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FORMATIVE CLASSROOM VISITS
LITERATURE REVIEW

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Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A former principal authored a recent article which explained how to create a positive school climate. In the article, the author outlined six simple action steps to which principals should devote time and energy. Not one of the suggested action steps was related instructional leadership, classroom visits, or feedback to teachers (Frascone, 2011). Often, authors will use the term *climate* synonymously with *culture,* or they will use it to convey ideas solely related to staff happiness or job satisfaction. The instructional climate to which the current study refers is not the same type of climate discussed by Frascone. Instructional climate is the sum composite of factors that impact student achievement. These factors are primarily: teacher effectiveness, curriculum quality, instructional time, teacher satisfaction and productivity, and principal leadership. In Williams' (2009) review of the literature, teacher effectiveness is the single most crucial factor affecting student learning. However, principal attitudes, expectations, practices, and style "set the tone for school climate" (p.17). It would make sense for any solution devoted to improving instructional climate to involve both teacher effectiveness and principal leadership.

TOPIC SPECIFIC LITERATURE AND BEST PRACTICES

In a recent study involving 320 career and technical education teachers, four antecedent variables of instructional climate were analyzed for correlations: supportive learning culture, job autonomy, school innovative climate, and perceived turnover intention (Song, Martens, McCharen, & Ausburn, 2011). Supportive learning culture and school innovative climate were the highest correlated variables (r = .83). The researchers defined a supportive learning culture as one that provides continuing collaboration, utilizing expert employees for informal learning, and ongoing informal learning processes. An innovative school climate in the same study referred to the ability to respond to the changing demands placed on schools, innovating teaching techniques in response to the changing needs of students, the development of professional self-efficacy, and responsive administrative processes. When studying the instructional climate of a campus, these two variables (supportive learning culture and school innovative climate) should be considered.

Ing (2013) reports three important aspects of the instructional climate: the supportive tone of a school, teachers' perceptions of themselves, and teachers' focus on improving instruction. These three aspects of the instructional climate of a campus are critical in determining the extent to which students have a maximized opportunity to learn in classrooms. Teachers' beliefs about their own effectiveness often translate into their beliefs about students' abilities to learn – these beliefs inevitably inform the daily decisions made in the classroom (Oakes, 1990). Researchers have repeatedly concluded that an instructional climate marked by teachers with higher level skills regarding curriculum and instruction is beneficial to student achievement (Wiley & Yoon, 1995). It might be, that teachers within such instructional climates are simply more apt at maximizing instructional time and thus opportunity to learn (Herman, 2014). The aspects of instructional climate that mostly impact student achievement are instructional leadership, teacher quality and efficacy, teacher support and collaboration, and the overall campus focus on instruction and learning (of both students and professionals).

There are aspects of the instructional climate that may not promote student achievement (i.e. job satisfaction, collegiality), but their absence can impede instruction (Moore & Esselman, 1992; Egley & Jones, 2005). Their absence can also impede professional learning, which is another aspect of the instructional climate that can affect student achievement. The instructional climate can be measured by the overall impact on student learning, but its importance to and relationship to professional learning has also been cited (Lim & Morris, 2006). Often, organizations gauge instructional climate (and the effectiveness of professional learning) through self-reports of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships (Eagan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004; Fitz-Enz & Davison, 2002). These personality based factors give information related to staff beliefs and perceptions of the instructional climate. The links between such beliefs and perceptions within the instructional climate is critical in understanding whether a campus is able to systematically ensure high levels of professional learning and instructional effectiveness (Anderman, 1991; Joo, Lim, & Park, 2011). Any measure of instructional climate would benefit from considering teacher perceptions and beliefs – as well as the "perceptions of each person involved in the process" (Kalule & Bouchamma, 2013, p. 102)

Instructional leadership. Of the instructional climate factors that principals have direct impact on, instructional leadership is continually regarded as the most critical (Cotton, 2003; Halawah, 2005; Williams, 2009; Jazzar, 2004). Instructional leadership includes many variables and skill sets, including educational philosophy, interpersonal skills, strategic planning and technical skills, tasks of supervision, and reform/change functions of supervision (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001). Anecdotal data supports the idea that effective instructional leadership includes three themes: talking with

teachers, prompting professional learning, and promoting reflective practice (Blase & Blase, 1998).

Two competing, but not mutually exclusive, views of leadership are transformational leadership and instructional leadership. Approximately two decades of research support the conclusion that instructional leadership has a larger impact (up to four times) on the instructional climate of campus than does transformational leadership (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Hallinger P. , Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, and Brown's (2014) study of 590 teachers across 37 campuses indicated that instructional leadership has a stronger impact on student achievement than does transformational leadership, school context, or principal demographics. Instructional leadership includes more than a focus on accountability and student assessment results – it includes principal involvement in pedagogical practices, monitoring instruction, and improvement of classroom practices (Bickmore & Sulentic Dowell, 2014; Spiro, 2013; Stronge, 2013).

The literature, and quantitative analyses, point to the conclusion that instructional leadership is inextricably related to staff development (McCollum, Lawrence, & Minter, 2006). A principal's instructional impact is best measured by the impact he or she is having on the growth of teacher quality and effectiveness – that is, the overall instructional climate of the school. Sahin's (2011) data analyses also confirm that instruction leadership has a statistically significant influence on instructional climate, particularly when principals act "not to create new instructional methods and techniques, but to take a stand against the status quo and support new opinions and applications…in a certain way that sends signals to teachers and students that they can achieve more" (pp. 1920-1921).

Teacher supervision. Teacher supervision can be an effective way to support new application of professional learning. Instructional improvement and professional learning have limited impact on instructional climate without adequate focus on transfer of professional learning (Lim & Morris, 2006). This is where instructional leadership plays a critical role, and the research consistently points to the principal as a key person responsible for improving the quality of teaching (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). As previously discussed, the level of innovation and instructional improvement on a campus is directly related to instructional leadership.

Egley and Jones (2005) concluded, "Instructional leadership involves frequent monitoring of the teaching process to assess the instructional capacity of the educational

organization" (p. 78). One of four instructional leadership characteristics identified in Khan and Iqbal's (2013) research was "effective monitoring and supervision…and provide assistance to teachers through their professional feedback" (pp. 423-424). A recent study of 106 school administrators (principals, assistant principals, and directors) revealed the positive impact that supervision has on professional development (Kalule & Bouchamma, 2013). While one study failed to link principal supervision of teachers to student learning, researchers did report statistically significant effect sizes for increasing teacher commitment, collaboration, efficacy, and trust (Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999).

Classroom visits as leadership and supervision. Improving schools and teacher effectiveness is a continuous process that "requires constant monitoring...coupled with a willingness to adjust current policies, practices, and procedures when the vital signs demand it" (Lezotte & Snyder, 2010, p. 87). Literature on the topic of teacher growth frequently point toward the problem of effective teacher supervision. The authors of a recent school leadership publication described the problem, "One of the biggest challenges facing school-level administrators is directly addressing performance issues...fairly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of teachers...and fairly recognizing the failures" (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 45). The abilities to supervise classroom practices and spur improvement using principal classroom visits is a major theme in the research literature. However, this theme includes a series of mixed messages.

Challenges to supervision. Some authors cite challenges to using classroom supervision as a tool for improving teacher effectiveness. The first challenge is the lack of clarity on specific action steps for instructional leaders to take while engaging in classroom visits and offering feedback (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Second, Reeves (2010) posits the weaknesses of formal observations as well as the trend towards "walk-throughs", which can seem "casual and superficial, particularly when the observer is unclear about the expectations of the process" (p. 91). Part of the problem is caused by the lack of clarity regarding what makes for effective practice. Brown and Crumpler (2012), in their study of teacher evaluation, conclude that one or two annual observations cannot adequately capture the complexity and range of a teacher's ability. They further note that evaluations based on observations have minimal impact on teacher growth. Additionally, supervision is not evaluation, nor should it be. "The intents of instructional supervision promote teacher development and growth… [whereas] intents of teacher evaluation serve different purposes, namely promotion, retention, and making personnel decisions" (Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007, p. 45).

Confusion regarding visits. Traditionally, supervision was a formal observation conducted once or twice per year (Gordon, Meadows, & Dyal, 1995). These observations typically spanned an entire 45-60 minute lesson. They were used for evaluations of teacher performance. In theory, they were designed to supervise teachers and improve teacher performance. As Reeves (2010) pointed out, there is a trend toward using shorter principal visits. However, it is often unclear what is meant by the term "walk-through" or what the purpose is behind principal classroom visits. Are they to supervise? If so, why? What changes in teacher behavior are exhibited during the visit? Are there any changes in teacher performance after the visit? How do students perceive these visits? Ing (2013) reported, "There is less agreement in the literature [concerning] what principals specifically do" in their visits to improve outcomes related to teacher performance and student learning (p. 848). The literature is lacking the data to answer the questions related to classroom visits. City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) explain,

> A wide range of activities goes under the broad *walkthrough* umbrella - some activities supportive of good instruction, others punitive and uninformed. Some focus attention on instruction and bring together educators in ways that lead to improvement; others are technical, compliance driven, cursory...and harshly evaluative. (p. 4)

Descriptions of classroom visits. Reeves (2011) states that any form of classroom visit that could jeopardize a teacher's job security will not be enthusiastically accepted. Rather, he posits that principals should engage in "constructive monitoring" by performing weekly classroom visits in a "treasure hunt" fashion looking for instances to affirm teachers in focused set of no more than six campus practices (Reeves, 2011, pp. 29-30). Killion (2011) described a peer classroom visit process that requires identifying the purpose of the visit, describing specific aspects of the lesson, and then holding a debriefing meeting to discuss the observed teaching practices. While some authors prioritize the need for collaboration after a classroom visit, others claim technology is an important tool for providing feedback after classroom visits (Bain & Swan, 2011). Technology is often used to record and disseminate data about instructional patterns and trends. This is the case in an Illinois school district where campus leadership conduct *data walks* which are classroom visits less than four minutes in length to gather data about the state of instruction on campus (Flynn, 2010). In another article, classroom visits are described as five minutes in length, conducted by principals with a common set of "look-fors", and are designed to informally supervise teachers (Protheroe, 2009).

Supervision and evaluation. Berube and Dexter (2006) discussed the merits of using classroom supervision as a tool for improving teacher effectiveness. They

distinguish supervision from evaluation by referring to the latter as a "bureaucratic function" concerning accountability and judgment of teacher work (p.11). They believe supervision is an effective leadership stance when principals use "short classroom visits…let staff know [the principal] cared about them and their work" (p. 14). The literature continually describes the limited impact that evaluation has on teacher performance, while consistent mention is made of supervision through brief classroom visits as a promising practice. However, it appears that the visit itself is not the catalyst for improvement. Collaboration, feedback, and reflection appear often in the literature as critical factors to improving teacher performance. Understandably so, as these are the same characteristics repeatedly describe as correlates to high quality instructional leadership.

      Feedback from classroom visits. Kalule and Bouchamma (2013) summarize research by stating, "The principal has the greatest impact on teaching and learning, as their feedback has a definite influence on these two processes" (p. 91). Feedback to teachers impacts the transfer of professional learning into the classroom. Three factors are highlighted in instructional leadership research, "Discussion with supervisors about using the new learning, the supervisor's involvement or familiarization of the training, and positive feedback from the supervisor" (Lim & Morris, 2006, p. 91). The types of feedback used by principals not only directly impact professional practice in the classroom, they also impact the overall instructional climate of the campus (Halawah, 2005). Feeney (2007) proposes three types of feedback: 1) describing observable facts, 2) providing aspects of effective teaching strategies, and 3) promoting teacher reflective inquiry into evidence of student learning.

      In a review of literature, Cavanaugh (2013) asserted the importance of using classroom visits to give performance feedback. He cited numerous studies and articles to conclude that "performance feedback is used to improve performance in many fields…within the context of coaching to improve classroom management…and instructional strategies" (Cavanuagh, 2013, p. 112). Feedback from classroom visits must be collaborative in nature, promoting discussions of instructional tasks rather than evaluating qualities of the teacher. To further define what is meant by collaborative feedback, Berube and Dexter (2006) state that visits should serve to "establish dialogue with teachers…suggesting strategies to improve teaching…supporting teachers in becoming responsible and self-analytical individuals who are continuously improving their practice" (p.14). Brown and Crumpler (2012) repeat the theme of collaboration by drawing the conclusion that classroom observational data should always lead to growth through feedback.

When the term "feedback" is used in the literature, it is consistently in the context of conversations and dialogue. Feedback is not for telling a teacher what to do after a classroom visit; rather, it should scaffold thinking about teacher performance. The literature is consistent about the importance of feedback in the principal visit process. At one extreme, it is argued that classroom visits alone are a "low-leverage…arcane and ineffective" leadership practice (DuFour & Marzano, 2009). This argument against visits is more of an argument for the increased use of feedback and collaborative professional learning as instructional leadership practices. DuFour and Marzano (2009) claim that instead of investing time into classroom visits, principals should invest their time into meeting with teams of teachers and discuss results of learning, assessment results, and how to get students to learn more. They believe teacher improvement can be achieved through team collaboration more so than individual post-observation conferences. It is, therefore, important to gather data on the perceived impact of visits on the instructional climate. A final point in the literature is the indirect impact that may results from increasing principal performance.

   Classroom visits and principal performance. Many researchers and authors refer to the benefit that classroom visits have for principals rather than for teachers (Ing, 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Moss & Brookhart, 2013). Primarily, principals benefit from classroom visits because they gather more data about the reality of the campus and can thus make informed decisions (i.e. how to support struggling teachers, who to hire). The principal's benefit may have very little direct relationship to teacher performance. It appears that for teacher performance to improve as a result of the visits, the principal must use observational data to promote collaboration. Essentially, the principal can use classroom visits to shape the instructional climate to allow for greater teacher growth and performance. The literature repeatedly states that increased teacher performance can result in greater student learning. From this viewpoint, classroom visits and feedback may indirectly serve to improve the capacity of principals to be instructional leaders. In all, this solution has ample support for its use to positively impact (either directly or indirectly) the instructional climate of a campus. However, further understanding of the factors involved with classroom visits and feedback could yield more consistent results when trying to impact instruction.

SUMMARY

   Instructional leadership can have an impact on the instructional climate of the campus. This conclusion is repeated throughout the last decade of research. Principal classroom visits are recurrently discussed as a promising instructional leadership practice. What makes for effective classroom visits is still a question needing further

research. Feedback from classroom visits to teachers is often cited as a (if not, the) critical component in the classroom visit solution. However, it is still a problem of understanding what makes for effective feedback to teachers. Together, the classroom visit and feedback solution is needing further research – both quantitative and qualitative – if practitioners are to be scientifically informed and strategic in their attempts at shaping a campus culture.