphasis was also on the use of tape recording of teachers’ classrooms, anecdotal records from classroom observations, and face-to-face interactions in order to solve classroom problems and improve instructional practices (Rosenshine & Furst, 1973; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1988; Tracey, 1995).

Children were learning, but the achievement gap between the rich and poor was not shrinking as attempted by ESEA (Coleman et al., 1966; Reardon, 2011). Despite the fact that education is the responsibility of the states according to the US Constitution, successive presidential administrators continued to address student performance. Past President Ronald Reagan’s administration’s attempt became widely known as A Nation at Risk report.

The 1983 A Nation at Risk Report

The Reagan presidential administration was convinced that federal money was not the answer to address the achievement gaps of the impoverished and other vulnerable populations identified as sub-groups. Therefore, federal funds earmarked for education decreased drastically during the 1980s (NCES, 2011). In response to the federal decrease, Gold (1988) reported that states boosted their own aid to districts serving children living in poverty. Standerfer (2006) reported that federal aid actually declined by 21% between 1980 and 1985. K-12 revenue from federal sources fell during Reagan's administration by about 30% because President Reagan’s
strategy was for the states to have more control and stronger presence financially over their educational programs and reform efforts (Cross, 2010).

Hence, President Reagan's administration provided an alternative approach for educational reform. They responded to the needs of education by drafting an advisory report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform* (National Committee on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) that highlighted the mediocrity of our public education. Cross (2010) pointed out that the then US Secretary of Education, Terrel “Ted” Bell, encouraged President Reagan to appoint a National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) to rally the nation around improving the standards for schools and colleges. The NCEE (1983) argued that teacher practice wasn't optimal in the 1980s because a disproportionate number of students, particularly in areas where children lived in poverty, continued to fail. The commission made their claims based on the following data:

- College Board achievement tests also reveal consistent declines in recent years in such subjects as physics and English.
- Both the number and proportion of students demonstrating superior achievement on the SATs (i.e., those with scores of 650 or higher) have also dramatically declined.
- International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests, American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.
- The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over 50 points and average mathematics scores dropped nearly 40 points.
- Over half the population of gifted students does not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school.
- Average tested achievement of students graduating from college is also lower than the past.
- Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.
- Between 1975 and 1980, remedial mathematics courses in public four-year colleges increased by 72% and constituted one-quarter of all mathematics courses taught in those institutions.
- About 13% of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40%.
• There was a steady decline in science achievement scores of US 17-year-olds as measured by national assessments of science in 1969, 1973, and 1977.
• Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.
• Many 17-year-olds do not possess the "higher order" intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40% cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay; and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps.
• Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in such basic skills as reading, writing, spelling, and computation. The Department of the Navy, for example, reported to the Commission that one-quarter of its recent recruits cannot read at the ninth grade level, the minimum needed simply to understand written safety instructions. Without remedial work they cannot even begin, much less complete, the sophisticated training essential in much of the modern military. (NCEE, 1983, pp. 11-12).

The Nation at Risk report provided a different lens for principals evaluating teachers as a way of addressing the problems of the educational system. It affirmed that performance should be tied to stronger accountability measures for teachers and their practices. Teachers should be held responsible for improving student achievement and accountable when achievement didn’t occur. Reagan (1983) emphasized, as one of six fundamental reform efforts to turn our schools around, the nation must encourage good teaching by paying and promoting teachers based on their competence and merit. Solidified by the NCEE (1983), the members suggested teacher evaluation should be tied to salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions, so the superior teachers could be rewarded and the poor ones terminated.

In response to the Nation at Risk report, states were called to take the initiative and improve educational outcomes. One state in particular, Tennessee, attempted to develop a system linking student academic outcomes to teacher evaluations (Sanders & Horn, 1998). It began when McLean and Sanders (1984) published a working paper on the use of student achievement data as a basis for teacher assessment. They found from using their outcomes-based teacher evaluation system, later known as the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System
(TVAAS) that the effectiveness of the teacher was the major determinant of student academic progress. There was a strong correlation between teacher effectiveness and student achievement data.

The TVAAS used a student’s test data accumulated over time and linked it directly to the student’s teacher in order to evaluate the teacher’s performance. Implementation of this system yielded compelling results and confirmed the efficacy and utilization of this assessment approach. By 1991, Tennessee enacted the Education Improvement Act, which included the TVAAS as a critical part of the legislation and became mandated practice in schools within the state of Tennessee.

Even with the impressive outcomes of TVAAS, only a small circle of educators knew about the evaluation system during this time (Sanders & Horn, 1994). The importance of stronger accountability efforts for student achievement was still identified as primary concerns facing the US educational system. In the next section, the literature reviews the role the NCLB Act of 2001 had within a culture of increased accountability.

**The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act**

“It is probably safe to say that student achievement will be the focus of school reform for decades to come even as NCLB is altered or replaced” (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 241). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) reported that the government increased the federal funding to the states in exchange for greater accountability for all students’ achievement. Prior to NCLB only failing students were required to be assessed. Figure 1 reflects the federal government’s investment since the inception of ESEA in 1964 to five years into NCLB after 2001. McGuinn (2006) claimed this NCLB era as the "accountability regime" (p. 47).
In exchange for federal funds, the overarching goal of NCLB was for 100% of all students, not just those living in poverty, to be proficient in reading and math by the year 2014. In order for a school to ensure that all of its students were on the trajectory towards meeting states’ academic standards at each grade level, the school was required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) on academic assessments. Schools that did not meet AYP over multiple years were sanctioned and labeled as "needs improvement" or "restructured": mandating a school to offer tutoring services from outside providers, and mandating a school to provide students the choice to attend a higher performing school, extend the school day, or replace teachers (Hess & Petrilli, 2006; Iron & Harris, 2007; McGuinn, 2006).

Principals responded to the demands of academic testing. Schoen and Fusarelli (2008), Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, and Anderson (2009) noted that the curricula were narrowed because principals led the alignment and standardization of curricula to reflect only content that was being tested. The test result data was disaggregated to identify gaps and to modify the curriculum; this also caused students to miss out on content not assessed through formal testing.
Principal organized tutoring opportunities for students who were not meeting standards and created enrichment opportunities for those students who were meeting standards. The implementation of pacing guides, pretesting, and tracking aids were used to ensure students were prepared and test ready, but it also was used to monitor at-risk students (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). According to Singh and Al-Fadhl (2011), principals had to be knowledgeable of assessment systems and skilled on how to use data to make instructional decisions. Sunderman, Orfield, and Kim (2006) and Rebell and Wolff (2009) noted that principals were challenged with attracting and retaining teachers because many did not desire to be in a school labeled as failing. Evaluating teachers and high quality instruction would be the ways to keep their schools from failing.

NCLB did not address teacher evaluation practice directly, but as a course of securing effective teachers in the classroom, it focused on teacher certification (NCLB, 2001). NCLB created teacher quality standards that required prospective teacher candidates to obtain and maintain licensure. New teachers hired needed to complete at least two years of college and within four years of teaching were required to be “highly qualified” (NCLB, 2001, p. 49). To be considered “highly qualified,” a teacher must have had full state certification or be enrolled in an alternative certification program after acquiring a bachelor’s degree and pass a test to prove competence in a subject area taught. Developing standards through the teacher credentialing process was an attempt to regulate the quality of teachers entering the classrooms and to provide effective teachers in every school.

As research and practice documented the problems of NCLB (i.e. high stakes testing, unfunded mandates), Congress failed to agree on a revision of this act. The US Secretary of
Education needed to fix the stall of a revised ESEA. Thus, the bold step of offering federal dollars through a competitive grant program became known as the 2009 Race to the Top.

**The 2009 Race to the Top Fund**

The federal government continues to influence states’ educational practices through policies tied to funds that states desperately need. President Barack Obama unveiled the Race to the Top Fund under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This funding was the largest competitive educational grant program in US history valued at four billion dollars. The Obama administration’s Blueprint for Reform (2010) ensured RttT was contrary to NCLB’s one-size fits all intervention approach by providing states the flexibility to innovate and create local solutions. RttT was a means to reward states for bold school reform efforts that agreed with narrowing the achievement gaps for subgroups and committed to increasing graduation rates (US Department of Education, 2011).

According to the Office of the Deputy Secretary, in the Department of Education (2012) the application for the new awards for Race to the Top includes government set criteria that in order to compete for funds, states need evidence of redesigning the way school districts evaluate teachers to promote efficacy. RttT (2012) criteria of recruiting, developing, and retaining effective teachers would be satisfied if the states’ plan included a teacher evaluation system designed to hold teachers accountable for student outcomes. The teacher evaluation system must be designed with multiple rating categories, include a significant portion of student growth data based on student assessments, and provide timely feedback from the principal.

RttT (2012) also required that the states’ plans mandate principals to become certified in conducting evaluations. The states’ boards of education would determine the training involved in the certification process to ensure that principals were effective evaluators. Although Darling-
Hammond (2012) was an opponent for student data as a factor in teacher evaluations, she recognized that incorporating a system of multiple measures of teachers’ behaviors and students’ test scores could be effective when principals were knowledgeable about instruction and trained to offer feedback germane to professional development opportunities for teachers.

Federal funding influenced states to comply with federal policy. The adoption of these policies impacted principals’ roles in evaluating teachers. It is important to learn principals’ perspectives and experiences because they are responsible for teacher efficacy so students learn. In the next section, I review literature on how teachers have been evaluated recognizing the changes of the systems and the different roles principals experienced over the years.

**History of Teacher Evaluations**

Teacher evaluation instruments have been developed, managed, and executed in various ways since the beginning of public education (Cohen, 2010). The purpose of this research was to understand K-8 principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers and principals’ experience with implementation. In this section, I review literature that outlines the historical development and criticisms of different teacher evaluations to provide a context of principals’ diverse experiences with implementation over the years.

**The Beginning of Teacher Evaluations**

Teacher evaluation in the public school system dates back to the early 20th century (Tracey, 1995). During this time the general community of each town randomly selected teachers who they thought were people of high esteem and good role models for students (Ellet & Teddlie, 2003). Principals, or at that time called Supervising Officers, used observations, general merit ratings, teachers’ self-evaluations, and student feedback in order to gauge the teachers’ effectiveness (Tomilson, 1955). The data collected from the evaluations resulted in
principals describing teachers’ personal characteristics such as “good moral standing in the community” (Ellett & Teddlie, 2003, p. 103), “helpfulness,” “personal appearance,” “good and kind,” “polite,” and “neat” (Tomlinson, 1955, p. 63).

**Rating Scales and Checklists**

Rating scales and checklists were popular forms of evaluating teachers. Educators began to view this process as an efficient way of measuring teacher effectiveness because of the success Taylor’s theory reflected in engineering and business (Marzano et al., 2011). Rating scales and checklists were simple and quick processes for principals to use. The characteristics measured were straightforward and subjective. According to Barr’s (1948) investigation, instruction, classroom management, professional attitude, choice of subject matter, personal habits, discipline, appearance of the room, personal appearance, cooperation, and health were the most frequent traits and activities measured in the hundreds of rating scales he researched. Principals visited classrooms and observed teachers to determine if they were meeting the rating scales’ and checklists’ criteria or not. Principals were required to prove when the teacher did not demonstrate the observable practices on the evaluation tool (Marczely & Marczely, 2002; Popham, 1988).

Despite its usage, there were disputes about rating scales and checklists. Petersen (2004) reported that studies of truncated reporting systems, like checklists, were unrepresentative sampling, biased reporting, limiting, misleading, and of little use. Medley and Coker (1987) found that it is not the appearance or counting of behaviors in the checklists that are related to student academic gains, but it is measuring the use of these teaching behaviors that are the most appropriate reflections of student learning in the classroom. The same applied to the rating forms. Wood and Pohland (1979) found in their study of teacher-rating scales that teacher
practice only constituted 28% of the total items the scales examined, the majority of the items evaluated teacher behaviors in the school, personal characteristics, and teacher presence in lesser roles such as volunteering.

Discussions about the effectiveness and usefulness of rating scales and checklists remained popular. Issues were raised whether the purpose was summative, formative, or both. There were additional teacher evaluation models that attempted to separate the two while some included both elements.

**Clinical Supervisory Model**

In the 1960s the clinical supervision model of evaluating teachers was introduced. Educators perceived it as a way of enhancing instruction compared to the previous checklist practice (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Goldhammer, Anderson, and Krajewski (1980) defined clinical supervision as “that phase of instructional supervision, which draws its data from first-hand observation of actual teaching events, and involves face-to-face interaction between the supervisor and teacher in the analysis of teaching behaviors and activities for instructional improvement” (pp.19-20). Here the supervisor is defined as the role of the principal as noted in the Definition of Terms in Chapter One. The model has five stages:

1. The pre-observation conference is the time teacher and supervisor confirm and nurture their relationship. They use this time to understand the teacher’s frame of reference for the observation.
2. The observation is the supervisor observing the lesson with the intent of analyzing it with the teacher afterwards.
3. The analysis and strategy component is intended for the supervisor to make sense of the observational data, make it intelligible, and to plan the management of the supervision conference.
4. The supervision conference is used to discuss what was observed in the teacher’s lesson.
5. The post-conference analysis represents the time for the supervisor to reflect and assess strengths and weaknesses of supervisory practice and familiarize teacher with work that needs to be done. (Goldhammer et al., 1980, pp. 32-44.)
Noted challenges existed in the clinical supervision model. Fehr (2001) criticized the clinical supervision model as a lengthy and ongoing process, which limited the time supervisors could use in informal observations and co-teaching opportunities to develop collegial trusting relationships with their teachers. Waite (1995) found that power and authority played a role in these face-to-face interactions. Power was negotiated continuously. Principals had the potential to have the power if the teacher surrendered control of the conference, felt no real investment in the process, undervalued one’s own teaching, or recognized the supervisor as an authority in the content or practice.

In the same way, Zepeda (2000) argued that the format of the clinical supervision model was replaced with evaluation because it did not adjust to the changing accountability demands of the schools. Evaluation is associated with accountability and judging teachers’ efficiency; supervision is the process of engaging teachers in instructional dialogue for the purpose of improving teachers and student achievement (Glanz & Sullivan, 2000). Supervision began to lose its value and meaning. The issues that contributed to the diminishing of supervision are the following:

- The infrequency of meaningful dialogue between teachers and supervisors;
- the legal mandates regarding formative supervision versus summative evaluation;
- the insular environments that discourage discourse about professional developments among peers situation in a caring, learning community;
- the lack of understanding about how adults learn, and a closed mind to assessing multiple perspectives on daily practice offered by both supervisors and peers;
- the lack of leadership by teachers due to the frenetic pace of their workdays and the lack of opportunity; and
- the lack of job-embedded supervisory practices that can enhance the traditional models of supervision. (Zepeda, 2000, p. 104)
The clinical supervision model was an improvement from the checklist and rating scales that preceded it. However, its usefulness was limited due to the time it took to facilitate and the relevance it had with the ever-changing accountability demands of principals.

**Madeline Hunter: Evaluation through Lesson Planning**

During the 1980s some principals relied on Madeline Hunter’s model as part of their leadership practice of evaluating teachers. Hunter’s theory-based model emerged out of the clinical supervision model. Her model was a way of transforming instruction by evaluating teachers on the design of lessons and teaching the lesson. Hunter (1984) described the act of teaching by synthesizing the components that made up the teacher decision-making process. Included in the lesson planning process, Hunter wanted teachers to plan for content, the learner’s predicted behavior, and the teacher’s predicted behavior. Instead of principals looking at prescribed curriculum that were developed during the Sputnik era, Hunter prescribed a lesson plan template and instructional delivery model as the answer to school improvement, and teachers were evaluated against the model (Kersten & Israel, 2005). The lesson design model components and descriptions are summarized in Figure 2.

Hunter argued her purpose was to have teachers think about what they were going to do before doing it (Brandt, 1985) as a way of improving their instructional delivery. Hunter developed a number of templates that intended to help teachers coordinate and analyze their decisions of lesson planning and to examine and interpret their lesson plans before teaching. Further, she developed an evaluative tool for principals to document the performance of the teachers and validate their changes (Fehr, 2001). Principals or other observers went into classrooms using this template looking for the lesson plan design in the teaching as a way to determine a lesson’s effectiveness or lack thereof (Hunter, 1984).
Hunter’s model impacted the educational community and dominated the views on teaching across many states because of its popular use. Fehr (2001) noted that Hunter’s model became the “prescription for teacher evaluation in many states” (p. 175). Danielson and McGreal (2000) asserted that state and local evaluation practices were developed based on behaviors derived from Hunter’s lesson design.

In spite of its popularity, Madeline Hunter’s model was not universally accepted without dissent. Nolan and Hoover (2005) suggested that Hunter’s model presented a conflict for principals with dual functions as the supervisor and evaluator. Although Hunter’s model evolved out of the clinical supervision model, rating scales and checklists were developed to accompany her criteria. The rating scales and checklists encouraged a single view of teaching (Danielson &
McGreal, 2000), and teachers felt they were boxed into this specific method, which limited their creativity. When creative lessons didn’t fit or teachers chose another direction to deliver instruction, teachers’ formal evaluation would suffer (Garman & Hazi, 1988). With this in mind, Charlotte Danielson attempted to capture the many complexities of teaching without limiting teachers’ creativity.

**Danielson Framework for Teaching**

By the 1990s the clinical supervision model and Hunter’s model were popular across the nation; however, policymakers promoted the need to find a more sophisticated way to evaluate teachers and measure their effectiveness (Ellet & Teddlie, 2003). Following the era of Hunter’s popularity were advances in observation techniques (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Loup, Garland, Ellet, & Rugutt, 1996). Kersten and Israel (2005) suggested that a checklist couldn’t capture the nuances and complexities of the teaching and learning process. Hence, a teacher evaluation model was needed to conceptualize the intricacies of teaching.

While Hunter’s model and checklists were widely being used, another tool was developed in 1996 called the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Danielson (2007) agreed that Dr. Janice Skowron’s research of becoming an exceptional teacher is a learning process. The teacher is continuously learning and refining teaching practices, which is reflective and improves teaching. In conjunction with that finding, Reeves’ (2004) research noted the reflection process allows educators to ascertain the difference between teaching techniques and their effectiveness. Danielson’s framework requires teachers and principals to take a more in-depth look at a teacher’s practice, have follow-up reflective conversations, and analyze their teaching to gauge teacher professional development. The framework intends to accomplish these things: honor the
complexity of teaching, create a common language for professional conversation, and provide a structure for self-assessment and reflection.

The Danielson Framework for Teaching identifies four domains of teaching: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. There are 22 components that refer to activities that occur in the classrooms, behind the scenes before the classroom, and beyond the classrooms. The domains capture the significant elements of teaching (Danielson, 2007)

Danielson (2007) noted:

The obligation to ensure good teaching is a matter of ensuring that teachers can demonstrate the knowledge and skill described in the framework. Doing so requires conducting observations, to be sure, because much of what is important about good teaching can be observed during classroom interactions. But classroom observations must be accompanied by conferences before and after the lesson. (pp. 177-178)

This process allows principals to collect evidence of what is seen and heard in the classroom by the teacher and the students during the lesson. During the pre-conference the teacher provides the principal evidence of the teacher’s skills in planning and preparing for the lesson. The post-conference is a discussion between the principal and teacher on how the lesson could have been done differently and improved.

Danielson’s framework has been adopted and adapted to serve as the local teacher evaluation system for many districts across the nation. The specificity of this framework provides the most comprehensive approach to teacher evaluation and was widely proposed as the evaluation tool to use (Marzano et al., 2011). Admitting Danielson’s recognition, Tucker and Stronge (2005) advocated for a “balanced approach to teacher evaluation” that included “an assessment of the act of teaching as well as the results of teaching” (p. 7). The more recent teacher evaluations rely on multiple measures of teacher practice and student performance data.
Current Teacher Evaluation System

Because of Danielson’s past and current popularity, research efforts continued across the nation to link effective teaching and student learning of public school students (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007). The quest for effective teaching practices permeates the educational research as many states revised their teacher evaluation practice to incorporate the student growth data component in response to RttT grant criteria. The purpose of this research was to understand K-8 principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers and to understand principals’ experience with implementation. In this section of the chapter I review literature on the legislation that influenced the current teacher evaluation used in a public Midwestern school district. It is the system used by the research participants, which is the setting for my research.

Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA)

In accordance with the criteria for RttT (2009), the 2010 Illinois state legislature passed the Senate Bill 315 Public Act 96-0861 legislation, called the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA). The Illinois State Board of Education received $42.8 million from the RttT grant. The funds were earmarked to support districts and the state to do the following: adopt more rigorous standards and assessments; recruit, evaluate, and retain highly effective teachers and principals; build data systems to measure student success; and build state capacity and support (ISBE, 2012).

The literature review focuses on the one initiative of recruiting, evaluating, and retaining highly effective teachers and principals. As part of the PERA bill, districts are required to implement evaluation systems collaboratively with the teachers’ union that assess teachers’ skills and include a measure for student growth. The districts must ensure that systems are valid and
reliable and help teachers and principals improve their practices and student outcomes. The evaluators, principals and assistant principals, are required to complete a new program certified by the State of Illinois in order to conduct observations, collect evidence, and provide feedback. The evaluation applies to tenured and probationary teachers and includes a four-point rating category system: excellent, proficient, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory. Districts have the option of adopting the state’s model or developing its own that meets the minimum standards mandated by PERA (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012). The district I examined had fully developed and implemented its own by September 2012.

**All Children Excel (ACE)**

The public Midwestern school district in which the study was conducted implemented a new teacher evaluation system in 2012-2013 that met the guidelines of RttT. The current system, All Children Excel (ACE), replaced a 40-year outdated teacher evaluation system.

Prior to the new design of ACE, the school district did research regarding teacher evaluations. In 2008, they recognized their teacher evaluation system was flawed and responded by adopting the Danielson’s Framework for Teaching to begin structuring their current teacher evaluation system. The district’s commitment to improving teacher evaluations led them to participate in a pilot program called Excellence in Teaching Project (EITP) (Sartain, Stoeling, Krone, & Brown, 2010). From the pilot it was learned that the Danielson Framework for Teaching was a reliable tool for the district to implement because it identifies low quality teaching practice based on the evidence the principals collected. Knowingly, decisions can be made to support teachers or remove them. Additionally, it was found that principals needed to receive ongoing training and support, which would aid in the consistencies of implementation and ensure the teacher evaluation tool was fair and useful.
ACE is divided into three measures with different weights: Professional Practice, Student Growth Performance Tasks, and Student Growth Standardized Assessments. Figure 3 is an illustration of the ACE evaluation percentage weights.

![ACE Measures](image)

*Figure 3. ACE evaluation percentage weights.*

*Source: Schaffer, personal communication, March 14, 2015)*

Supported by the research, the anchor of the professional practice component in ACE is an instructional framework modeled after Danielson's Framework for Teaching but revised to align with the expectations of the Common Core State Standards (Chicago Public School District 2014). ACE’s instructional framework has four domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. Each domain is divided into four or five components that are used to anchor coaching, professional development, teacher self-reflection conversations (CPS, 2014).

ACE requires principals or assistant principals to be certified evaluators by passing Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) training modules in order to conduct classroom observations. Aligned to the expectation of PERA, tenured teachers receive at least two formal evaluations, and probationary teachers (three years of experience or less) receive at least three
formal observations per school year (ISBE, 2012). Informal observations are conducted throughout the year.

As noted by a Midwestern school district principal, formal observation is a planned time when the principal observes the teachers. The process includes a pre- and post-observation conference; the observation lasts for the entire class period or a minimum of 45 minutes. The principal or assistant principal collects observational data in relation to the teacher evaluation rubric. The observation of the professional practice is worth 70% of the teacher's summative evaluation rating. Besides the professional practice score, the ACE includes a student growth score for 30% of the teacher’s summative rating (Schaffer, personal communication, March 14, 2015).

Student growth is the component of ACE that gauges the teacher's impact on student learning. Student growth is measured in two ways: 20% is determined through the use of a standardized assessment, and 10% is determined by teacher designed performance tasks, which are a written or hands-on demonstration of learning a certain skill or standard (Schaffer, personal communication, March 14, 2015).

**Summary**

In this chapter, the literature review contextualized the historical responsibilities of the principal to the modern era as it relates to teacher evaluation and other responsibilities. The literature addressed the changing roles of principals in response to federal legislation. The chapter further highlighted the history and critiques of teacher evaluations and principals’ experiences. Lastly, the literature reviewed a specific model of the current teacher evaluation system in the school district where the study took place.
The literature recognizes that teacher evaluation has evolved in different formats and principals are constantly impacted. With the current teacher evaluation system, how do principals understand the current teacher evaluation intentions and priorities? How do they perceive it to improve teachers’ instructional practice? How has it impacted their roles as principals? Research that focuses on the perceptions and experiences of school principals with the appraisal of teachers is needed. The next chapter reflects the research methodology used to conduct the research.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand K-8 principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers. A secondary purpose was to understand principals’ experiences with implementation. Teacher evaluation has gained emphasis as discussions take place nationally on educational reform. Research on teacher evaluation has provided findings on teacher efficacy, accountability measures, and equitable and fair practices. However, the research has not highlighted how principals understand teacher evaluation as they are responsible for its facilitation. This chapter describes the methodology of a qualitative research design, selection procedures for the research participants, data collection and analysis, methods, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and my statement of subjectivity.

Research Methodology

The methodology selected for this study is a qualitative research approach with qualitative strategies for data collection and analysis. Qualitative research strategies were selected because it allowed the researcher to become a part of the principals’ world to uncover their perspectives and obtain a deep understanding of their experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Federal regulations were the reasons teacher evaluation systems with student growth, as a component, became the catalyst of educational reform in 2010. Existing research that shares the principals’ views of the new phenomenon is limited in spite of the fact that they are the leaders of the school responsible for evaluation. In order to deeply understand their experiences, the most logical methodology would be a qualitative research
approach because its goal is to obtain understanding of what it means to be the participants at that time in a particular setting (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

**Participants**

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants included:

- Participants were principals because they were accountable for evaluating teachers.
- Participants were licensed as school administrators and state certified teacher evaluators according to the Board of Education certification criteria.
- Participants used the current district adopted teacher evaluation system for at least one year with kindergarten through eighth grade teachers. One year was the minimum because they experienced multiple teacher evaluation cycles with various grade level teachers.
- The principals’ schools were geographically located throughout the Midwestern public school district. They were limited to a specific area within the district.

**Participant Selection Procedure**

After receiving IRB approval, I recruited participants for this study using several strategies. The first strategy required me to invite participants from a group of Midwestern elementary public school principals I became personally acquainted with through class discussions, group projects, and professional development sessions over the years. These principals have shared their perspectives and experiences of leadership practices, including evaluating teachers, throughout our educational administration certification program, doctoral degree program at DePaul University, or leadership professional development sessions. Because of their willingness to share their practices and perspectives openly in these settings, I believed that interviewing them would contribute to rich data for my analysis.
The second recruitment strategy entailed inviting participants from my sorority who fit the selection criteria. This organization is a large group of professional women who joined the sorority as college-educated women based on the mission of service to all mankind. The members lead community service projects aimed towards educational advancements and improvements. In order to facilitate that type of programming, the members have partnered with schools in our local area, which required the permission of principals. Because the sorority has a membership of over 200,000 members internationally, I expected there were some who were elementary principals working in the Midwestern public school district where my study was taking place. The members have an email listserv exclusive to local sorority members who have volunteered their personal email address, so members can stay connected and network across local chapters. I used this platform to invite participants.

I solicited participation from the groups stated above through an email (see Appendix A). The email included the purpose, participant criteria, what is involved to be in the research study, and a request for a phone conversation to answer any questions. I aimed for five principals to participate in the study based on Creswell’s (2013) recommendation that the exploration of a phenomenon with a group of individuals may vary in size from three or four individuals to 10 to15. The findings regarding the demographics such as years of experience of each principal, years as a teacher, number of teachers in the school building, and tenured or non-tenured status of staff is reviewed in Chapter Four. The information was obtained from the interviews or schools’ websites.

Once the elementary school principal agreed to be a participant in response to my email, I responded by thanking her (all participants were female) for agreeing to be in the research study and confirmed the phone conversation date and time (see Appendix B). I included the informed
consent form (see Appendix C) that includes the purpose of the study, the interview process, benefits and risks involved in participating in the study, the time commitment, withdrawal options, and information about the confidentiality of the information collected. Once we had our phone conversation (see Appendix D), I discussed the informed consent, assessed the possible participant’s understanding of the study, and answered any questions. I reviewed the interview cycle and scheduled the interview at the principal’s office or home. I arrived to the interview site early to set up and test the digital recorder. At the start of each session, I presented each participant with the consent form for her signature. After written consent to participate was acquired, the interviews were conducted, but the participants were able to back out at any time.

**Data Collection Methods**

I used a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions (see Appendix E) to collect the data. Each participant was interviewed at least once. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed into written notes later in order to get an accurate record of what was said. After I checked for accuracy, the audio recording was destroyed. The location was at the participant's home or office, which was a preselected, convenient, and comfortable location (Bailey, 2007) where it was unlikely that others would overhear the conversation.

The Seidman (2013) three-interview series structure (see Figure 4) was used. It allowed the participant to explore his/her experience in context and reflect on its meaning. Instead of the interview spanning over three separate meetings, the interview session took place in one meeting that lasted about 45 minutes to two hours. Because principals are busy people, I thought the expectation of three meetings may discourage participation. “As long as structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of
their lives, alterations to the three-interview, and the duration and spacing of interviews can certainly be explored” (Seidman, 2015, p. 25).

The interview consisted of three sets of questions. The first set of questions recounted early experiences that led the participant to become a principal. The second set of questions narrowed in on the details of the participant’s teacher evaluation experience. The final set of questions broadened the focus to reflect on the meaning of the experience and to obtain demographic information that was not available on the public website such as the number of teachers per grade, tenured/non-tenured status, years as a principal and in the district. After the participant's comments were transcribed, I reviewed the information. A digital recording device was used to record the first interviews. Recording interviews preserves the words of the participant and the original data (Seidman, 2013). The last interview was not recorded. I was unable to contact most of the principals to have this follow-up phone interview, but I still used the data from the previous face-to-face interviews.

Figure 4. Seidman’s structure for the three interview series. Source: Seidman, 2013, pp. 21-22.
Data Analysis

The general analysis procedures I followed began with reading the first transcript to become familiar with the data and then reformatting it into a three-column document to support my further analysis. The first column was labeled Raw Data and contained the data. The second column was labeled Preliminary Codes where I re-read the transcription and made preliminary codes and notes (big ideas, key concepts, or short phrases). These notes and codes were my first impressions that were documented for future analytical consideration in my final coding. The third column was labeled Final Code where I read the transcription a third time along with my second column notes and assigned my final coding to the data. The second column provided a transitional link from the raw data to my final coding (Saldana, 2009).

As I formed codes, I considered Bailey’s (2007) recommendation of coding the data with some of these specific questions in mind to aid in theming the data:

1. What happened?
2. What led to the situation?
3. Why did it happen?
4. What was the level of emotional engagement in the interaction?
5. What were the consequences of this activity or interaction?

After I coded the first transcript, I coded the remaining transcripts following the same procedures for the first one. To avoid the risk of coding data according to what I expected, I did not use preexisting or a priori codes as a guide (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Instead, I used in vivo coding as a way to prioritize and honor the participants’ voices and to ground the analysis from the participants’ perspectives (Saldana, 2009). I re-contextualized the coded data, so it could be read easily and maneuvered (Coffey & Atkins, 1996) by writing the coded data on post-
it notes. This allowed me to compare the coded data across transcripts, notice the similarities and the differences, and begin to link post-its together to see the emerging themes and subcategories. A theme is a way to categorize the data into a topic that organizes a group of repeated ideas (Saldana, 2009). Afterwards, I organized the themes and sub-themes in a chart. Also, I used the themes to address my research questions, frame them conceptually, and explore links between them (Bailey, 2007).

After I reviewed the analysis, there was a follow-up phone interview request. I emailed the participants to request up to a 30-minute follow-up interview to talk through the emerging analysis and to get the participants’ reactions. I spoke with one participant, and my themes resonated with her. This is a form of member-checking (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) to ensure the accuracy of the data.

**Ethical Considerations**

By studying human participants, I recognized the importance of doing research ethically. I used several strategies to maintain an ethical study. I successfully completed the CITI’s “Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams” web-based training on the ethical treatment of research participants. This training module satisfied the human subjects training requirement for the National Institutes of Health and certified that the researcher has an understanding of the guidelines and principles that ensure that participants are treated in an ethically responsible manner. The study was submitted to the university’s Institutional Review Board after the proposal was approved by my committee and approved before any data collection or participant interaction. Informed consent forms included the purpose, procedures of the study, and a statement that spoke to the voluntary nature of the research, which means participants were free to discontinue at any time. In order to avoid a breach of confidentiality, the data from the
interviews were treated confidentially and with respect for the privacy of the participants. I used pseudonyms in lieu of real names to preserve the confidentiality of the participants, their responses, and the names of their schools. I did not discuss the participants’ responses with anyone other than that participant. Interviews took place in a setting preferred by the participant but designed for confidential conversations. Data and other written and printed information were kept in a locked drawer for which I was the only one with a key. All electronic documents were password protected, and only I had the password. I destroyed the digital recordings gathered during the interview. All electronic documents collected for this study will be destroyed three years after the dissertation committee approves the dissertation.

Quality and Trustworthiness

The criteria I used to address quality issues relates to trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness refers to the “quality of [research] (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). The four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

- Credibility (similar to internal validity) is concerned with the fit between the participants’ perspectives and understanding and the researcher’s representation of it. Readers should be able to see clearly how the participants expressed their perspectives and meaning-making, and they can juxtapose that with how the researcher represents it.
- Transferability (similar to external validity and an alternative to generalization) asks how the findings of this research are useful to, or transferable to, other settings. The researcher should provide enough detail so that readers can determine whether the findings of the study are transferable to a setting they are familiar with.
- Dependability (similar to reliability) is concerned with the process. Was the process logical, traceable, and documented? Can a reader know from the description of the process that the results of the study emanated from this process?
- Confirmability (similar to objectivity) focuses on the relationship among the “assertions, findings, interpretations,” etc., so readers can see that the data and analysis “[are] not merely figments of the inquirer’s imagination.” (Schwandt, 2001, pp. 258-259)

Multiple strategies were used to support trustworthiness of the data. They included member checking, thick description, and audit trail:
• Member checking was performed to ensure the accuracy of the data. The participants of the study were given the analysis (Willis, 2007). They could affirm or deny that the analysis reflects their perspectives or feelings.

• Providing “thick description” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113) was the vehicle used for communicating a holistic and realistic picture of the participants’ perspectives that vividly transports the reader to the setting and provides an element of a shared experience. Quoting verbatim from the data collected about the participants’ experiences and perceptions throughout the study helped to maintain descriptive validity.

• Using an audit trail to track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) was useful because it provided a detailed explanation of how the data was collected and analyzed. I documented the work beginning from when, to whom, and how I sent the invitations to participate; responses and subsequent communication with potential participants; details about the gathering of raw data; and the process of analyzing the data and writing up the analysis. In addition, I kept records of all the emerging themes, the data used to support them, and how they were refined and expanded (Willis, 2007).

Researcher Subjectivity

Researcher subjectivity is important in qualitative research because it helps the reader understand the researcher’s connections and rationale for conducting the study (Schram, 2006). This study has a foundation based on my broad experience with teachers, principals, and teacher evaluations. I have been a classroom teacher where I achieved National Board Certification and coached other teachers. I have worked in roles at district offices geared around teaching, learning, and coaching for principals and teachers. My immediate past experience was an
Assistant Principal of a Pre-K to 8th grade elementary school. Having these opportunities afforded me insight on teachers and evaluations because I worked in all levels in the organization and was provided varied opportunities from different angles that interfaced with teacher evaluations.

I believe principals in the district where I was employed found the new teacher evaluation system relevant, but I have heard them openly express that it was time intensive to implement. My first-hand experience taught me that principals claim a need for a business or operational manager that can handle all the other “stuff,” so they can increase their time in classrooms with teachers. They spend a large amount of their days split between roles, that includes managerial, political, institutional, etc. (Hallinger, 2003). However, they are expected to grow and develop teachers across a continuum. Principals are challenged with doing this consistently. They struggle not only with the time to coach and mentor teachers but also the commitment of time to do it well and provide feedback to see change within teaching practices that yields positive outcomes for students.

Researcher subjectivity clarifies up front the biases the researcher brings to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012); this enables the researcher to more fully reflect on how he/she might deal with the biases. In order to navigate through this bias, I recognized a few things. First, all principals’ experiences have not been perceived this way. Some principal practices have successfully addressed the time challenge and can offer suggestions into resolving that issue along with other challenges they’ve experienced. Second, teacher evaluation tools, approaches, philosophies, and practices are always evolving. Based on the iterations that have existed over the years, the intent is to make the teacher evaluation system better, so it is useful in
improving teacher practice. I kept a journal to document my reflections on the research process including how I dealt with my bias as it arose throughout the research process.

**Summary**

Chapter Three discussed the qualitative research methodology with the phenomenological design used in this study. In order to understand this approach, this chapter included a description of the study and the rationale of its design. Chapter Three also included a description of the participant selection process, methods of data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations and quality concerns.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Principals are responsible for evaluating teachers. It has become more prevalent in their normal routines and part of their typical day as research has linked it to student achievement (Ellet & Teddlie, 2003; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Despite teacher evaluation’s importance and principals’ frequent work with the process, their perceptions and input have not had a high regard during the implementation and execution stages (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007). For that reason, this study engaged five principals in conversation to examine their perceptions on their contemporary experience with the current teacher evaluations and its meaning.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand K-8 principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers. A secondary purpose was to understand principals’ experiences with implementation of the evaluation. This research study was based on the following research questions: How do K-8 principals understand the intentions and priorities of the current teacher evaluation system? How do principals perceive the teacher evaluation system improves teachers’ instructional practices? How has the teacher evaluation system impacted the role of the principal?

This study utilized a collection of interview data to determine findings to the research questions. Chapter Four begins with the demographic information and the responses to the interview questions that investigated the principals’ life histories which influenced their work with teacher evaluations. The responses are not in any particular order but rather are intended to provide a context of the findings. Then the findings are shared in a section called Emerging
Themes: The Principals’ Points. It is based on three themes that emerged when looking at all of the principals’ responses. Chapter Four ends with a short conclusion of the findings.

Each of the five participants in this study was an elementary school principal. Table 1 provides demographic data of each participant.

Table 1
Participants’ Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Years as a Principal</th>
<th># of Years as a Teacher</th>
<th># of Tenured Teachers Evaluating</th>
<th># of Non-Tenured Teachers Evaluating</th>
<th># of Students in Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelton</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipinski</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaken</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massey</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remnant</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Principals

This section synthesizes the participants’ responses to questions regarding their life histories. The principals provided information about their years working in the public school district and described their occupations before becoming a principal. Each shared her intentions on becoming a principal and identified characteristics of principals each had admired when she was a student or in her profession. Each described a typical day at her individual school, which included each participant’s goals for observing teachers. Each section concludes with a brief narrative of the participant’s experiences with teacher evaluations as a teacher and/or administrator.
Ms. Shelton

Ms. Shelton has been with the subject school district for 15 years and served in multiple roles before becoming a principal. She was an assistant principal for a few years, and prior to that role she spent many years serving as a coach for teachers working with diverse learners. Before becoming a coach, she was a special education teacher and prided herself on her commitment to student achievement, which she thought was perceived as uncommon during those days. She has only worked in elementary schools.

Ms. Shelton admitted to not having a plan or interest in the principal’s role. The principal she worked with as an assistant principal left the school. She already felt an attachment to the school and did not want to abandon the staff. Her concern and connection to them is the reason she pursued the role of principal.

While serving in different roles, there were specific characteristics about several principals she remembered with admiration. Principals who were committed to both the student body and the community they served stood out to her. She commended their practice of creating a culture and learning environment that was conducive for their own children as a testament to the quality of work demonstrated in the school. She reflected on her memories of the first school she led, “I was building my first school for my son. I wanted him to have a solid middle school experience.”

School culture was expressed heavily and was frequently included in her description of a typical school day. She believes in an inclusive school environment, in spite of the heavy gang affiliations that students engage in outside the school. “We are all under the umbrella of this school, that’s the only gang we’re claiming.” Ms. Shelton said she makes sure she greets her staff and students every morning to get an early morning pulse and is ready to start any
interventions needed at the top of her day. With multiple buildings at her school, she mentioned her attempts to bounce back and forth between the buildings, so she is visible and available to every student and teacher each day.

Although she said a school day is never typical, Ms. Shelton’s goal is to observe at least five classrooms a day. These visits occur during the day and mainly in the afternoons. Her office was draped with customized charts that outlined the school’s schedule parsed out by instructional content and expected times the observations should occur. Ms. Shelton mentioned that providing structure and stability to her team and students encouraged the most productive educational day as possible for both groups.

Unfortunately, she does not always meet her observation goals because of all the administrative responsibilities that include parent meetings, emails, phone calls, and student and parent concerns. Addressing these issues occupies her time, and the day gets away from her. Her day ends after her students and teachers complete after school programming. Even then, it is likely she is staying hours later.

Ms. Shelton was evaluated with a checklist as a teacher. She remembered her principals entering her classroom twice a year, and she received superior ratings. She thought the ratings were in comparison to what some of her colleagues weren’t doing because she was really trying to teach students who were diverse learners, and other teachers were just astonished at that. Principal Shelton left the role of the teacher unclear of her rate of success because she felt the checklist was a very antiquated system and limited in making a judgment of her practice.

By the time she left the classroom performing in her role as a coach, the checklist was the current tool, but the district introduced the Charlotte Danielson’s framework as a coaching tool.
This experience provided her some context going into this current system as a principal. As an administrator she had only experienced the current teacher evaluation system.

**Ms. Lipinski**

Ms. Lipinski has been with the school district for 16 years and had a unique pathway to leadership. Her trajectory as a leader started when she was as an elementary school teacher, and she served as a union delegate. While serving in that capacity for two years, she decided to run for a school board position as a teacher representative and won. Holding these two positions increased her familiarity with the 125 teachers who were her colleagues. She expressed that she became well respected amongst her peers.

The role of a principal was never a career goal of Ms. Lipinski. She started in a cohort for her master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Before completing all the coursework, the cohort of students decided to extend their studies into an Educational Administration Master’s degree program. She completed both programs and was awarded both master’s degrees. She didn’t think she was going to be in a principal capacity because her time was consumed working another full-time job as a bus operator, until her principal approached her. He was losing his assistant principal, and he needed leadership representing the diverse make-up of the student body. She accepted the offer and served in that position with two other assistant principals. In that role, the assistant principals shared the responsibility of discipline for the 2200 students in the building. Coaches, who were sponsored by the district, led the professional development for instructional improvements. According to Ms. Lipinski, the principal performed managerial responsibilities. Soon after her appointment, the principal’s contract didn’t last long, and Ms. Lipinski lost her position.
In her quest for employment, she went back to college to take additional courses in special education to make her more marketable. Leadership positions didn’t open up immediately, so Ms. Lipinski ended up back at her roots as a teacher, but this time for special education students. She was really far from home and desired to be closer, especially since the birth of a daughter. Again, in her efforts to become marketable and to be satisfied with her geographical location, she completed the application process and became eligible to be a principal in the district. She increased her networking efforts and quickly learned from one of her previous cohort members that his school needed a principal. The agreement was made that he would be her assistant principal if he presented her as a qualified candidate; she is principal of that school now.

The principal she described embodies a variety of characteristics. One was a person with great budget experiences, commendable interpersonal skills, and structured her daily responsibilities within a schedule. She strongly believed that principals who try to have schedules and keep them are the ones who are not successful and eventually leave the principal’s role. She remembered the sound advice about removing teachers who she received from another principal. He told her to “let teachers go” who were not team players. She expressed that she stands by that advice after regretting not following it initially.

Ms. Lipinski described a variation of communication exchanges that take place during her regular school day. She shared that half of her day is dedicated to instruction and the other half to administrative duties which include writing emails and newsletters and attending meetings. She expressed a commitment of “keeping the parents informed.” She indicated that she meets with teachers, tries to visit at least five classrooms every day, informs teachers of her performance expectations, and then relays their status of meeting them or not. She voiced that
she sends out a weekly bulletin and tries to “stay away from you do this, do that…” in an effort to remain positive, so when she has to write them up, they know she is serious. If she sees the need to address a teacher or staff member, she stated that she is receptive to have those impromptu conversations as a way to keep open communication existing within the school community.

Ms. Lipinski has only worked in elementary schools. She has overseen as few as 400 students to as high as 2200. She has experienced a checklist evaluation system as a teacher and administered it as a principal. Her school day starts as early as 8:00 a.m. and ends well past 6:00 p.m.

Mrs. Blaken

Mrs. Blaken has been with the district for 22 years and considered herself a new principal because of the limited time spent specifically in that role. Immediately after graduating from college, she served as a camp counselor during the summer and worked as a classroom teacher during the school year. She specified all of her jobs had something to do with children. The many years of experience as a K-3rd grade teacher led her into a reading specialist position for a cluster of schools. In that role, she coached and supported teachers in best instructional delivery practices for young children. One of the schools where she provided support was in need of an assistant principal, and Mrs. Blaken said she willingly accepted the position. When the principal retired, Mrs. Blaken shared that she was a little apprehensive to take on the role and responsibilities of a new principal. “I was about 50% [sure I] thought it was a job that I wanted to do.” She stated that she decided to take on the challenge, but originally it was not on her immediate radar.
The type of principal that Mrs. Blaken remembered took her back to her own junior high and high school years. She shared that she was impressed by her principal’s connection to her and to all of the students in the school. He addressed all of them by name. He knew their interests and made sure all of them knew his serious expectations around learning.

Mrs. Blaken described her typical school day. She said that she makes it very clear to her students’ parents that her day starts with their children, not with their complaints. Rather, she has office hours for that purpose because she needs to greet her students and teachers after she checks in with her clerk about the operational expectations of the day. The greeting has become a ritual for her. “You know greeting them,...I think it kind of reminds me of why I’m here.” She said she looks forward to interfacing with the students first thing in the morning.

Afterwards, she detailed the continuation of her morning ritual with her assistant principal. They identify the classrooms and times to visit for the day. These visits were referred to as “teacher evaluation observations” or “quick snapshots.” Either way, the classroom visits take her well into the afternoon where she and her assistant principal spend most times in the hallway during lunch and recess transition ensuring children don’t find themselves in “sticky situations.” Once the students are finished with their lunch, Mrs. Blaken and her assistant principal have lunch together and discuss their morning and other unresolved issues.

The afternoon, including after school programming, encompasses her administrative duties. Specifically on Fridays, Mrs. Blaken pointed out that she goes outside after school to see the students because she has spent her day in teacher team meetings, and the students have not seen her all day. Mrs. Blaken has only worked in elementary schools.

As a teacher, Mrs. Blaken experienced evaluations in two different contexts. In a private school setting, she was evaluated once a year. There wasn’t any written feedback, and there
were no conversations. However, transitioning to the public school setting, she was evaluated twice a year with a checklist. Her supervisor did have a conference but did not provide any written feedback. Although the verbal feedback was provided, she thought it was broad and not helpful.

Her experience being evaluated as a coach was similar to the evaluation expectations currently in place. She was observed periodically and received feedback. Now, as a principal, she has only administered the current teacher evaluation system. To help her maintain her time commitments, she has self-created classroom observation schedules posted in her immediate view to keep her organized and in compliance. Her office is wall-to-wall covered with leadership and literacy professional reading resources.

**Miss Massey**

Miss Massey has been with the district for 15 years and has a background of business and education. She became a high school teacher through an alternative certification program. She served in that role for seven years. She was asked to be the assistant principal at the high school she taught when her principal retired. She said she thought she wasn’t ready, but her principal felt otherwise. Miss Massey obliged with the belief she would be able to make better decisions globally for the students. In this role, she shared that she identified behaviors and strategies she would initiate differently if she were the principal. This is what she said led her interest in the principal’s role. She conveyed she could “influence the culture of the entire building, inspire, motivate, educate, on a whole different level” as the principal. She stated that she wanted to make a larger impact than her experience as an assistant principal, so she did that with younger children at the elementary school level.
Miss Massey described characteristics of multiple principals she admired. She remembered principals who were risk-takers, advocated for their students, cared about families, and provided a purpose for parents in the buildings. These principals were ready to work with staff, innovative, and not necessarily part of the status quo. She expressed the terms “entrepreneurial” and “team focused.” She concluded her description of principals she admired as one who has a servant leadership philosophy.

Before staff arrives, Miss Massey specified her day begins with administrative tasks, so she is available to service her parents, staff, and students during the school day. She said that she believes in an open door policy by providing them access to her at any time, so she can address their needs. She called her office “Grand Central Station.” After greeting the students at breakfast and ensuring all classrooms are covered and security is in place, she said “it is on and popping.” She spoke of the numerous one-on-one meetings she has with teachers, parent meetings, and meetings with students about expectations. She said she visits classrooms to observe teachers, constantly talk with students, plan with teachers, and even contact colleagues to learn their strategies for school success. Miss Massey expressed that she ends her day following after-school programming where she is typically closing out with meetings or “tying up loose ends.”

Miss Massey has experienced the checklist as the evaluation tool used when she was a classroom teacher. She remembered it as an annual checklist of tasks that included lesson plans being completed and objectives posted on the board. Because of its simplicity, there were no real conversations, coaching, follow-up, or assistance for instruction. During that time, she didn’t like the fact that there wasn’t the opportunity for feedback. Since she has only been a
principal for two years, the current evaluation system is the only one she facilitated with teachers.

**Dr. Remnant**

Dr. Remnant has been with the district for 19 years and experienced a lot of changes as she was led into the role of a principal. She considered the first part of her life as a professional student because she earned one Bachelor’s degree, two master’s degrees, and a Ph.D. before the age of 30. Immediately upon graduating, she taught students who needed a non-traditional route towards graduation at an alternative school. Following her years at this school, Dr. Remnant took her talents to the district’s central office. There she served as a principal liaison where she supported the administrative tasks of the principals to make their jobs easier. However, she quickly recognized the nature of her personality was not in an office, so she didn’t last long in that position. She became an assistant principal and eventually was coached into a principal position.

Dr. Remnant accepted the principal’s role because she stated that she enjoyed helping people. She felt that others saw something in her that she didn’t see in herself. Admittedly, she expressed more joy being an assistant principal and thinks she was better at it. Back then, she believed instruction was secondary, and management was everything. Community activism was expected and that is what she was good at doing, plus she said she likes directions. “I like working under authority.”

Dr. Remnant made known to me that she wanted to emulate what she witnessed other principals had accomplished. They made a bigger impact on a larger number of people. They changed communities. She desired to help others in that capacity, so her previous principals were very influential in guiding her in that direction.
Outside of the three principals she worked for, Dr. Remnant was also impressed with a principal outside of her daily purview that was worth noting. This gentleman was the principal over the school in the county’s jail system. She attended his retirement party and remembered the high esteem he received for the work he facilitated. Dr. Remnant never engaged with him daily, but clearly from the evening she remembered the resounding remarks and ways he was an advocate for his students. She echoed his sentiments, “I never allowed anybody to tell me what was right for my kids and my school, and I would do anything I could to get what I wanted for my kids and my school…” Dr. Remnant said she lives her truth on that statement.

Dr. Remnant spoke of her daily routine as a “juggling act” in a way to mitigate those unknown vices from disrupting the learning process. While her intention is to spend most of her day in classrooms, because of unforeseeable events that occur, the observations don’t always happen.

She had experienced the checklist evaluation tool as a teacher and principal. She was so familiar with the tool from both perspectives that she was able to recite from memory some of the objectives required to measure teachers’ practice. The checklist was perceived as subjective and limited in value. She thought it didn’t lead to any type of conversation. Once the evaluation was completed, a copy was placed in the teacher’s mailbox, and the other copy was mailed downtown for the teacher’s file.

While reflecting on the checklist, Dr. Remnant made mention of the additional experiences she had with other teacher evaluation tools. She compared the Madeline Hunter’s lesson plan template and observation cycle to the current teacher evaluation system but considered the new system “1000 times better.” She mentioned she was one of the few schools
who participated in the pilot of the current teacher evaluation system before its district-wide adoption.

**Concluding Thoughts about the Principals**

This chapter focused on the demographics and the life history of the participants. It included their occupations and motivations towards the role of principal. Each principal shared her perspectives on a typical day at her school and her experiences with teacher evaluation systems as a teacher and/or administrator. The next section reflects on the themes that emerged from the data.

**Emerging Themes: The Principals’ Points**

The interviews revealed that teacher development grounds all five of the principals’ work around the teacher evaluation system. They consistently described an excessive amount of time and planning to ensure optimal implementation and execution of the teacher evaluation system because it is solely in the best interest of students’ development. This section reports on the findings based on three themes: Principal into Coach, Increased Principal-Teacher Communication, and Empathetic about Challenges. Figure 5 outlines the themes and subthemes that surfaced from the data.
**Figure 5.** Themes and subthemes.

**Principal into Coach**

Coaching is the process in which education professionals assist others in learning new skills or teaching strategies and apply them skillfully and effectively for instruction (Showers, as cited in Strother, 1989). Most of the principals recognized their role has evolved partially into a coaching role because of the leadership practices they demonstrate using the observation process and rubric, which are mandatory components of the teacher evaluation system. Principal Shelton described her experience when she was sitting in a classroom observing a teacher:

> It's putting me in the role of coach. I've sat in on observations, and there have been moments when I've just really wanted to get up and just take over, but I can't in that moment. It allows me to go back and coach teachers through those difficult lessons. So, I have to look at all of that and that puts me more in the role of a coach.
When Principal Blaken talked about the purpose of the teacher evaluation system, she explained the practice of coaching during that process:

It [teacher evaluation system] really was designed to be a tool to help folks reflect on their practice and get better and for people [principals] to coach teachers to improve their practice….So I want them to feel comfortable coming into it [the process]. I want you to feel like you're doing your best, then I can coach from that point.

Principal Massey always wanted her teachers to know the teacher evaluation system was designed for coaching:

I always want people to know this is a coaching tool, the goal is for you to be reflective and to improve because you're dealing with the students’ lives….So [the teacher evaluation system] has gotten a little bit more towards what teaching and coaching should be…but I've always thought that the instructional leader should be able to coach.

**Coaching strategies.**

During their interaction with the teacher evaluation system, the principals specified coaching strategies they employed to benefit teachers’ growth. First, Principal Shelton shared she will model for the teacher, “If I'm in the classroom doing a pop-in, I see that something is going terribly wrong, I will get up and I will start teaching.”

Or, she will offer peer coaching:

If the experience pained me and I'm not sitting in your face for six hours, I can imagine what the experience is for the students. So that's when I immediately say, ‘I'm going to have to plan a couple more days when I just pop in here and then I can get up and model for you, or I can pair you with a colleague who is really strong with this particular of skill set.’

Also, Principal Shelton will also offer peer modeling. She told her teacher, “I'm going to come back and model this lesson, or, I'll have someone come in here and model this lesson for you.” Added to that statement, she mentioned that she has created a culture where her teachers feel safe to learn from each other, “We were able to start with peer walk-throughs.”
Similarly, Principal Lipinski discussed different coaching strategies she found valuable in supporting teachers’ growth. She told her teachers, “Tape yourself, listen to yourself, cause it's worth it.” She and her staff also set instructional goals for the year, so she would know how to coach them throughout the year. She said, “So, like for my teachers when we sit down and talk at the beginning of the year, we talk about things that they want to work on.”

Along with the other principals, Principal Blaken shared some of the coaching habits she uses with teachers.

We do regular snapshots, so they’re [teachers] used to that. They’re used to us leaving a note on their desk or sending an email and saying, “Hey, come talk to me I want to talk to you about what I saw.”

Both Principals Blaken and Massey spoke about the coaching conversations they facilitate to work on specific attributes that give their teachers the greatest outcome on their evaluation. Blaken remarked:

Let's get the stuff that's really going to be leveraged, cause if I can change some of your planning you know some of the things that you do in Domain 1, automatically will help with things that are not happening in the way we want them to happen in Domain 3 in practice.

Massey stated:

I give specific feedback to areas that are chunks and manageable, it's not like, oh here are 17 things that you need to work on. It's these 3 or 4 things will give you high leverage to move and improve in several areas.

Principal Blaken and Dr. Remnant talked extensively and with an appreciation for the online resources that help them coach and support their teachers. Principal Blaken confirmed:

The online resources [district sponsored] for teachers and even for administrators where it's for teachers, by teachers, a lot of those modules were designed and now more than ever I feel like, if a teacher didn't get a rating that they wanted in a specific component that they can go in and find additional resources. At the same time, principals don't have to dig on their bookshelves, they too can go to one place and get additional resources for teachers and point them in that direction.
The online videos, documents, and webinars were well received by Dr. Remnant:

I love the videos! I love having the videos, and the videos are in each Domain and the videos are explicit. They have webinars, and the webinars are around the Domains. Those are for everyone, and they are really great. The other thing too that I love about the [district supported online resources], I like it in terms of the supports. All of the documents that teachers need, or that I might need are on that center. I think the supports are really good, I do, and I use them a lot. I think it's a very effective tool.

Additional meetings, feedback sessions, and a peer-coaching system have been offered by Dr. Remnant as an avenue of coaching teachers towards their professional growth. She explained:

I am effective at giving good instructional feedback around instructional change that I want to see and helping them to think. I have also been able to get more teachers to go in the last two years to workshops and to lead coaching. We have a good coaching system now….I have two quarterly meetings with each teacher that is not required on the evaluation tool. So I meet with each teacher for one hour every quarter. So just to have a face-to-face, that's just something I've been doing; I've been doing that since I was a principal. Everybody knows I have a list of 25 questions. I give them to you the day before for you to peruse, and you come in and we talk.

Some of the principals spoke of their teachers observing other teachers. Likewise, Principal Massey discussed those same sentiments, except she provides her teachers the opportunity to observe teachers of other schools. She said, “Let's go in observe some teachers.” [They would respond], “Is it okay if I go and observe such and such at another school?” [I would respond], “Yes! I'll pay for that sub all day long. Yes, want to take a whole day, a half a day, what do you want? What do you need? So yeah, if you want to go observe, yes, yes.”

**Professional development.**

All of the principals mentioned a large part of their work was focused on professional development for teachers. They explained the importance of being transparent, so teachers understand the expectations around instruction. They all agreed that the district-sponsored training was insufficient in that regard. Principal Massey unquestionably stated, “They
[teachers] need to see this system and how it's being done,…let's get to the meat and potatoes of this thing and understand what it is.”

Many of the principals discussed their own ways of facilitating learning opportunities for their teachers around their interaction with the teacher evaluation system. According to Principal Shelton:

We did a lot of PD [professional development] with teachers around what feedback looks like, around attaching and tagging various occurrences with which Domain and aligning them. So we did some levels of hands-on training with the staff because we knew that the online model was not going to be as successful for our teachers.

Principal Lipinski said:

We do the orientation, and we kind of go over new things that are coming out. So [for] my newer teachers, I kind of sit down with them go over the how the process works and then I buddy them up with someone who's there.

In-school coaching opportunities were discussed by Dr. Remnant:

We have in-house training I'll do a reminder or a refresher there, maybe once a month. Then we have grade level meetings, and I'll touch on components or areas where I'm like, ‘Okay, this is where we need to focus on.’ So monthly they're getting something.

Summer school trainings also took place according to Principal Massey, “We had trainings over the summer where we broke it down to our staff. We actually had them watch videos just like we did. We let them evaluate then we let them do a self-evaluation.”

Some of the principals felt the need to further develop themselves to add value to their staffs’ development. All of them participated in the district-supported and state mandated training, but others felt the continual need to obtain a more in-depth understanding, to support their teachers. Principal Massey passed the training module:

But what does that mean for my staff? What does that mean for my students? How do I teacher practice growth into student growth? Yeah, and I don't know if exactly what that training would look like for administrators, but something needs to happen in the gap cause it's like you've passed these modules and then you're just thrown in there, and it's like, okay, figure it out sink or swim. Somebody will come out sooner or later. So you
almost have to create your own personal lifeline….I was with a network that was really into Bambrick's work with Leveraged Leadership, so for me that helped because it made us drill down to key things that would actually move the teachers practice….If I hadn't read Bambrick-Santoyo's book, I would not have known how to prioritize my time to be able to give teachers that feedback and to say, okay, I've done this before, I've actually coached somebody in one week or two week increments and given, you know, feedback. That's not something that they teach, that's something not in a typical class, and you have to actually do it and be able to write about it, speak about it, and reflect on your own process to be good at it.

Bambrick-Santoya’s model was also popular with Principal Blaken:

We do get feedback from the teachers like what worked for you, what didn't work, and we've made adjustments, you know, from year one to year five. We've really made adjustments…I’ve learned more about Bambrick-Santoyo's model for effective coaching and feedback. I utilized that model with my teachers, so I don't, I didn't want anyone to think it's an ‘I gotcha’ moment. I always want people to know, ‘Okay, this is a coaching tool, and the goal is for you to be reflective and to improve because you're dealing with the students’ lives.’

Another layer of district-supported resources were advantageous to Ms. Shelton, “Some of the inquiries that I have, I get answers from my network and or my colleagues who've done that well before.”

**Barriers of coaching.**

While principals described their work on multiple fronts to coach their teachers, some admittedly identified barriers that interfere with their attempts to implement leadership strategies successfully. Some of the principals’ confirmed what was noted in the literature review as some of the challenges with the evaluation process. Principal Remnant spoke about teachers not completing forms, which she believes make them powerless, and it makes the conversation “lopsided.” She stated:

They [teachers] don't fill out the required forms, the pre-conference observation form and the post conference observation forms. They don't fill them out. I make mine fill them out, but they don't fill them out. I have a lot of mentees now whom I'm working with on that. They're having a lot of problems in their school because the teachers won't fill them out because they don't have to.
Principal Massey identified another barrier, which is the absence of student voice. She likes to talk to the students during the observations to hear their perspectives as the intended benefactors of the lesson. She shared, “There needs to be a way to incorporate a question or two from students who are where you can garner enough insight about, okay they understand what's going on or they don't. The students need to be interviewed.”

Principal Remnant agreed with the significance of student voice being present:

My kids tell me… So I talk to my kids, my 8th graders, 7th graders, I talk to them. ‘What's going in your room, man? What are you all doing?’ ‘Oh man I don't understand none of this.’ ‘What's happening? Did he give you that? Is he explaining this to you?’ I talk to my kids. ‘Is he explaining this to you, or did he just give you this worksheet?’ ‘No, he taught...’ ‘Well, how long have all you all been working on this?’ ‘Two days.’ Then I go back and look at the lesson plan. You know, I talk to my kids. I really, and my teachers know that. I talk to my kids, and they tell me every time. That's how I know when they're not lying.

Although there weren't any interview questions inquiring about the teacher dismissal stage in the teacher evaluation process, the majority of the principals mentioned it. They acknowledged when substantial coaching efforts and supports have been provided and a teacher’s instructional practice is inadequate, the teacher evaluation system supports their efforts in removing the teacher. When asked what does the system does well? Lipinski said, “The teacher evaluation system does a good job at getting rid of teachers…When you [teachers] play around with it, it could get you.” Agreed, but said differently, Principal Blaken shared, “The district is going to use the data as a metric if you need to cut positions, so ratings can come into play.” A different way to remove teachers was described by Principal Massey:

I know you didn't ask me that, but [I will] coach someone out of this role. I don't want people to lose their jobs, but I don't want people in front of kids who don't want to be in front of kids…It really makes me look at the evaluation system and say some of you, all really, shouldn't be teaching.

To sum up the process, Principal Remnant said:
I put out a lot of teachers in my time too, and it's a difficult process. I also have found that this is a great tool to help teachers improve or make different choices...You're either going to play the game, you're going to improve in the game, or you're going to get out of the game, there really is no other way to go.

The various components of being a coach have consumed the lives of the principals who were interviewed. They committed to understanding the teacher evaluation system in order for all responsible parties to implement it fully, so it positively impacts students. The findings reflected that these principals think the coaching strategies, professional development of teachers and themselves, the incomplete or missing coaching forms, the absence of students’ voices, and the removal of teachers impacted their role as a principal into a coach.

**Increased Principal-Teacher Communication**

Another reoccurring theme in the findings from the interviews was communication. Communication was duly noted as one of the most prevalent improvements that evolved out of the current teacher evaluation system. The process that was modeled after the clinical supervisory cycle mentioned in the literature review set a platform for principals and teachers to have more conversations. The rubric, a framework that provides descriptions and attributes about planning, instruction, the environment, and professional practice of teachers, increased principals’ communication with their teachers about their performance. Principal Shelton expressed, “It requires teachers to participate….you have to discuss…that is the strongest piece that I’ve seen come out…It allows you to kind of dialogue about the different things you're seeing.”

**Process.**

While described in the literature review as the Clinical Supervisory Model which was designed in 1980 by Goldhammer et al., the pre-conference, observation, and post-conference are identified as the components in the cycle that the principals use with teachers to discuss teaching
behaviors. The cycle aided principals in their verbal communication efforts of communicating with teachers about their teaching craft. This clinical supervision cycle has been emphasized as a critical aspect of continual developments in teaching (Marzano et al., 2011). Compared to past practices in the district, there wasn’t a standardized structure for feedback sessions. Principal Remnant reflected on the past process:

The form itself lends itself to no conversation. I mean none. If you got marked a little bit, you could go to them and be like, ‘Why you?’ [The principal would say], ‘Well, you know, you were late 12 times this year.’ Okay, now you could argue that out and be like, ‘You know I'll do better…’ [The principal would say], ‘All right, I'll change it.’ And it went downtown. You mailed them; there were triplicate copies, a white, a yellow, and a pink. And you kept your copy in the file, and he [principal] kept his copy and then if he felt like mailing them to human resources, your principal mailed them. If he didn't, oh well, cause nobody checked them.

The principals in the study use the pre-conference (the beginning of the cycle) as a time to discuss with teachers the planning of the unit and/or lesson that will be observed. Principal Blaken takes it a step further by using this time to communicate with the teachers suggestions for improvement before she teachers a lesson. She asserted:

To be honest with you, I make adjustments with my teachers in those pre-conferences. Like, if they're going to bomb in the water, then we make those adjustments right there, like this doesn't connect…like I really do want you to do your best, and there has even been times when there's nothing they could do except go back to the drawing board, so we would push a deadline, you know, we would push the date back for an observation. You need to come back; you need to go do this; your lesson is missing this, this, this. Go back and then come back.

When the principals are in the classroom observing the teacher (the middle component of the cycle), they explained they are capturing the moment by scribing as much as they see and hear from the teachers and students as it relates to the rubric. The experience is typed or hand-written, and the written data are electronically submitted to the teachers. Dr. Remnant talked about her experience:
I stay in the room an hour and a half, that's just what I do. The informals [observations] are supposed to be 15 minutes, I think, or something like that. I do 45 to an hour. So the formals [observations] are supposed to be an hour. I do an hour and a half because I want to catch everything. Because I do that, I have had some of the best conversations with people who I had to absolutely say nothing.

Principal Shelton thought that teachers find a lot of value in the written data collected. It's really easy to say oh no, this didn't happen, that didn't happen, but when you see it is pretty much word for word and like, oh that does sound like me. I do you know, make statements like that. And it lets them know that I am listening and I am just as invested in the process as they are.

The final component of the cycle maintains its relevance. Principal Massey used this time to bring the motive back to the students. “The goal is for you [teachers] to be reflective and to improve because you're dealing with the students’ lives.” With that in mind, she said that she uses post-conferences as a time to verbalize to her teachers their attributes that provide them the highest leverage to improve their teaching behaviors across the several different Domains in the rubric.

Principal Blaken said that she gets most excited communicating with teachers during the post observations conferences:

Even if it was not their best lesson, the fact that they one, recognize where it went wrong and they have a plan and can clearly articulate their plan to improve it, and I'm just literally like, ooh I got that. I really have very little to add because they were so intentional about, so thoughtful about the lesson and intentional about what they're going to do better the next time.

When Dr. Remnant discussed her perception of what the teacher evaluation system does well, communication was rooted in her description:

I think it allows you to have great tough conversations…if you use it the way it's supposed to be used. If you're smart, and you really use it the way it's supposed to be used, you don't have to be a mean principal, a dirty principal, you don't have to hurt people. All you have to do is lay out your evidence and allow conversation to flow from what you have…It lends itself really to having great conversations, particularly hard conversations with teachers who are underperforming.
Principal Shelton admitted the impact post-conferences have on teachers. “It made them more thoughtful about what they were doing in class because if you’re not thinking about your practice you think everything is fine.”

This post-observation time also provides principals additional opportunities to communicate resources and suggestions for teachers, which they have found extremely valuable. According to Lipinski, during her post-observation conversations, she has communicated resources to assist her teachers:

It [online resource] is kind of like the blog or whatever, they offer PD [professional development] based on certain components, and I let them know. I do it for all teachers regardless of what they're struggling at. It's like a PD [professional development] after school for them, and where they can go and they can get like help on providing differentiated instruction and help on whatever it is, and every month it's something new.

When her teachers are not pleased with the outcome of their rating that was discussed during the post-conference conversation, and they desire to improve their practice, Principal Massey said, “They can go in [the online option] and find additional resources in that specific component.” Blaken acknowledged the value in those post-conference conversations as a time to suggest the online resources for both teachers and principals:

The online resources for teachers and even for administrators where it's for teachers, by teachers, a lot of those modules were designed and now more than ever I feel like, if a teacher didn't get a rating that they wanted in a specific component that they can go in and find additional resources, but at the same time principals don't have to dig on their bookshelves. They too can go to one place and get additional resources, you know, for teachers and point them in that direction cause, you know, things being electronic now I think it's made things easier to some degree, a little more streamlined.

Rubric.

Most of the principals thought the written language in the rubric strengthened the communication efforts between teachers and principals by providing some level of consistency across the district about what teaching resembles. The written descriptions leave no room for
ambiguity when it comes to having a conversation about performance expectations. Blaken thinks it helps:

> It takes the subjectivity out of it to a larger degree than what we previously had. I think it helps because again its original purpose was around helping teachers get their practice, improve their practice so that you can pinpoint now in ways that we couldn't with the previous document evaluation tool, specific areas for improvement. You can track teachers’ growth under specific components and then overall Domains. I think it makes the language consistent across the district.

There is no room for personal opinions, confirmed Massey:

> There's a common language for the expectations. It doesn't matter what I like. What's working well is, I don't think before now it's ever been this level of specificity and an in-depth look at everything that a teacher does. It's quite complex, and to be able to label that, name that, celebrate the strength in that, be able to identify areas of growth in that and then to be able to identify people who are strong so that other people could come and observe that. That’s good.

The rubric provides an opportunity for principals and teachers to engage in more in-depth conversations and growth efforts about teaching behaviors. Remnant said:

> I love the richness, the deepness of having the conversations around the Domains. I think it's really clear, what this Domain is, what it entails, and what it does not entail. What I really love about it is to be able to have conversations around what I have seen, not what I felt, and that's taken a lot of work.

> The specificity of the rubric is applauded by Blaken, “You can pinpoint now in ways that we couldn't with the previous document evaluation tool, specific areas for improvement you can track teachers growth under specific components and then overall Domains.” Lipinski has found value when she has focused in on a specific attribute she wanted to see across her school.

> “When I'm rating a lesson about using incorrect grammar, it helps me to be consistent on my ratings for all the teachers.”

> Increased principal and teacher communication have been considered an advantage for teachers and principals to perform in their roles, respectively. Although the principals
unanimously identified the data entry of the notes from the communication exchanges as time consuming, they found the benefits to heavily outweigh the drawbacks.

**Empathetic about Challenges**

Empathy was another theme that emerged from the data. Principals felt a heightened level of emotional connection with the teachers through their experiences with the teacher evaluation system. Massey provided her perspective on the teachers’ anxiety everyone is feeling:

> It [current teacher evaluation] was quite overwhelming cause you went from a checklist to now you have a placemat of four different Domains that you need to be proficient in all at one time. A lot of the stuff people were already doing, but the language that it was wrapped in, and you know, the packaging was a little scary. Then when it was related to your evaluation with test scores and all the different components, it was a lot to unpack and to deliver. But, I think when you let people know, ‘Okay, we're in this together. Let's figure this out together. No one's going to penalize you.’

The principals perceived the interactions with the evaluation system led teachers grappling with opposing forces of being powerless while simultaneously faced with multiple opportunities of being empowered.

**Powerless.**

One of the ways the principals were empathetic about the teachers’ challenges was recognizing student data, a non-negotiable measure in the teachers’ evaluation, as unfair and devalued. Student data from standardized test scores are used in their evaluations. Some of the principals felt that teachers have had to succumb to a practice that was not beneficial to their growth. Dr. Remnant said she couldn’t explain the score teachers received from the student data, Any principal worth their salt will tell you all this stuff is weighted so bad, that value-added, which I still can't explain to anybody in the world. You have to take that stuff with a grain of salt…I don't even pay attention to it, cause it's not a holistic snapshot of anything. For this reason, she visits classrooms daily and schedules instructional walkthroughs.
Principal Lipinski mentioned principals get the data too late to do anything with it for teachers, and a sub-group of teachers receive scores for students they don’t teach. She explained, “The summative rating, which includes the student data piece is not provided until the next school year…the special-ed teachers, usually take the data of the entire school…It could be quite messy.” So, at the beginning of the year when she gets it, she sits down with her teachers and together they try to figure out what is wrong.

Further, she felt due to the pressures invoked on teachers from the student data measure, which is the area they feel they can’t control, they are resorting to unscrupulous behavior in the areas they can control and self-report:

Teachers cheat. [For example] in 5th grade when they [students] come to you, they can't do this [work ]...So if you're honest, and you let them test, their scores [are] going down because their [previous teacher] cheated by inflating their last year final scores on the test...So you know with that being said, it is pushing teachers to cheat more because a lot of them want their jobs, and they're trying to figure out how can I stay honest if the person before me cheated, and their data is there? So how can I come behind them? Then they're [the previous teacher] going to say, ‘I didn't do it.’ You didn't teach them, they failed. They didn't get what they needed to from me.

All principals recognized that sometimes the data is used to cut positions neither the principals’ nor the teachers’ control. Principal Blaken summed the entire process up with shrugged shoulders by simply stating, “That’s just the reality…Principals don’t get to decide and that comes from HR [human resources].” In disagreement with that process, she described how she uses the other data points in the teacher evaluation ratings to encourage teachers by identifying areas where they can set goals and draft a professional development plan for themselves.

Another noted contributing factor to teachers’ vulnerability was the conflicting messages of the teacher evaluation as a development tool and as an evaluative tool. Principal Massey
thought that teachers had evolved to this notion of fear because they risk losing their jobs if they show ineptness in teaching. She posited, “It's [teacher evaluation system] missing the mark because people are afraid of it. It's tied to their evaluation [and] can be punitive as opposed to didactic.” To counteract those emotions Principal Massey felt it was best for her to respond to her teachers fear by “divorcing the two roles.” In her leadership practice, she described how her teachers can benefit from the growth perspective and receive the teacher evaluation system to be beneficial.

Because of the same conflicted opposing purposes, Principal Blaken also impressed upon her teachers the teacher evaluation system is designed to be helpful. She said, “It gets murky for teachers when you make it evaluative. In one breath we’re saying this is for your growth because of the coaching conversations, but teachers have anxiety because it’s evaluative and it wasn’t designed to be evaluative.” So, she described how she emphasized to her teachers that the evaluation is not a big deal. It is a moment in time for teachers, and an opportunity for them to grow.

Further, a few of the principals felt that teachers are adversely impacted by their evaluation because they can’t control their class composition. Principal Shelton described her concern about disruptive groups of students in the teachers’ classrooms. “Some subjects are harder to teach; some students [and], you know, some class combinations are a little more difficult.” When that happens, Shelton said she goes more into the role of a coach and supports her teachers during those difficult lessons.

Principal Lipinski recommended that the school district create a different teacher evaluation instructional rubric for principals to use at different schools to compensate for the
variation in classroom makeups and school types. She defended her position by sharing a previous experience:

So, I guess this teacher at School A and the teacher at School B did the lesson plan together, and they both teach freshman English. So, the teacher at School B got [rated] all distinguished, but the teacher at School A got [rated] all proficient. She [teacher at School A] gave a really good lesson, a distinguished lesson [because] she worked even harder. The kids are more strugglers. They don't grasp onto it. I have to push it on them. So you know like why wouldn't it be distinguished compared to her [teacher at School B]? Teachers getting rated different and get away with it [the belief] if the school is not high performing then it's not high performing teachers in there. Cause there still may be some within that school, you know [of] course everybody is not superior or excellent, but you may have quite a few in there.

In spite of the uncontrollable features of the teacher evaluation system, all of the principals want positive results for their teachers, to improve their teachers’ instructional practice, and to help them do their best. Principal Blaken professed, “I really do want you [teachers] to do your best.” Principal Massey echoed those same sentiments, “I just really want the process to be rewarding and fulfilling for my staff so that they're able to take it and actually incorporate it and it's not force fed. I want them to want to be better.”

Powerful.

Conversely, all of the principals identified multiple opportunities during the teacher evaluation process that works in teachers’ favor and positions them to carry some power. Each of them described how teachers are provided forms prior to their pre-conference that asks guiding questions to prepare them in advance for the principal discussion about the lesson(s) they will be teaching. Likewise, the principals noted that teachers are also provided post-observation forms to document their perspectives and reflect on the lessons they taught in advance of their post-conferences with the principal. The data captured from the responses to the questions on the forms are also part of the teacher evaluation rating.
In both of these occasions, the principals noted that teachers can influence and have some leverage in their own teacher evaluation ratings. As a way to inform the principal before the observation, Principal Massey told her teachers, “You complete the pre-observation conference so that I'll know what it is that you're going to be teaching.” Affirmed by Principal Remnant, she said she had to stress to her teachers: “You give us, actually what the forms are asking. What do you want me to look at? What are you concerned about? What do you teach? It's not so much about what you're teaching, but it's what do you want me to help you to do? And what am I going to see when I get here?”

With the realization that her teachers think there is value in completing the forms before the conference and preparing for their lesson, Blaken said, “Really, to have a conversation with me it shows me evidence that you've planned it out.” She also stated she allows for her teachers to provide additional evidence if they don’t agree with the rating, “We've had to do some negotiating in the post-conference if they have evidence…I also allow them one do-over if they are not pleased with the outcome of their evaluations.”

In some of the schools, the principals shared that their teachers have gone to the extent and voiced who they wanted to evaluate them and when they want to be evaluated. Massey noted:

They pretty much get to pick, like I want you to come in on Tuesday at 9 o'clock and most of the time, I would say 90% of the time, teachers are choosing a difficult class or class that's challenging because they do want feedback. They're not like, oh I want to pick the best class cause I'm putting on this show.

Similarly, Remnant shared her experience:

I had an assistant principal who did it you know letter to the post, I mean it was, you know, it was just, it was too much. And so you know my teachers would be like, ‘We want you, not her.’
When the principals described the current teacher evaluation system, they indicated that teachers are provided the opportunity to collect unlimited amount of evidence to be rated in one of the Domains. Because Blaken said she believed in leveraging all the strategies for the best outcome for her teachers, she said:

We try to encourage our teachers after each observation, take your time and observe, quarterly is really ideally the best practice that we want them to engage in. Upload your artifacts, you know so if you led a workshop for the PAC meeting, upload that into Domain 4, don't wait until May because you're going to forget. You don't put it in there, you don't want to just leave it to me because I'm not just remembering yours, I have to look for evidence that everybody else is doing it, so I tell them that's their place to shine, like to just store their information.

The principals providing additional training, outside of the district-supported training is another illustration of teacher empowerment. The principals recognized the importance of teachers owning the teacher evaluation system and being fully aware of what and how they were being evaluated. Teachers learning more about feedback were important to Principal Shelton:

When we came back to the school year, we did a lot of PD's [professional development] with teachers around what feedback looks like, around attaching and tagging various occurrences with which Domain and aligning them. So we did some levels of hands-on training with the staff because we knew that the online model was not going to be as successful for our teachers.

Principal Lipinski focused on the process. She said, “I kind of sit down with them go over how the process works and then I kind of buddy them up with someone.” Focusing on the new rubric was Principal Massey’s focus:

We had trainings over the summer where we broke it down to our staff. We actually had them watch videos just like we did. We let them evaluate then we let them do a self-evaluation like, ‘How do you think you would fare on utilizing this new rubric?’ And then just unpacking the standards.

The principals recognized the emotions of the teachers around the teacher evaluation system. They have tried to assimilate and coordinate different strategies to provide them encouragement and ownership in their process, which is an illustration of servant leadership.
attributes (Russell & Stone, 2002). Principals’ outlook on the intentions of the evaluation system was positive, and they desired the teachers’ outlook to be congruent.

**Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the three emerging themes from the data. The first theme described the principal as a coach. Principals repeatedly showed a commitment to developing teachers with their leadership coaching strategies, professional development, while recognizing the barriers to ensure effective implementation and positive outcomes for teachers and students. The second theme focused on the increased opportunities for principals and teachers to talk about instructional teaching and professional behaviors. The teacher evaluation system created a written and oral structure to have ongoing conversations with their teachers about their planning and instruction. The last theme expressed principals’ empathy about the challenges teachers endure with the evaluation system. The principals recognized teachers couldn’t control some of the variables that exist in their evaluation. Despite that fact, they provided multiple opportunities for teachers to take ownership of their rating in areas within their sphere of control to leverage the highest rating possible.

The integration of all the themes and sub-themes show that the principals had mixed perceptions of the current teacher evaluation system. Although they provided a favorable view on the current teacher evaluation system’s ability to support and develop teachers, they also found constraints that seemed in some cases as inhibitors. The teacher evaluation system is a mandate that was designed to meet criteria in order for school districts to receive federal funds. The principals recognized the compliance of their work, but were able to maximize the teacher evaluation system’s offerings. In addition, they mentioned at great length how some of their leadership practices were reactions to restrictions or drawbacks they experienced only wishing
those factors could have been a considerable components for the teacher evaluation. The next chapter is the Discussion where I return back to the research questions, connect the analytical concepts to the theoretical framework, and conclude with my final thoughts and future considerations of my research.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Five principals were interviewed in this study to capture their perceptions of the teacher evaluation system currently in use to support and develop teachers and along with the principals’ experiences with implementing the evaluation system. In support of existing literature in this area, current principals still play multiple roles at school including that of a teacher evaluator (Hallinger, 2003). The evaluation process requires them to train, develop, and support teachers. It also includes removing the teachers who are not meeting expectations.

Fehr (2001) criticized the teacher evaluation process for taking up a significant amount of principals’ time during the regular school day and for requiring a certain level of engagement to ensure it is implemented and prioritized precisely as intended. The principals in the study confirmed this to be true; however, they emphasized a greater commitment to develop their teachers, so students can benefit from quality instruction. Their responses added a different perspective of using the teacher evaluation system, its meaning, and its intentions. Principals in this study clearly provided a different dynamic of the multi-dimensional nature of the teacher evaluation system. As a result, this research advocates for stronger principals’ presence and principals’ voices as the users of the current teacher evaluation system with the intent of contributing to a growing body of research.

Principals’ judgments of the teacher evaluation system are insightful due to the level of interaction they have with it and the voluminous number of teachers and affected by it. The research questions that guided my study to share principals’ perspectives were: How do K-8 principals understand the intentions and priorities of the current teacher evaluation system? How do principals perceive the teacher evaluation system improves teachers’ instructional practices?
How has the teacher evaluation system impacted your role as a principal? The general analysis procedures I followed began with my reading the interview transcripts and coding the data. I wrote the coded data on individual post-it notes to link like thoughts together and identified emerging themes. The themes stated in that evolved from the data were Principal into Coach, Increased Principal-Teacher Communication, and Empathetic about Challenges.

This chapter is divided into multiple parts. First, I describe the contents of the theoretical frameworks. Then I return to the three research questions by connecting the analytical concepts from the data to the literature review and theoretical frameworks. I conclude this chapter with future directions for principals.

**Theoretical Framework**

I started the study without suggesting a per-existing theoretical framework in mind because I didn’t want to code my data by certain concepts. I was not interested in testing or verifying a theory. Instead, I wanted to see how the emerged data dictated theoretical concepts within a framework(s), which is an inductive model of thinking and an acceptable qualitative approach to research (Creswell, 1994).

No single framework guided this study initially. I applied, after the data collection and analysis, models of leadership specifically Bass’ (1985) transformational theory and Greenleaf’s (1996) servant leadership theory seem pertinent. The participants’ leadership attributes and behavior helped me to make the connections to the kind of leaders these principals emulated while in their role as teacher evaluator.

Greenleaf’s (1996) theory of servant leadership was built into a model of 20 attributes researched by Russell and Stone (2002). With a more acute focus as it relates to this study, there are five characteristics of a servant leader demonstrated in the data. They are service, modeling,
teaching, listening, and appreciation. Service is the core of this theory, and it explains how leaders encourage the best from their followers by helping them. Help can be in the form of alleviating barriers that will interfere with their success, such as materials, attention, time, or resources (Russell & Stone, 2002). Servant leadership pinpoints its focus on the interest of the follower first and then the desired outcome of the organization. Modeling and teaching is an important way leaders demonstrate what they want the followers to emulate. This takes place through coaching sessions where the two communicate and/or leaders are a personal example or demonstrate through role-play (Greenleaf, 1996; Russell & Stone, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1992). Listening is key to servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1996), as it was mentioned in Bass’ (1985) primary behavior of individualized consideration. Serving the same purpose in both frameworks, listening is a critical way leaders show respect for their followers, learn from their followers, so they can better serve and support them. Lastly, the servant leader demonstrates some level of appreciation. A servant leader facilitates positive thoughts, images, and interactions while showing a sense of relatedness, empathy, and concern for the work that is being asked and practiced by the followers (Greenleaf, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 1993).

Bass’ (1985) transformational theory defines inspirational motivation and individualized consideration as two of the four primary behaviors. Inspirational motivation is descriptive of leaders who communicate high levels of expectations their followers can accomplish outside of their own self-interest. Leaders who demonstrate this behavior provide meaning to their followers work, foster interactive communication, and show a dual commitment to the common goals. Individualized consideration is representative of leaders who act as coaches. They are committed to helping their followers grow through their challenges, offering a supportive environment to do so, and listening intently, so their individual needs can be addressed, and they
are empowered to perform (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2010). See Figure 6 for theoretical frameworks.

![Figure 6. Theoretical frameworks.](image)

Of similar relevance, current research confirms the leadership practices in these frameworks are as relevant as they were 25 years ago (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) made a claim in a report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation that current principal leadership practices closely reflect that of a transformational approach. They found from their research, evidence that there are three categories which serve as the “basics” of successful leadership. Those three sets of practices are setting directions,
developing people, and redesigning the organization. When the authors delved into the practice of developing people, they learned from the evidence that there were more specific sets of leadership practices: providing individualized support (e.g. Bass’ transformational theory) and appropriate models of best practices and beliefs (e.g. Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory). Confirmed further by Kouzes and Posner’s (2007) research in *The Leadership Challenge*, they discovered “model the way” (pp. 15-16) as one of the five practices of exemplary leadership. Modeling the way is described as earning the right to lead through your direct involvement and actions.

Specifically in the context of this research, the more recent studies add value to the type of leaders described through the lens of Bass’ (1985) and Greenleaf’s (1996) frameworks. When I returned to the research questions, I used data and correlating themes from the principals’ responses as answers. I made connections to situate the study within the context of the theoretical frameworks. This provided a conceptual understanding of the leadership practices the principals exemplify when interacting with the teacher evaluation system. The theoretical frameworks help to see clearly how principals perceived their work and their intrinsic commitment to student achievement through the vessels of teachers’ practices. One principal stated, “A school runs on the personality of the principal.” Proven true, the principals in this study have personalities of people who are caring and committed to the growth and development of teachers. They work tirelessly to ensure their schools, which some call “their house,” is organized and aligned to a culture that is positive and productive for students and adults. I feel the veracity of that statement is supported by the data presented.
Return to the Research Questions

Research Question One

The first research question was: What are the intentions and priorities of the teacher evaluation system? When principals were asked to compare their experiences to their expectations, most of them mentioned they didn’t have any expectations. Most simply stated the system was new, and they were required to learn it and implement it, so they would make it work. Based on their responses, it felt as though they initially embraced the newness as part of their responsibilities, so they complied. However, when asked for a description of the teacher evaluation and its strengths, they independently shared the same view that the teacher evaluation system placed great emphasis and intentions on teacher development, fairness, and principal training.

Drawing on Greenleaf’s (1996) theory of servant leadership, the principals’ diverse set of leadership behaviors were key for them to understand and implement the teacher evaluation system according to its intended purpose of developing teachers. Specific examples of those behaviors drawn from the data are the principals provided training and resources to their teachers. They modeled and coached to improve teachers’ practice. In Chapter Four, I discussed how principals found increased communication opportunities with their teachers favorable. During these times, they set goals, listened, and discussed expectations with their teachers, so they have would a vision and motivation to progress. They also encouraged teachers to take ownership in their own professional development by utilizing online resources and actively engaging in the components of the evaluation process they controlled as a form of empowering themselves and adding value to their own rating.
In spite of the common belief that the teacher evaluation system was intended to develop teachers, there was one principal in the study who projected a strong emotion counter to the teacher evaluation intent to develop teachers. She indicated that the correlating documents used during the evaluation process didn’t provide the principals with the right questions needed for principals and teachers to authentically discuss and determine new behaviors to improve their practice. This principal went on to label the system a couple of times as a “bunch of crap” and instead of its intended purpose to help teachers improve, she believed it was a form of accountability, which actually helps principals get rid of low performing teachers better than before. For that reason, she believed teachers don’t trust the process or the evaluation results. From the cases Kouzes and Posner (2007) analyzed, they would argue trust is essential in leadership efforts. Without trust, the constituents and associated goals will dissipate.

This principal’s response was somewhat connected to her series of distrustful interactions she mentioned at the beginning of the interview in describing her experiences prior to her role as principal. On her road to leadership, she consistently thought individuals’ actions were based on alternative motives or were a catalyst for hidden agendas. As a teacher, she wondered how the principal knew she had the credentials of becoming an assistant principal, and she hadn’t conveyed it. She wondered which assistant principal she was going to replace, and why were they going to leave. She wondered why the principal asked her to be an assistant principal, and she wasn’t considered “his buddy.” She wondered why her colleague “turned on me.” She was initially suspicious of the current assistant principal (her cohort member) who proposed she apply for the principal position at his school. She wondered why so many people she hadn’t talked to in a long time were reaching out to her once she got the position of principal. She speculated a teacher left because she was jealous of her relationship with other teachers. When
neighboring schools outscored her in academics, she assumed they were participating in unscrupulous activities. I think the change into the current system added to her leering of trust she already maintained from previous interactions.

All the principals recognized the evaluation system was geared to improve all teachers’ practice, regardless of the years of service; however, they did notice some variations working with tenured and non-tenured teachers. The principals who had been in the district longest noticed different reactions to ratings between the two groups. They opined that tenured teachers mostly challenged their ratings and were unhappy with feedback when they were rated less than proficient. The other three principals noticed that tenured teachers were overall less receptive to feedback while their non-tenured teachers welcomed it and embraced small wins to improve their practice. They believed that tenured teachers had less interaction with the teacher evaluation process since their status warranted fewer observations, so they were less familiar than non-tenured teachers. With non-tenured teachers undergoing four observations, they had more opportunities to engage with the process and the rubric, which increased their level of comfort and receptiveness to all the components and feedback.

Along with teacher development, fairness was perceived as a priority of the teacher evaluation system. The principals felt it was free from bias for both them and their teachers. The two principals who used to be coaches in their previous roles felt the district served them well in their efforts of establishing consistency. They gave praise for the rubric as it serves as an anchor to use common language for discussion, suggestions for improvement, and rating the teachers without favor. The rubric is modeled after Charlotte Danielson’s (2007) framework. As noted in the literature review, one of Charlotte Danielson’s intentions for creating a framework was to develop a common language for professional conversations. According to these
principals, it had accomplished that. One principal described it as a way to “normalize things.” They did not mention common language was a concern in their previous role as coaches, but it was interesting that they were the only two principals who mentioned it as a great quality and priority of the system.

Dr. Remnant and Principal Blaken looked at fairness in a different light. Dr. Remnant shared that one of her teachers was not pleased with her rating, so she appealed it. There was a panel of independent educators who looked at the data collected by the principal and decided if the individual rating remained or should be changed. She recognized that she “won” but overall thought providing the teacher the opportunity to appeal and have a non-related body of people making the judgment was an equitable practice. Principal Blaken did not mention the appeal process, but she certainly spoke about the fairness of the system in terms of it “leveling the playing field.” She shared that principals observe teachers’ behaviors but also have to provide evidence to support the rating. It is no longer an arbitrary record, so principals have to make a case for a rating with anecdotal notes and other data points. That is a fair practice and contrary to the studies Peterson (2004) reported of the checklist model cited in the literature review.

Lastly, most of the principals acknowledged their training resources were a priority in implementing the teacher evaluation system. They experienced the standard online training required by the state in order to receive the credentials to evaluate. Outside of that training, the principals benefitted from colleagues’ support, online videos, handbooks, opportunities to practice with their staff, and district supported training and practice times. Although they felt they had to provide their teachers with much professional development, they overall thought the district served them well with supportive resources. They repeatedly referred to the online resources they used when they needed clarity or further understanding on the multiple
components in the teacher evaluation system. From the principal responses, it appeared that an emphasis on principal training was provided to ensure they were effective in their role so limited understanding wouldn’t interfere with their ability to grow, develop, and evaluate teachers.

**Research Question Two**

The second research question was: How do you use the teacher evaluation system to help improve instructional practices? When principals repeatedly spoke about improving their teachers’ instructional practices, they referenced two-way communication efforts that took place during the pre-observation and post-observation conferences. Principal Shelton pointed out that if one doesn’t talk about teaching with one’s teachers, then teachers are going to think that everything is acceptable when it is not. Principal Remnant stressed that conversations help look at instruction together and work on trying to change it together. These are the type of results intended from the clinical supervisory model that was discussed in the literature review by Goldhammer et al. (1980).

Conversations were perceived as a major breakthrough for teachers’ instructional improvements. The principals’ constant reiteration of communicating instructional expectations, providing immediate feedback, and establishing agreed upon actionable activities illustrates the strong value they found from the principal-teacher conversations. They emphasized that teachers were clear on what needed to be changed, improved, or omitted in their practice after those conversations. According to Bass’ theory (1985), interactive communication and communicating expectations are examples of inspirational motivation that yield positive relationships and cultural bonds between the leader and followers. Within the context of the work environment, both parties would be working towards the common goal of transforming the behavior into the desired outcome best for the organization.
The value of conversations were regarded so highly by the principals who previously were both coaches, that one principal recommended replacing formal observations, which can vary between one-two a year, with informal observations, that can go up to four per year. She defended her position by explaining formal observations are pre-planned and scheduled. Teachers can prepare to do what is right for that one time. However, in an informal cycle, principals get to see teachers’ practice in a more authentic form because the visits aren’t scheduled. According to the REACH report (Chicago Public Education Fund, 2016), the surveyed principals saw value for more flexibility around observation type as well. The school leaders in this report said that they would provide more effective, actionable feedback to teachers through shorter more frequent feedback. Similarly, the principals in this study felt that the results from informal visits appeared to lead to more meaningful discussions about teacher practice and increased the likelihood of the improved changed behavior to sustain over time. Principal Blaken subscribed to the idea of increased informal observations because it motivated her tenured teachers. In her school, the “informals” push them more because they are motivated to improve by the time they are scheduled for their final formal observation.

Some of the principals used conversations in an alternative way to improve instruction. Principal Lipinski was the one principal who perceived the teacher evaluation system as an accountability tool. She believed teachers know what they need to work on before any conversations take place, so she used the conversations as an opportunity to set goals with the teacher and identify steps in reaching them. The conversations help to solidify actionable steps and clear up expectations. Principal Massey mentioned that during her conversations she encourages her teachers to work on areas where they are not performing their best and to choose a class that may be difficult for them to teach, so they can improve. Bass’ theory (1985) would
describe this example of inspirational motivation because Massey is inspiring them to see the future state of their practice as a better position than their current. She inspired her teachers to improve in those areas where they are most vulnerable. She also admitted to using conversations as a time to tie all of the administrative tasks together, such as grade reporting and lesson planning. She thought these topics in the conversations are important because it allows the teachers to see the relevance of all of their work, builds trust with her teachers, and sees how it plays a role in improving their overall instructional delivery.

Additionally, the two principals with the most seniority in the district offered similar layers of support in their conversations as an attempt to improve instructional practices of teachers. Blaken believed the purpose of the conversation before the evaluation is to listen to the teacher and make adjustments to the lesson before it is executed. Listening, a servant leader attribute defined by Russell and Stone (2002), is a critical aspect of empowering and enhances communication clarity. So Blaken used the conversation as a time to recalibrate the lesson and refine it as needed. She, along with Dr. Remnant, prided herself of taking copious notes during the observation. They both mentioned it allows them to have a high volume of data, which leads to deeper and richer conversations around teaching and provides them mathematical evidence of what they are observing to help support their claim in the conversation. Perhaps this is due to their many years of experience serving teachers within this district and knowing what is needed in a conversation to keep it focused on what they perceived as relevant.

It is worth mentioning that there were different perspectives on the frequency of using the data as a way to improve instruction. Some of the principals indicated the data emanated from the teacher evaluation is used to develop teachers for that moment in time and nothing more. That is how and when they use it. Dr. Remnant said that teacher evaluations are private, and the
summative data report that claims to outline the teacher’s performance isn’t a holistic representation of anything. The data can be manipulated to tell any story, which was why she practices other observational strategies to collect data specific to the instructional goals of the school. Dr. Remnant and Ms. Lipinski both mentioned they get summative data for the teachers so late it is difficult to use it to change practice. The Voices from the Field report (Chicago Public Education Fund, 2016) made a claim that principals felt the timing of the data limits their ability to accelerate teachers’ growth, but it also makes informed staffing decisions. For this reason, it is recommended the summative data reports be available in July before the new school year.

Principal Blaken was as an outlier in this regard. In addition to using the data at the moment in time, she voiced a further commitment to her teachers’ development by using the summative data to identify trends and develop individual teacher professional development when they are less than proficient specific to what the data dictates. This may also be more practical to accomplish for Principal Blaken because compared to the other participants, she had the fewest number of teachers and might have had more time to engage in this type of task. In addition, she also had years of experience as a coach and the longest years as a teacher, and she mentioned her level of familiarity with the current evaluation process before her role as a principal. Her many years of experience with the process may have contributed to her refining how she uses it and adapting it for optimal results.

**Research Question Three**

The third research question was: How has the teacher evaluation system impacted your role as a principal? The teacher evaluation system inevitably affected the principals’ role since they are the facilitators responsible for its implementation. In this study, the principals
communicated that their role has become more of a coach to their teachers, they have become more organized with their time, and they are better prepared for teacher interactions.

A reoccurring theme I have discussed is that some of the principals discussed their role evolving into that of a coach as a result of the teacher evaluation system. It appears that two of the principals were able to make this comparison due to their previous experience as coaches. Consistently observing teachers and providing feedback, strategies and tips to improve teachers’ instructional delivery method is an illustration of coaching. Principal Massey, who had the fewest years of service as a principal, had never been a coach. However, she was of the same mind as the other two principals because she came into the role expecting it would encompass some form of coaching. She said, “I’m a newer principal, so I was already on the instructional leader paradigm shift.”

Dr. Remnant, who had the longest tenure as a principal, had a diametrically opposite experience of those principals previously mentioned. She mentioned that her involvement in providing instructional supports to teachers was new to her role as a principal. This added dimension appeared to make her skeptical about her ability to perform, especially after admitting she liked being an assistant principal better than being a principal. Her perspective actually agreed to what was indicated in the literature that historically principals worked and were perceived as managers (Glasman, 1984). Dr. Remnant called them her “administrative tasks.”

To help with her personal transition into this role, she also spent some time making a slight comparison of the current teacher evaluation system to Madeline Hunter’s (1984) model mentioned in the literature review. The process used then is similar to the current, which is a progressive improvement from the checklist model.
Since the teacher evaluation system impacted the principals’ role into that of a coach, all of them talked about having a goal of observing approximately five classrooms every day. Five appeared to be a general expectation in the district since all of the principals mentioned it, but this was different from their experiences with the checklist. Whether they administered the checklist or was evaluated by it as a teacher, the checklist didn’t require daily visits. Based on the principals’ perceptions, checklist evaluations were done one or two times a year. Some observations were mandates expected as part of the teacher evaluation system. However, it seemed because of their desire of not wanting “teachers to fail” (Shelton), they incorporated additional observational visits. The additional visits were either led and organized by principals or by some of the fellow teacher colleagues. They said the visits were designed to provide a modeling experience for the teachers, so they could see the practical implications of certain strategies. Also, it offered more opportunities to exchange information on teaching content.

The teacher evaluation system seemed to have significantly impacted the way principals organized their time and administrative tasks. All the principals expressed that since the inception of the current teacher evaluation system, they had to be more organized. The teacher evaluation process described by the principals is contingent on teachers’ tenure status and rating from previous year. These observations can range from two to four per year for each teacher. The process includes having one-two meetings with the teachers and a visit to their classroom to observe the teaching of a lesson. It seemed the principals with the largest number of teachers to evaluate stressed the importance of having a schedule developed at the beginning of the school year. They shared that the schedule helps them to stay organized on the type of observations they need to complete and the dates in which they should occur. One principal pointed out that
organization ensures they stay compliant with teacher contract obligations and helps them to maintain the integrity of the evaluation process.

Due to the increased meeting times with teachers, most of the principals spoke convincingly about preparation impacting their role and crucial to their success. Since teachers possibly have some power in this process either by appealing, refuting, or confirming the evaluation ratings, principals must be prepared for whatever may evolve out of the evaluation conversations. Principal Lipinski’s example of preparation was simply watching a video of a similar lesson she was scheduled to observe. She said that if she had never taught a specific content and wanted to prepare herself for what she will observe and confer after the observation, this was one of the many things she would do to be ready. When I asked the principals for the advice they would provide to other principals using the system for the very first time, three of the five recommended knowing the rubric is a priority in being prepared to use the teacher evaluation system. They mentioned that knowing the rubric helps prepare the principal by framing their thinking on what teaching behaviors to laser in on during the observation. Knowing the rubric is also perceived as a way to prepare principals for the conversations when meeting with teachers because it provides the consistent language and expectations.

Russell and Stone’s (2002) servant leadership attribute of appreciation was best represented when Principal Remnant spoke about her commitment to continual preparation efforts with the teacher evaluation system. She conveyed that she is mindful of what she is asking her teachers to do; therefore, she continues to engage in professional development opportunities and resources to improve and prepare herself, so she is better equipped to support them. She shared instructional resources she was reading over Christmas break because she
wanted to do a better job of coaching her teachers, so she could provide them with the help they needed.

**Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

This research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge within the teacher evaluation realm and beyond. In general, one of the most eminent results of this research is the principals’ commitment to teachers and their development. The literature review prominently identified policymakers’ roles and opinions of teacher accountability. There have been multiple iterations of teacher evaluations as a response. Given those influences, it is appropriate to note that the principals in this research equally vowed a desire to positively impact and develop teachers as a priority. They saw the conversations and other forms of communication as opportunities to improve teachers’ practices. They thought the system was generally fair, even the appeal process when the teachers didn’t agree with the rating. Kouzes and Posner (2007) realized that leadership development is self-development. Development of people is the most significant contribution to any institution. Principals’ commitment to developing their teachers is an illustration of leaders developing others into leaders, which is a win-win solution for the district.

These principals were also empathetic about the challenges teachers experienced. They felt the training the teachers received was inadequate, so they wanted to offer more. They expressed some uncertainty with the student growth measure included in the teachers’ evaluation because they didn’t understand how it worked, they received it too late to use, and they agreed it didn’t add value to the comprehensive look of teacher practice. In alignment with Linda Darling-Hammond (2015), who continues to raise new questions about the value of students’ value-added measures as part of the teachers’ evaluation, they found the best ways to circumvent
those effects when it came to improving teachers’ instructional practices. Despite this fact, the principals consistently encouraged their teachers to maximize the opportunities they control of their ratings within the teacher evaluation system.

If educators want to contribute to the sustainability of the positive outcomes from the principals interactions with the teacher evaluation system and to impact the approximately 98,000 public elementary and high school principals (US Department of Education, 2012) and the 3.7 million public school teachers (US Department of Education, 2012) that was mentioned in Chapter One, additional research is recommended. Some attention needs to shift into research efforts, such as building trust within principal and teacher relationships and examining the principals’ role on the front end of policy developments and the design of teacher evaluations systems.

Principal-teacher relationships can really foster increased levels of trust within a school. Trust plays a significant role in teachers’ response to evaluation (Tshannen-Moran, 2004) and likely leads to more active and constructive supervision that contributes to improved instruction. Trust is cultivated through speech, conversation, commitments, and action (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012), which according to the findings, the principals demonstrated in their interactions with the teacher evaluation system. Trust evolves when the teacher finds the principal feedback beneficial and changed behavior actually occurs. “Performers can only adjust their performance successfully if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate, and trustworthy” (Wiggins, 2012, p. 16). Trust is a necessary ingredient for any type of change to evolve and sustain (Fullan, 2010). Tschannen-Moran (2004) analogized trust as “glue” and a “lubricant” (p. xi) because it is critical to schools’ success since it sticks all parties together and greases it so the work of the body can still get done.
Results from this research should be regarded as a springboard into a broader focus on principals’ views as early on in the process as the development of educational policy. Principals’ voices matter and can influence the success of teacher development through the educational policy or design of teacher evaluation systems. I listened to five principals share their thoughts about the current teacher evaluation system. Principal Massey said it best when she stated,

If we took a larger stance on how teachers are evaluated, what is essential in an evaluation, and what's important in education,...we would be able to own a little bit more of how they’re evaluated and what those expectations should be for the evaluation. But because it's [teacher evaluation] an alignment with bureaucracy and money and not about children really learning, there's a misalignment as far as my expectations and what it should be.

She did not think principals have a strong enough presence to influence teacher evaluations. In fact, she agreed with what was presented in the literature in Chapter Two about policy significantly informing the expansion of teacher evaluations as opposed to principals who are the facilitators.

My hope was for my study to help capture some of those nuances that only principals could offer, so others can understand the value their perceptions of the use of the teacher evaluation system brings to support and develop teachers and their experiences with implementation. My goal was to certainly answer my research questions, but I also hoped the responses would strengthen the principals’ voices as it relates to the fundamental success of teachers and their development through the current teacher evaluation system.

**Conclusion**

This chapter summarized the research study and described how I used the emerging data to identify my theoretical frameworks. I described each framework and its components that conjoined all the variables in the data. Afterwards, I linked the literature to the responses of the
research questions. Lastly, I offered implications for action with the results and recommendations for future research.
APPENDICES
Appendix A: Email Script A

Below is the text of an email that was sent to participants requesting their participation in the study.

Hello,

Hope all is well. This is Denitra Griffin, and as you know, I am closing out my studies as a doctoral student at DePaul University. I am conducting my research project under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Rieckhoff.

The purpose of my research is to understand your perception about the current teacher evaluation you use and your experience implementing it. I am looking for participants who fit the following criteria:

- Principals
- Licensed as school administrators
- State certified teacher evaluators according to their Board of Education certification criteria
- Used the current district adopted teacher evaluation system for at least one year with kindergarten through eighth grade teachers
- Over the age of 18.

As a previous assistant principal, I understand your demanding schedule, but I am asking for your participation, so your views can be shared with a broader audience. I am requesting a face-to-face interview of 90 minutes to two hours of your time to talk. The interview will be audio recorded, and I will ask you to recount your early experiences that led you becoming a principal, details of your teacher evaluation experiences, and reflections of that meaning of your experience. Your name and school will be replaced with pseudonyms during the interview, transcription, analysis, and publication to help keep your information confidential. A second in-person interview may be needed if we cannot complete the full interview in the first meeting. After I transcribe your comments and review the information, I will request a third and final phone interview in which I will talk to you about your previous comments. This last interview will not be recorded.

Please reply to this email if you are willing to speak with me about this topic. Should you agree, please suggest a time and phone number where I can reach you. In my reply I will attach the informed consent. When we talk, I will answer any questions you have and schedule our interview. I hope you can take advantage of this opportunity to share your perceptions and experiences with the current teacher evaluation model.

Thank you.

Denitra Griffin
Dgriff17@mail.depaul.edu
773-447-8143
Appendix B: Email Script B

Hello (Participant),

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in my study. I have attached the informed consent for your review. Please read it thoroughly before our phone conversation on (suggested time and date). When we talk, I will ask any questions you have and confirm you understand the purpose, benefits, and risks associated with the study. Also, please have in mind an interview day and time for us to meet.

I look forward to our conversation. Thanks again for your participation.

Denitra d. Griffin
Appendix C: Adult Consent to Participate in Research

ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
A qualitative study on the principals’ perceptions and experience with the current teacher evaluation system

Principal Investigator: Denitra Griffin

Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Department (School, College) College of Education

Faculty Advisor: Barbara Rieckhoff, Ph.D., College of Education

What is the purpose of this research?

I am asking you to be in a research study because I am trying to understand the principals’ perceptions about the use of the teacher evaluation system to support and develop teachers. A secondary purpose is to understand principals’ experiences with implementation of the teacher evaluation system. This study is being conducted by Denitra Griffin, a doctoral candidate at DePaul University, as a requirement to obtain her Doctorate degree. This research is being supervised by her faculty advisor, Barbara Reickhoff, Ph.D. I hope to include about five people in the research.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a principal responsible for evaluating teachers. You are a licensed school administrator and certified teacher evaluator according to your state Board of Education certification criteria. You have used the current district’s adopted teacher evaluation system for at least one year with kindergarten through eighth grade teachers. You must be age 18 or older to be in this study. This study is not approved for the enrollment of people under the age of 18.

What is involved in being in the research study?

If you agree to be in this study, your participation includes up to two face-to-face interviews and one short telephone follow-up interview. I will use an informal interview protocol with open-ended questions to collect information from you. We will have the face-to-face interview at a mutually convenient time and place. The location will be at a private room in a library, your home, your office (before or after school hours), or a preselected convenient and comfortable location for you where it is unlikely that others will overhear the conversation. The interview cycle is as follows:
**Interview 1:** Ninety minutes to 2 hours. The first set of questions will ask you to recount early experiences that led you to becoming a principal. The second set of questions narrows in on the details of your teacher evaluation experience. The final set of questions broadens the focus to reflect on the meaning of the experience and to obtain demographic information that is not available on the public website, such as number of teachers per grade, tenured/non-tenured status, years within the district. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into written notes later in order to get an accurate record of what you said.

**Interview 2:** Ninety minutes to 2 hours. *Only* required if we do not get done with all of the questioning in Interview 1. The interview will be in-person audio recorded and transcribed into written notes later in order to get an accurate record of what you said.

**Interview 3:** Thirty minutes follow-up phone interview, during which I will talk to you about your previous comments. This interview will not be audio recorded.

**How much time will this take?**
The total time of the study is 2 hours to 4.5 hours. The first interview will last 90 minutes to 2 hours, and if needed, interview 2 could last an additional 90 minutes to 2 hours. The third telephone interview will last about 30 minutes.

**Are there any risks involved in participating in this study?**
There is the possibility that someone may find out what you have said (a breach of confidentiality), but we have put protections in place to prevent this from happening. In order to avoid a breach of confidentiality, the data from the interviews will be treated with confidentiality and respect for your privacy. Interviews will take place in a setting preferred by you, such as private room in the library, your office before or after school, or your home but designed for confidential conversations. I will use pseudonyms during the interview, transcription, analysis, and publications for you and your schools to minimize the chance that any one will be able to link the information back to you. I will make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave me information or what the information is. If there are any questions where you feel uncomfortable answering, you have the right to skip them and/or stop the interview.

**Are there any benefits to participating in this study?**
There is no personal benefit to you for being in the research. We hope that what we learn will help contribute to the body of knowledge in the field for the topic being studied.

**Can you decide not to participate?**
Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw from the research after you begin participating.

**Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?**
The research records will be kept and stored securely. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write about the study or publish a paper to share the research with other researchers, I will write about the combined information gathered. I will not include your name or any information that will directly identify you. I will
make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave me information, or what that information is. However, some people might review or copy my records that may identify you in order to make sure I am following the required rules, laws, and regulations. For example, the DePaul University Institutional Review Board may review your information. If it looks at my records, the members will keep your information confidential.

The research records will be kept and stored securely. Data and other written and printed information will be kept in a locked drawer in my home, which I will be the only one with a key. All emails and informed consents sent electronically will be transmitted from my laptop which is password protected, and only I will have the password. After the audio recording has been transcribed into written notes and checked for accuracy, they will be destroyed. I will be utilizing a transcriptionist who has signed a confidentiality agreement that is included in the application. I will keep the de-identified data gathered during the study three years after the dissertation committee has approved the dissertation.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, or you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher, Denitra Griffin, 773-447-8143, dgriff71@mail.depaul.edu or Dr. Barbara Rieckhoff, 773-325-8670, brieckho@depau.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University’s Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You may also contact DePaul’s Office of Research Services if:

• Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the researcher.
• You cannot reach the researcher.
• You want to talk to someone besides the researcher.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent from the Subject:
I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By signing below, I indicate my consent to be in the research.

Signature: ____________________________________________________________

Printed name: _______________________________________________________

Date: ___________________
Appendix D: Phone Script

Again, I want to thank you for being a participant. First, we will go over the informed consent. Did you have the opportunity to read it? If not, please take this time to review it, and I’ll hold the line. Do you have any questions regarding the research? Can you tell me the purpose of this study? The benefits? And, the risks?

As I stated in the recruitment email, I am requesting a face-to-face interview of 90 minutes to two hours of your time to talk. The interview will be audio recorded, and I will ask you to recount your early experiences that led you becoming a principal, details of your teacher evaluation experiences, and reflections of that meaning of your experience. Your name and school will be replaced with pseudonyms during the interview, transcription, analysis, and publication to help keep your information confidential. A second in-person interview may be needed if we cannot complete the full interview in the first meeting. After I transcribe your comments and review the information, I will request a third and final phone interview in which I will talk to you about your previous comments. This last interview will not be recorded.

What day, time, and location are good for us to meet for the interview?

When we meet in person, I will provide you a hard copy of the informed consent and request your signature. I look forward to our meeting time.

See you then.
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, Lisa Nuzzo, acknowledge that I will be providing translation, interpretation, data entry, or transcription services to DePaul University in connection with the following research:

Research Title/Description: A qualitative study on the principals' perceptions and experience with the current teacher evaluation

Principal Investigator(s): Denitra d. Griffin

I understand that I may receive sensitive and legally protected information in connection with my services. For example, I may receive oral, visual or written information regarding (i) the research, such as its design and findings; (ii) a research participant, such as his or her contact information, medical conditions, thoughts, and feelings; and (iii) persons known by a research participant.

I understand that disclosure of any information I receive in connection with the research may result in irreparable harm to DePaul and the research participants. I accordingly agree to the terms of this Confidentiality Agreement, including the following:

- I am permitted to disclose the information I receive in connection with the research to the following individuals only: [LIST OF AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL]. I will not disclose to any Authorized Personnel any research-related information unless and until I have received instructions from the Principal Investigator regarding what is necessary to keep the records safe.

- I will not disclose the information I receive to anyone who is not authorized by this Agreement to receive it unless (i) the Principal Investigator gives me written authorization, or (ii) disclosure is legally required.

- I will use precautions to prevent unauthorized parties from accessing the research-related information I have in my possession. At a minimum, I will keep all tangible information (such as documents, notes, audiocassettes, videotapes, and all media with electronic or digital information) locked in a file cabinet or safe, and I will keep all electronic information (such as computer files and other digital information) password protected.

This Confidentiality Agreement begins on the date I receive research information or begin providing my services to DePaul, and it has no expiration date. Information that I knew before I began my services to DePaul or that is in the public domain through no fault of my own is excluded from the confidentiality requirements. This Confidentiality Agreement embodies the understanding and agreement of DePaul and me, and it may not be amended or changed except by written instrument signed by both parties. It is governed by the laws of the State of Illinois, and DePaul and I agree to use the State of Illinois for jurisdiction and the County of Cook as venue for any disputes. Breach of this Agreement may, without limitation, result in termination of my services and other legal action against me.

I AGREE TO THE TERMS ABOVE:

Signature of Service Provider

Lisa M. Nuzzo

Name (printed)

ACCEPTED, DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

Signature of Principal Investigator

NUZZO TRANSCRIPTION

10250 S Oakley Avenue Chicago, IL 60617

Address

9/17/2015

Date
Appendix E: Interview Guide

Principal Investigator: This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time.

LIFE HISTORY
1. Tell me what you did for work before becoming a principal.

2. What was your path in becoming a principal?
   Why did you decide to become a principal?
   How long have you been a principal?
   In what type of schools have you been a principal?

3. Can you describe a principal that stands out in your memory?
   Describe a typical day as a principal.

CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCES
1. What kind of evaluation systems have you experienced as a teacher or administrator?
   Describe your current evaluation system.
   What was your training like?
   How did you prepare your teachers for the current system? What prepared you the most for it?
   What do you think the teacher evaluation system does well? Not so well?
   What would help you address these challenges? What supports are available for you?

2. How does your experience with the teacher evaluation system compare to your expectations?

3. How do you use the data from the teacher evaluation system?
   Describe how you use the evaluation system to improve teachers’ instructional practice.
   How often do you meet with your teachers about the teacher evaluation system?
   How would you characterize your interactions with your teachers when you are using the teacher evaluation system?
   What happens on a day when you leave a meeting with your teacher about their evaluation and you say to yourself, “That was a good one.”
   What happens on a day when you leave a meeting with your teacher about their evaluation and you say to yourself, “That was not good.”
   What has the teacher evaluation system taught you about teachers?

4. Describe what it is like evaluating tenured and non-tenured teachers using the teacher evaluation system.

5. How has the teacher evaluation system changed the way you view your role as a principal?
How has the teacher evaluation system changed the way you perform your duties as a principal?
What has the teacher evaluation system taught you about yourself as a principal?

MEANING
1. If you were asked to speak to a group of principals using the teacher evaluation system for the first time, what advice would you give them?

2. Tell me if there are any changes you would recommend for the teacher evaluation system.

DEMOGRAPHICS
1. How many teachers do you have per grade?

2. How many of your teachers are tenured and non-tenured?

3. How many years have you been a principal? How many years have you been with this district?
REFERENCES:


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