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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

PRINCIPALS' POST-OBSERVATION FEEDBACK AND ITS INFLUENCE ON  
TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH  
AT TWO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy

by

Dalys A. Stewart

July, 2013

Robert Barner, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Dalys A. Stewart

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## VITA

**EDUCATION AND CREDENTIALS**

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2001-2003	Literacy Coach, LAUSD Forty-Ninth Street School
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## ABSTRACT

The principal plays a key role in establishing a culture of collaboration and ongoing learning, and his/her actions related to effecting change are vital to the success of the school. A principal can contribute to the advancement of teacher expertise by engaging in specific behaviors. One such behavior is focused feedback, which leads teachers to reflect on their instructional routines. Given with intentionality, it is a powerful tool. Therein lies the motivation for this study.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine the practices in which principals engage during classroom post-observation feedback, and their effect on teacher professional growth. Seven teachers at 2 Southern California Catholic high schools were interviewed to capture their perceptions of the effect that principal feedback has had on their professional growth. Although much research has revolved around the impact that principals' actions have on the enhancement of teacher practice, very little research has focused on these effects from the perspective of the teacher. Capturing teachers' perceptions about the way their principals' actions impact their instructional practice may add to the existing body of knowledge in the field of education related to the way principals promote the use of effective practices at their schools. It may also shed light on the need for the teacher's voice to be heard and taken into consideration when making decisions on and implementing policies that are directly related to improving teacher practice.

Three main ideas emerged from a review of the existing literature: (a) *there is a direct connection between the principal's actions and teachers'*

*professional growth; (b) principal feedback produces lasting changes in instructional practice, especially when given immediately following the teaching; and (c) teachers are reflective practitioners seeking to improve their practice on an ongoing basis.* Educational institutions may be able to utilize the findings of this study to inform their practice, and or to re-examine their policy on evaluation processes.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background

Effective schools place student learning at the center of all instructional efforts. Meaningful discourse between teachers and administrators must be aimed at enhancing teachers' professional practice, leading to increased student achievement. Improvements in teaching and learning have consistently been linked to principals' involvement in supporting instructional practice (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). This involvement may include classroom observations, engaging faculty in reviewing test scores, collaboration with teachers on improvement of the instructional program, and being resourceful and visible (May & Supovitz, 2011). These actions are consistent with the efforts that increase student learning and therefore achievement.

School improvement efforts are more successful when school leaders and school leadership teams work together (Spillane, 2006). Successful school principals should embrace practices that address the internal and observable dimensions of teacher performance (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). According to West, Jackson, Harris, and Hopkins (2000), "the role of leadership in school improvement is to bring about *cultural* change by altering the processes which occur within the structure" (p. 36). Along the same lines, the professional learning community model lends a rationale to the idea of the principal needing to understand his/her staff in order to lead sustainable change. The principals of professional learning communities inform their staff, facilitate professional development, and empower staff to make good decisions (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

A suggested practice for instructional leaders is to “talk openly and frequently with teachers about instruction. Specifically, make suggestions, give feedback, and solicit teachers’ advice and opinions about classroom instruction in an inquiry-oriented approach” (Blase & Blase, 2002, p. 262). Costa and Garmston (2002) describe feedback as the energy source of renewal, particularly when it is offered in a skillful way. Feedback can be seen as a natural result of teachers’ performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Teaching involves decision-making and acting on those decisions, and in so doing improving student learning (Hunter, 1979). Feedback may be a way for the principal to activate teachers’ ability to reflect on practice and make decisions based on evidence of performance. Even non-managers in education, who traditionally emphasize teacher autonomy, stress the importance of classroom observations followed by feedback. These non-managers see classroom observations as an imperative (Frase, 2005).

Blase and Blase’s (2002) study of 809 elementary, middle, and high school teachers across the United States focused on a description of principals’ instructional leadership. Data collected in this study indicated that principals’ “feedback focused on observed classroom behavior, was specific, expressed caring and interest, provided praise, established a problem-solving orientation, responded to concerns about students, and stressed the principal’s availability for follow-up talk” (p. 258). When principals give feedback, they invite teachers to reflect. Therefore, feedback may essentially be a gift offered to teachers, and

when done under the proper conditions, it may become part of that principal's legacy.

Therefore, legacy may be seen as an unintended, yet inevitable, product of leadership, and it is likely that the habits principals espouse at their school site define the legacy that they leave as a result. Galford and Maruca (2006) ask (of a leader):

Is it ever too early to think about the kind of long term impact you'll have on your organization? Is it ever too early to think about what people will think, say or do, after your tenure as a leader has ended, as a result of having worked with you? (p. iv)

A principal who leads with the intrinsic desire to nurture the best in all team members is creating a legacy of motivation and learning for teachers and students as well. Appreciating teachers' strengths and helping them develop their areas of growth is perhaps one of the most important traits of a true leader.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Current leadership practices implemented in districts and schools across the nation fail to promote teacher learning to a level that yields high student learning (Fink & Markholt, 2011). Research on the typical day of a school principal indicated that the principal spent very little time observing teachers or interacting with teachers on curricular or instructional matters (Frase & Streshly, 1994). Specifically, "principals spent from 40% to 80% of their time in their office or office area, 23% to 40% in hallways and playgrounds, 11% off campus, and only 10% in classrooms" (Frase, 2005, p. 448).

Effective school leaders must ensure that ample time is dedicated to leadership that promotes sound instructional practices. Feedback after



classroom observations is one powerful practice in which principals engage that can lead to the improvement of instructional practices. However, no extensive studies have been conducted specifically on teachers' perceptions about the impact of feedback on their professional growth. Therefore, this research presented an opportunity to examine the practices in which principals engage during post-observation feedback and teachers' perceptions about the impact of these principal practices on their professional growth.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This phenomenological study specifically examined the experiences of selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools with regard to principal practices that have most influenced their professional growth. This study is especially relevant given the sense of urgency for ensuring that teachers are delivering effective instruction and that their principal is giving them the tools with which to do it. Meaning was derived from the experiences of teachers working with their principals after observations of lessons.

### **Research Question**

How might selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools perceive that principals' post observation feedback has influenced their professional growth?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Instructional leadership was the theoretical lens utilized in this study to frame principals' behaviors during post-observation conversations, and the link between these conversations and the advancement of teacher instructional

practice. It is a suitable theoretical framework in which to ground this study, as it emphasizes leadership dimensions of teaching and learning (Murphy, 1988). This type of leadership allows for collaboration with teachers and principals, which leads to greater effectiveness in curricular and instructional matters (Marks & Printy, 2003). Effective instructional leadership encompasses two practices: principals talking to teachers to promote reflection, and instructional leadership leading to professional growth. These practices have an emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effect on teachers (Blase & Blase, 2000).

### **Importance of the Study**

The examination of teachers' perceptions presented an opportunity to obtain first-hand information regarding principals' actions that promote teacher growth. The findings of this research study may potentially benefit administrator trainings, school districts seeking to enhance teacher development programs, and principals in pursuit of ways to engage their teachers in learning. Findings may also add to the existing body of knowledge about how principals' actions support teachers in modifying their practice. This work could give guidance to school leaders and teachers in designing a system for school improvement that focuses on classroom practice and is grounded in educational research. It highlights the importance of principals leading improvement efforts by promoting reflection on practice.

## Definitions of Terms

The operational definitions and key terms used throughout this study:

**Instructional leader.** An instructional leader has expertise and charisma and is usually a hands-on principal steeped in curriculum and instruction and versed in advancing teacher practice (Cuban, 1984).

**Feedback.** Feedback is the action of giving information to teachers about their practice and how it impacts their students (Robbins & Alvy, 2003).

**Professional growth.** Professional growth is an individual's ability individual to utilize acquired experience in appropriate ways to be able to improve student learning, reflect on instruction, and collaborate with colleagues as learners (Peine, 2007).

**Principal.** This study will define the term *principal* as an instructional leader, based on an instructional leadership model (Hallinger, 2005). The model describes the instructional leader as focused on high expectations and the creation of a school culture that values innovation in teaching and learning.

**Perception.** Perception can be described as:

The process by which people translate sensory impressions into a coherent and unified view of the world around them. Though necessarily based on incomplete and unverified (or unreliable) information, perception is equated with reality for most practical purposes and guides human behavior in general. ("Perception," 2012, para. 1).

**Instructional practices.** Instructional practices are teaching practices that incorporate Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) qualities of a good instructional design: clear goals for student performance, meaningful, real-life application of ideas and concepts, and a personalized approach to teaching. In addition, a

good instructional design includes the teacher as a facilitator or coach, as a model, and as an initiator of reflection. Flexible grouping of students and a learning environment that encourages risk-taking are also features of this design.

**Reflection.** Reflection refers to achieving depth and breath of understanding of an experience, thereby impacting personal and professional efficacy, leading to improvement in practice (Rodgers, 2000).

### **Delimitations**

A delimitation of this study is that it focused solely on seven teachers at two Catholic high schools. The outcomes of this study may therefore be difficult to generalize to other schools, whether private or public. In addition, conclusions are based solely on the results of the interviews, which will preclude other information that could have been obtained by other methods and that could have otherwise added depth to the study but were not, for the sake of parsimony. Therefore, the validity of this study is limited by the data collected in the interviews. This delimitation was mitigated by measuring the salient variables grounded in prior literature, and by way of providing evidence of validity and reliability of the instrument.

Finally, the participants' responses might be considered a delimitation if they are not grounded in critical personal reflection. Therefore, the interview questions were intended to provide teachers with the opportunity to recall examples of specific situations that framed their perceptions.

## **Limitations**

Pyrczak and Bruce (2011) define limitation as “a weakness or handicap that potentially limits the validity of the results” (p. 73). Focusing on feedback *moves* in which principals engage to promote improvement in practice does not take into account other roles principals play at their school sites that may also promote teacher professional growth. Questions therefore addressed only the dynamics of feedback, and other principal moves were not considered in this study, but may be appropriate to explore in future studies. In addition, data were only collected from teachers, not principals, as teachers’ perceptions of their experiences were targeted.

## **Assumptions**

The variables in this study (principal feedback and professional growth) are described through the lens of teachers’ perceptions. The researcher assumed that responses were open, honest, and representative of current realities. Teachers’ responses were accepted as such. Furthermore, as some teachers may have felt that their answers could be used against them in the future, anonymity was guaranteed to preclude any fear of retaliation. It was assumed that teachers participating in this study would do so willingly, and that they would view participation in this interview as an opportunity to examine and learn more about this relevant issue. To that end, participants were offered the option of receiving aggregate information on the outcomes of the study.

Since another assumption was that at least 90% of targeted participants would participate fully, offering an incentive (\$10.00 Starbucks gift certificate)

toward participation in the interview helped encourage participation in the entire process. Finally, the researcher assumed that participants would respond to interview questions in a truthful way, providing information that could be relied upon as representative of their true feelings. The research encouraged respondents to participate in earnest and ensured them that their responses would be treated with confidentiality.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research project is comprised of five chapters, starting with Chapter 1, which included an introduction to the background, statement of the problem, statement of purpose, research question, and importance of the study. This chapter also defined operational and key terms that are utilized throughout the study. Delimitations and limitations, as well as assumptions made by the researcher, were explained. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature providing the rationale for principal feedback and teacher professional growth. It includes the historical background, theoretical underpinnings, and empirical evidence to support these variables. This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of instructional leadership, also explained in this chapter. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study. It describes the research design and rationale, and outlines the procedures that were followed in the study, including how data were collected. In Chapter 4 the themes that emerged from the data collection are revealed. This chapter includes an explanation of the themes, and an analysis of how the themes were extracted from the data collected. A new story is crafted from the emerging themes. Finally, in Chapter 5 the researcher draws

conclusions that are directly related to the research question, explains the implications of the study, and makes recommendations for further research study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The works cited in this review encompass a series of books and peer-reviewed articles that represent the body of work around the topics of principal feedback and teacher professional growth, as well as instructional leadership as the theoretical lens. Not only does the list of sources include historical and theoretical data, but it also offers extensive empirical data that facilitates and supports an analysis and a synthesis of the topics and the theoretical framework utilized in this study.

This review begins by exploring instructional leadership and the impact that behaviors typical of instructional leaders have on teacher practice and student learning. Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) have indicated that when principals are accessible to teachers, observe them teaching, and facilitate conversations around instruction, they have a positive impact on the instructional program and student achievement. Various researchers' definitions of instructional leadership are provided, and empirical evidence is utilized to support this theory as the foundation for this study.

Principal feedback is examined in this review via: a look at the historical role of the principal, followed by the dimensions of teaching and learning and the role of the dimensions in ensuring that principals utilize a coherent lens for observing instruction. The benefits of principal feedback and ways to give effective feedback are also studied. Finally, Marzano, Frontier and Livingston (2011) contributed to the study of principal feedback by stressing the importance



of principals considering levels of performance when observing and evaluating teacher practice. These authors offer that in order for feedback to be effective, it must address specific elements of performance within a continuum of development. This section of the review concludes by citing various studies conducted in regard to principal feedback, lending further support to its efficacy as a tool to improve teacher practice.

The literature review continues to explore teacher professional growth. Following the same format, a historical background initiates an examination of this variable. This study of teacher professional growth continues with a consideration of the research around professional development and teacher growth, emphasizing the importance of coherent professional development as a catalyst for the advancement of teacher expertise. Theories of teacher change are also examined to provide a context for how teachers learn and evolve. A study of the barriers to professional growth highlights the organizational and personal barriers teachers encounter that prevent them from fully engaging in the learning process and thus halt their professional advancement (Duke, 1993). Finally, empirical evidence is offered that highlights teacher professional growth and factors that work in its favor. These studies, conducted by researchers such as Drago-Severson (2004), Gilles, Wilson and Elias (2010), Parise and Spillane (2010), Slepko (2008), and Supovitz et al. (2010), provide a context for the study of the effect that principals have on the way teachers grow as practitioners. The review concludes with a summary and synthesis of the research findings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Current leadership practices implemented in districts and schools across the nation fail to promote teacher learning to a level that yields high student learning (Fink & Markholt, 2011). Research on the typical day of a school principal indicated that the principal spent very little time observing teachers or interacting with teachers on curricular or instructional matters (Frase & Streshly, 1994). Specifically, “principals spent from 40% to 80% of their time in their office or office area, 23% to 40% in hallways and playgrounds, 11% off campus, and only 10% in classrooms” (Frase, 2005, p. 448).

Effective school leaders must ensure that ample time is dedicated to leadership that promotes sound instructional practices. Feedback after classroom observations is one powerful practice in which principals engage that can lead to the improvement of instructional practices. However, no extensive studies have been conducted specifically on teachers’ perceptions about the impact of feedback on their professional growth. Therefore, this research presented an opportunity to examine the practices in which principals engage during post-observation feedback and teachers’ perceptions about the impact of these principal practices on their professional growth.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This phenomenological study specifically examined the experiences of selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools with regard to principal practices that have most influenced their professional growth. This study is especially relevant given the sense of urgency for ensuring that teachers

are delivering effective instruction and that their principal is giving them the tools with which to do it. Meaning was derived from the experiences of teachers working with their principals after observations of lessons.

### **Research Question**

How might selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools perceive that principals' post observation feedback has influenced their professional growth?

### **Literature Search Strategies**

A search for resources relevant to this work led to the Pepperdine Library Electronic Databases. Under the subject Education, several search engines proved resourceful. A search was conducted, initially seeking information on past and current practices in the evaluation of teachers. The search was narrowed specifically to peer-reviewed articles and books on principal feedback and teacher development and growth. A subsequent search of the same education search engines (i.e., ERIC, EBSCOHost, Education Full Text) yielded articles on instructional leadership. The advocates of this theory emerged, and only the works pertaining to education and or the work of teachers were utilized. The sources that provided historical, theoretical, and empirical evidence were utilized.

### **Literature Review Highlights**

This literature review examined extant research that supports the study of principal feedback after classroom observations, and its impact on teachers' professional growth. The literature is divided into the following sections: (a) an

analysis of instructional leadership as the theoretical framework, utilizing it to explain principals' behaviors during post-observation conversations, and the link between these conversations and the advancement of teacher instructional practice; (b) historical background on the role of the principal, as well as theoretical considerations and empirical evidence supporting principal feedback; (c) historical background of teacher professional growth, followed by theoretical considerations and empirical evidence; and finally (d) a summary of findings that makes connections between the different researchers' points of view, and provides an alignment of the research to the topics explored. The underlying structure of this review followed this pattern: an explanation of the theoretical framework, an examination of the historical underpinnings, the theoretical considerations, and the empirical evidence of the topics, followed by a synthesis of findings.

### **Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership proved a suitable theoretical framework to use as a lens in this study. It was conceptualized during the effective schools movement era in the 1980s (Marks & Printy, 2003). During that time many studies were conducted to determine what made some schools successful, with instructional leadership emerging as a crucial factor (May & Supovitz, 2011). The principal was viewed as an expert who was striving to create a standard practice for effective teaching (Marks & Printy, 2003). However, at the same time, instructional leadership was not very successful due to the lack of training for administrators in the tasks expected of them – setting high expectations for

teachers and students, supervising instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership clashed with the existing organization of schools that sought to ensure that teachers were treated as professionals (Marks & Louis, 1997).

This type of leadership can be defined as a function of the roles of the school principal as coordinator, supervisor, and developer of curriculum and instruction (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger (2003) is credited with conceptualizing a model of instructional leadership, which can be viewed through the lens of three dimensions: (a) school mission; (b) management of instructional programs; and (c) a school community that values learning.

Similarly, Murphy (as cited in Marks & Printy, 2003) conceptualized a parallel model of instructional leadership that is practiced in schools with high quality teaching and learning. Four sets of activities have an effect on instruction, and are similar to Hallinger's dimensions of instructional leadership: (a) attention to mission and goals; (b) coordination, monitoring and evaluation of programs, instruction, and assessment; (c) creation of a culture of learning; and (d) nurturing a supportive workplace.

Another perspective is that instructional leadership is rooted in a concern for the behaviors of teachers as they effect positive changes in student learning (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Thus, school performance improves when principals lend support to teachers as they learn to practice leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003). To support teacher leadership, principals should fashion professional development to encourage a spirit of competition among teachers

(Blase & Blase, 2002). Principals who expect commitment and professionalism from their teachers and collaborate with them practice integrated leadership in their schools and their students perform at high levels (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Southworth (2002) conducted an investigation into successful leadership in small primary schools in England, highlighting 10 principals. Southworth interviewed the principals on their views about the traits of successful administrators, how they lead the improvement efforts at their schools, and what effect they have on teaching and learning. Findings of this study included: leaders equated instructional leadership with hard work, the administrators in question placed a high value on student achievement, respondents had a positive outlook on their schools' success, the staff appreciated the administrators' accessibility, the participating leaders attributed the success of their schools to a collective effort, and all the participating leaders had effected successful changes at their schools. These leaders' behaviors are thought to have created a culture of collaboration and learning among their teachers.

Blase and Blase's (2000) study made a substantial contribution to the understanding of instructional leadership as well. These researchers found that an effective principal-teacher relationship with instruction at the core gave way to inquiry, reflection on practice, and creativity. Teachers were found to be flexible in their approach to teaching. Their study's findings suggest that effective instructional leaders should be supportive of teachers. They also support the idea of instructional leadership as promoting a spirit of collaboration and collegiality, and providing opportunities for reflection followed by discussion of

practice. These practices promote dialogue and collective inquiry among teachers.

Shaul and Ganson (2005) also gave credence to instructional leadership when they indicated that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has provided the impetus for leaders to focus on instruction. They indicated that NCLB holds as its main purpose the improvement of academic performance for all children, and the narrowing of the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. This is to be achieved via the assurance that, by the state's definition, teachers are highly qualified.

Instructional leaders are known for the influence they exert on student learning outcomes by aligning structures such as teaching standards and the distribution of resources to the school's mission (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In essence, instructional leaders develop a mission that guides their leadership, and as managers they advocate for the tasks they value most (Hallinger, 2005).

The research and other information gleaned deem instructional leadership an appropriate lens through which principal feedback and teacher professional growth can be viewed. The practices that principals embrace as they support teachers in their journey of improvement – “making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling, using inquiry, soliciting advice, and praising” (Blase & Blase, 2002, p. 258) – define a principal as an instructional leader. These practices are thought to give teachers flexibility in the teaching procedures and techniques they espouse (Blase & Blase, 2000).

## Principal Feedback

**Historical background on the role of the principal.** Since the analysis of the effective schools movement of the 1970s, the essential function of the principal in helping teachers refine instruction has been the focus of much research (May & Supovitz, 2011). The role of the principal has been influenced by many factors including: “Immigration, urbanization, the rise of great corporations, the traumas of two world wars, the Great Depression, the social upheavals of the 1960’s and 1970’s, and the high stakes accountability movement of the 1990’s” (Brown, 2005, p. 109-110). Brown (2005) states that at the onset of the accountability movement, the supervisory roles of principals were affected; they became more analytical and focused on development of curriculum. Brown explains that the new role required principals to diagnose teaching and learning in order to effect changes on the teaching process. Thus, principals began to be considered key players in the enhancement of instruction.

Today’s principals are held accountable for ensuring that their students are meeting the state standards as measured by state assessments (English & Steffy, 2005). This shift may be somewhat attributed to a report published in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2008), which, in essence, accused educational professionals of being complacent with the educational status quo. As a result of, and coupled with, the standards and accountability movement, this report has led principals and superintendents to pursue instructional leadership as a vehicle for improving teacher practice and student achievement. Thus, although the role of the principal has been



influenced by many factors, the demands on the principal have not changed, as they are still expected to perform the duties of administrators, supervisors, leaders, and politicians (Kafka, 2009).

**Theoretical considerations.** Research indicates that a wide variety of teacher behaviors can be changed when teachers are given feedback. Behaviors that may change include the use of instructional minutes, teacher response to occurrences among students, and the amount of praise used with students. Scheeler et al. (2004) also assert that negative behaviors, such as the inadvertent repetition of a word while teaching, can be diminished via feedback.

***Dimensions of teaching and learning.*** Principals cannot evaluate that which they do not understand. To that end, Fink and Markholt (2011) delineate five dimensions of teaching and learning to explain what expert observers should look for during classroom observations:

- *Purpose*, which refers to how clearly stated the purpose of a lesson is, and whether it is relevant and meaningful;
- *Student engagement* refers to who is involved during the lesson, how teachers engage students, and how substantive student-teacher or student-student talk is;
- *Curriculum and pedagogy*, which is concerned with appropriateness of curriculum, teaching technique, and whether teachers are giving access to students via the use of scaffolds for learning;

- *Assessment for student learning* refers to opportunities teachers give students to demonstrate their learning, as well as the instructional practices the teacher is refining to support learning; and
- *Classroom management and culture*, a teacher's ability to design a classroom environment that supports learning via effective use of space and resources, implementation of rituals and routines, and valued interactions.

Fink and Markholt (2011) suggest that these dimensions enhance observers' ability to understand classroom practice and provide them with language to facilitate the follow-up conversation. They further add that the dimensions inspire teachers and principals to develop a shared vision of quality instruction.

***Benefits of feedback.*** Classroom observations conducted by the principal continue to be considered a common form of teacher evaluation. Observations allow the principal to collect data on teacher performance (Weems & Rogers, 2010). Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston (2004) posit that feedback is a direct communication between principal and teacher post-observation, and this interaction moves the teacher through the direct, indirect, and collegial phases of a conversation. In the direct phase, after giving feedback, the principal teaches the teacher; during the indirect phase of the conversation, the teacher is invited to reflect on his/her practice, and during the collegial phase the principal starts with a reflective question and follows up with a future conversation as needed.

Duke and Stiggins (1986) assert that teachers believe if feedback is to change their practice, it has to come from a convincing source, it must address

specific nuances of their teaching, and it must offer ideas and suggestions for improvement that are aligned with the context of the lesson. They also note that teachers believe feedback must be given on a regular basis, it can be formal or informal, and it can allow them to monitor their own improvement. Hattie and Timperley (2007) made the following contributions to an understanding of feedback: (a) in general, feedback may decrease the frequency of inconsistencies between that which teachers currently understand and what they want to achieve; (b) feedback is more successful when it reinforces correct responses versus those that are incorrect; (c) feedback on task performance tends to lend fewer opportunities for learning and is therefore ineffective; (d) feedback is more effective when it does not threaten the recipient's self-esteem; and (e) hence, low-threat feedback is more likely to be internalized.

Frequent classroom visits have been credited with positive changes (as perceived by teachers) in teacher and school efficacy, organizational effectiveness, and teachers contributing to the planning of training and evaluation (Frase, 2005). Information obtained from feedback allows the practitioner to reflect on the behaviors that will yield the desired results. If the teacher were to decide to teach the lesson again, he/she could make decisions about what adjustments need to be made (Robbins & Alvy, 2003). Downey et al. (2004) advocate for reflection because it allows teachers to recreate an experience, think about it, and evaluate it. They suggest that reflection leads to increased teacher expertise and improved student achievement, and that when principals

insist on teachers participating in reflective feedback after observations, the action of reflecting is internalized.

***Giving effective feedback.*** There are many ways to provide feedback, and many people can deliver it at different times (Scheeler et al., 2004). Downey et al. (2004) state that leaving a note is one way to give feedback. However, they caution that in spite of recent recommendations for frequent classroom observations, few notes should be left. They further suggest that a note reinforces a boss-employee relationship versus a collaborative model of learning, and it creates reliance on external affirmation instead of turning teachers toward self-affirmation. Another way to give feedback is to engage in a two-way communication to process ideas and influence thought. A direct statement offered to the teacher about performance is a strategy that allows the principal to reveal something for the teacher to consider; this strategy places the principal in a mentoring and teaching role.

Fink and Markholt (2011) advocate for the effectiveness of feedback looked at through the lens of three benchmarks for analysis of observations and subsequent feedback:

- ***Benchmark #1:*** Analysis of observations coupled with questions for the teacher. This benchmark includes a debriefing conversation during which the principal shares observation notes and thoughts.
- ***Benchmark #2:*** Analysis of observations as a component of an ongoing professional development plan, which are included in conversations with staff.

- *Benchmark #3*: Analysis and debrief on a regular basis, as part of a cycle of reflection and learning. Staff is comfortable engaging in conversations regarding their practice as it impacts student learning. Then the data obtained via classroom observations become the topic for analysis and debriefing conversations.

These benchmarks refer to what principals do when they conduct observations, the actions they take afterwards, and the way the protocols of observation, analysis and debrief become embedded practices in the school culture. In order for teaching practice to improve, effective feedback must be given; this is only possible when the principal is knowledgeable of what good teaching looks like, hence the importance of the benchmarks.

There is increasing evidence that the principal's visits have a positive influence on teachers (Frase, 2005). However, in order for principals to know and understand what they are observing, they must subscribe to the dimensions of teaching and learning; this knowledge represents the difference between an expert and a novice observer. In addition, an understanding of the benchmarks for analysis of observation and feedback provide principals with the tools needed to create a culture of improvement at the school (Fink & Markholt, 2011).

***Levels of performance.*** Marzano et al. (2011) suggest that feedback that only points to whether a teacher utilizes a skill or not does little to further the teacher's expertise. They further posit that when given specific feedback, teachers can engage in focused practice. Relative to focused practice, Marzano (1992) describes three phases of development: the *cognitive phase*, during which

the teacher is learning and trying to implement a strategy; the *shaping phase*, during which the teacher experiments with different versions of the strategy; and the *autonomous phase*, the point at which the teacher is proficient in the use of the strategy and implements it with automaticity.

As they indicate that criteria for offering feedback are also an important factor, Marzano et al. (2011) describe offer five levels of performance (on a scale of 0-4) that provide a way to give teachers feedback. These scales allow for tracking of the development of teacher expertise on specific elements of four domains over specific intervals of time (see Table 1). These authors advocate for this scale as a way to give teachers an idea of where they are on a continuum of development.

Table 1

*Domains of Teaching Practice*

Domain 1	Domain 2	Domain 3	Domain 4
Classroom Strategies and Behaviors (41 Elements)	Planning and Preparing (8 Elements)	Reflecting on Teaching (5 Elements)	Collegiality and Professionalism (6 Elements)
Scales Specific to Elements of Domain			

Innovating (4)    Applying (3)    Developing (2)    Beginning (1)    Not Using (0)

*Note.* Adapted from *Effective Supervision: Supporting the Art and Science of Teaching*, by R. Marzano, T. Frontier, and D. Livingston, 2011. Copyright 2011 by ASCD. Adapted with permission.

**Empirical evidence.** A study of 809 teachers at all levels across the United States conducted by Blase and Blase (2000) considered principal behaviors under two categories: those that promote reflection (including

feedback), and those that promote teachers' professional growth. While offering feedback, effective principals engaged in meaningful conversations with teachers. Their feedback was targeted and focused on student learning. It praised teachers, promoted critical thinking, was sensitive to student concerns, and offered the opportunity for subsequent conversations with the principal. As a result, teachers became reflective, creative, and better able to take risks, and they felt efficacious, and self-assured. One teacher stated:

This type of strategy builds my confidence. My supervisor reinforces the fact that I am a teacher. As I collaborate with her, I learn more about my teaching. I look forward to her next visit as a chance to grow. The confidence I have described shows in my teaching. As I gain positive feedback, I continue using what works in the classroom. And because I do not fear negative evaluation, I am willing to take risks. (p. 134)

A conclusion drawn from this study is that, in general, principals who seek to become effective instructional leaders should ensure that as they create a school culture focused on instructional improvement, they also embed opportunities for reflection and growth.

In another study (Holland, 2008), seven principals in two urban high schools, two middle schools, and three elementary schools were interviewed and observed to capture their perceptions on how novice teachers grow and how they meet their teachers' professional growth needs. The principals interviewed and observed in this study offered that, among other strategies, classroom observation followed by feedback is an effective way to offer teachers information about the quality of their teaching and classroom management. They further offered that the observations provide an opportunity to share teaching strategies with teachers, drawing from their own teaching experience.

An analysis of 10 studies identified of the following attributes of feedback: method, timing, and source of the feedback (Scheeler et al., 2004). A total of 208 teachers participated in the 10 studies, 199 of whom were pre-service teachers. All participants were considered teachers regardless of their status (pre-service or in-service). The findings of this meta-analysis support the idea that only the timing of the feedback contributes to teachers' efficacy. These findings also confirm that feedback is most effective when it is delivered during or immediately after the instructional situation has taken place. However, these findings also reveal questions about the possible interruptions to the instructional sequence and the effects these interruptions can have on students. These researchers suggest that this problem can be mitigated by utilizing in-ear devices during the observation so that the principal can give feedback. Another possible solution is to give feedback later, but still on the same day. At any rate, Scheeler et al. (2004) offer that the feedback should be given as close to the teaching event as possible. Three overarching conclusions were drawn from this study: (a) it is better to offer feedback than to not offer feedback; (b) feedback that immediately follows the teaching situation is better than feedback that is given later; and (c) teacher behavior is more likely to change when the feedback is targeted, constructive, and corrective.

In yet another study, Coulter and Grossen (1997) sought to establish the effects of in-class feedback versus feedback given after, as it relates to the learning of teaching behaviors and the permanence of these behaviors. It involved giving feedback to seven teachers on two specific behaviors, and no



feedback on a third behavior. Findings of this study showed that behaviors targeted for in-class feedback were more likely to be acquired than those that were not. The behaviors targeted for feedback were also maintained long after: 14 days to be exact. This study makes a case for the importance of immediate feedback as an opportunity for correction and improvement of behaviors without delay. It also confirms the long-term impact of feedback on teacher learning.

The empirical evidence provided in support of principal feedback reveals that reflection is important for teacher growth (Blase & Blase, 2000). Teacher experience serves as the catalyst for reflection, as teachers are able to build on what they know and enhance their knowledge based on the feedback received (Holland, 2008). In addition, not only is feedback important, but also when given as close to the teaching as possible, it is more effective and has lasting effects (Scheeler et al., 2004). Finally, the effectiveness of feedback is further supported by Coulter and Grossen (1997) in their study of immediate targeted feedback, which was found to have changed specific teacher behaviors in productive ways.

### **Teacher Professional Growth**

**Historical background.** The decade of the 1970s was a period during which a focus on teacher competency prevailed, and during that time professional development was concerned less with teachers' continuing professional growth, and more with the teaching of specific skills. In the 1980s policymakers' focus had shifted to accountability and competence, but districts and teacher groups rallied around a revival of professional growth (Duke, 1993). The idea of teachers as reflective beings supported the notion of ongoing critical

reflection occurring as a function of experience (Schon, 1983). In the 1990s, a nationwide movement to revise the teacher evaluation process was born (Duke, 1993). Some saw learning as taking place for the duration of the teacher's career (Hargreaves, 1992). Similarly, other theories of teacher growth emphasized the teacher as a learner (Ball & Cohen, 1999).

Guskey (1986) offers that while research has focused on the process of teacher change and teacher professional development, there has been a shift in thinking from change as something that is imposed on teachers to an intricate learning process in which teachers participate. He adds that this shift is one that involves teachers as active learners, crafting their growth and participating in professional development and in reflection. Traditionally, professional development has failed because these efforts have neglected to take into consideration two important factors: (a) teacher motivation to participate, and (b) how teachers change. More recently, due to the perceived ineffectiveness of professional development programs, efforts have moved away from the one-time training model, such as that offered by workshops and conferences (Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011).

Weems and Rogers (2010) indicate that today's teachers enter the profession better prepared than in the past, perhaps as a result of the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act signed in 2002 as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB insisted on the hiring of quality teachers and led most states to require teachers to pass a subject-knowledge assessment as a way to ensure their preparation. However, as evidenced by the

predominant failure of students on national assessments, schools can be said to be failing at evaluating teacher performance.

So although Guskey (1986) suggests that early conceptions of teacher learning were focused on the acquisition of specific skills. Ball and Cohen (1999) offer that later studies focused on teacher growth as an ongoing learning process. However, NCLB's requirement of teacher competency may have been the true turning point for today's teachers who must now adhere to more stringent evaluation criteria (Weems & Rogers, 2010).

**Theoretical considerations.** In order to understand teacher professional growth, it is essential to explain the concept. Duke (1993) stated:

Professional growth is not staff development, though it may be stimulated by staff development. Professional growth involves learning, but it is more than learning. While learning may represent the acquisition of new knowledge, growth implies the transformation of knowledge into the development of the individual. (p. 702)

Teacher personal and professional growth is supported primarily by professional development (Drago-Severson, 2004). However, if it is to lead to permanent change in pedagogy and practice, professional development must be structured to ensure transformation (Slepko, 2008).

When a school focuses on learning and its teachers consider school-wide efforts while focusing on the impact they have on learning, the basic structure and cultural make-up of the school experiences marked changes (Dufour, 2002). The context of the school can deny or facilitate opportunities for teachers, such as professional development, support, motivation to try new techniques, and administrative support, or the lack thereof (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

Lieberman and Miller (2001) posit that the experiences afforded teachers must stimulate self-reflection and be part of an ongoing process aimed at improving professional growth. They offer that these experiences might include learning pedagogy and increasing content knowledge, followed by opportunities to practice what they have learned, and ending with a reflection on the process. Frequent reflection is thought to lead to change in practice (Downey et al., 2004).

***Professional development and teacher growth.*** NCLB requires that high-quality professional development be made available to teachers. This requirement is based on a belief that teacher participation in learning opportunities will positively impact teacher practice and student outcomes (Borko, 2004). Research indicates that teachers deliver quality instruction and are more likely to be flexible in the classroom as a result of their professional growth and their personal and professional development (Hargreaves, 1992). Teacher professional development must be a deliberate effort aligned with teachers' needs and practices as defined not by others, but by teachers themselves. Teachers are attracted to professional development that promises to extend their knowledge and skills, promote growth, and improve their ability to meet student needs (Guskey, 2002). Traditional professional growth opportunities for teachers emphasize a one-time workshop far from the classroom and outside of teachers' experience (Guskey, 1986). However, Slepko (2008) offers that ongoing professional development yields success in the sustained change of teacher instructional practice.

With regard to teachers acquiring knowledge, Mezirow (1985) advocates teachers to be self-directed learners. He offers that self-directed learning can be understood in the context of three types of adult learning: *instrumental*, involving the learning of specific skills; *dialogic*, which involves teachers as social learners deriving understanding together; and *self-reflective*, understanding that changes the way teachers teach as a result of introspection. Traditional staff development efforts have emphasized instrumental and dialogic learning. As most professional development opportunities are not guided by a specific curriculum or continuum of development, there ought to be a plan that provides teachers with many opportunities to gain knowledge that is meaningful to them as learners. This also calls for a professional teacher educator to facilitate the efforts to ensure that teachers master the skills being transferred (Slepkov, 2008). Professional development tends to lead to greater learning if level-alike teachers participate in a collective effort (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008).

As indicated by Duke and Stiggins (1986), a system that is committed to professional growth provides resources to its teachers to guarantee improvement. They offer examples of the types of resources that should be provided to improve performance: release time for teachers to visit other classrooms, attendance at trainings, or modeling for other teachers. These authors suggest that district experts may be made available to provide support and or technical assistance as well as mentorship, and teachers may want to have the capability to access feedback on performance in class via information systems. Finally, video recording equipment and other professional materials must be provided in any

improvement efforts. In essence, the professional development of teachers only comes about as the result of the teacher educators' full commitment to the processes by which teachers grow, and to the structures supporting that growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

**Theories of teacher change.** Teacher learning and development is sometimes seen as a cyclic process in which although one area of influence might be affected, another may not. However, change must occur in various areas of influence if teacher growth is to occur (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Teachers are more motivated to change when a *cognitive conflict* is created in their minds, which occurs when teachers are allowed to dissect their current practices before adopting new ones (Cobb, Wood, & Yackel, 1990).

One model of teacher change indicates that teachers modify their beliefs and attitudes based on evidence of a change in student learning (Guskey, 1986). An examination of 61 new programs in schools in 146 districts nationwide found that it is not effective to try to alter teachers' attitudes or to foster a commitment to new practices that they have not yet implemented. In fact, teachers were not committed until after they had been able to engage with the new practices in their classrooms (Crandall, 1983).

Additional research supports the learning-oriented model of leadership as an easy way to promote teachers' transformational learning. Drago-Severson (2004) defines transformational learning as that which allows teachers to cope with personal and professional complexities. She explains that the focus of transformational learning is neither the mastery of skills nor the increase of

knowledge, but rather making sense of the teaching experience, and giving teachers opportunities to examine their own assumptions in the learning process. The principal plays the role of professional developer and educator, and relies on adult learning theory to inform his leadership to promote learning.

Also in regards to teacher development, Putnam and Borko (2000) state that a situative perspective of change considers teacher knowledge and learning an experiential effort, assuming that all knowledge resides in the contexts of the teaching experience. They offer three conceptual themes to define this perspective as it relates to cognition:

1. Authentic activities in the classroom are important to promoting teacher learning. What is learned is the result of the learning situation and of how a person learns;
2. Teachers learn by participating in learning communities that encourage discourse that changes both the individual and the community; and
3. Cognition is distributed, emphasizing the importance of shared learning and cognitive performance.

Because learning is situated, some learning experiences for teachers beyond the classroom are essential for substantial learning to take place.

Professional growth is a function of ongoing learning (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Reflection on practice in an authentic learning environment allows teachers to acquire new knowledge in teaching (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000). Drago-Severson (2004) offers that teachers adjust their practices based on their daily experiences, and Putnam and Borko (2000) agree as they advocate

for learning as occurring within the context of the classroom. Thus, principals can facilitate teacher learning by engaging them in useful, relevant instructional practices (Robbins & Alvy, 2003).

***Barriers to professional growth.*** The barriers to professional growth may be listed in two categories: (a) *organizational barriers*, those built into the structure of the organization that prevent teachers from moving forward; and (b) *personal barriers*, those that teachers impose on themselves (Duke, 1993).

Duke (1993) posits that the teacher evaluation process, which often requires teachers to meet a set of performance standards, is an organizational barrier.

He adds that an evaluation process that utilizes common standards is taxing for administrators and reduces the time that is given to the teachers who truly need it.

Added to the evaluation process is the practice of teachers setting annual improvement goals, which usually translates to more paperwork and seldom promotes growth. The effects of these organizational barriers can be mitigated when school systems move from accountability-driven to growth-oriented evaluation, personalizing the experience.

In addition to the organizational barriers, Duke (1993) describes personal obstacles to advancement of teacher practice, including: “lack of awareness, disillusionment, distrust, pessimism, high comfort level with current practice, preoccupation with other concerns, stress, fear of failure, impatience, and poor time management” (p. 4). These barriers indicate teachers’ degrees of motivation and capacity for growth, and can be mitigated when school districts are flexible in their offering of growth activities, to the point of allowing teachers to



periodically opt out. When the barriers to professional growth are removed, school districts, schools, administrators, teachers, and students benefit from unfettered teacher learning. Therefore, Slepkov (2008) advocates for structuring and delivering professional development so that it transforms practice and ultimately yields new pedagogical and instructional practices.

**Empirical evidence.** A study of 26 teachers conducted by Slepkov (2008) documented their journey of professional growth for a period of 6 months, relying on the teachers' points of view for data. It included action research as well as the teachers' participation in a project creating websites as the culminating tasks. This study found that when professional development is authentic, grounded in tasks that teachers find meaningful, relevant to their practice, and based in the classroom, teacher practice is more likely to be transformed. Another finding acknowledged that the professional developer is important as the facilitator of the learning of those involved. Finally, because teachers were able to craft their own learning, they felt that the learning environment was authentic and that this opportunity validated their ideas of what classroom learning should be like.

In another study, Drago-Severson (2004) conducted interviews and document analysis of 25 school leaders, all of whom had held the principalship for at least 3 years. For the purposes of creating a diverse sample, the criteria for the selection of the principals included the following: elementary, middle, and high school; schools serving various racial groups; and public, private, and Catholic schools varying in levels of financial resources. This study sought to

understand what these principals did to promote teacher growth and why they thought their approach was effective. Drago-Severson's findings support the learning-oriented model of leadership by describing four pillars employed by the participants: (a) working in teams, (b) giving teachers leadership opportunities within the school, (c) participating in collegial inquiry, and (d) engaging teachers in mutual mentoring. The pillars can be seen as tools that principals use in their efforts to promote teacher growth and professional development.

Utilizing data from 30 elementary schools in a mid-size urban school district, Parise and Spillane (2010) investigated the links between professional development and learning opportunities and changes in instructional practice. Significant changes in instructional practice as it relates to mathematics and English language arts were associated with formal professional development and on-the-job learning opportunities. These findings also confirm that the learning opportunities in which teachers participate at schools can be as predictive of teacher change as are subject-specific learning opportunities.

Another study conducted by Supovitz et al. (2010) in an urban southeastern school district in the United States utilized a teacher survey and student data to examine the structural links between what students learned and principal leadership, teacher collaboration with peers, and the effects on teacher practice. This study found that principals have an indirect impact on student learning as a result of their direct impact on teacher practice. Teacher peer influence was also found to have played a major role in ensuring that teachers improved. In the area of mathematics, peer influence factored more strongly

than principal leadership in promoting teacher growth, perhaps because principals were less prepared in mathematics. However, in English language arts, principal leadership was found to have a greater effect on teacher instruction than peer influence. This was thought to be the result of principals' insistence on teacher collaboration and conversations around instruction related to English language arts.

Yet another study conducted at Parkland Elementary School, located in a mid-western city of the United States, reviewed extant data on teacher and principal interviews regarding action research and its effect on teacher growth. Three main ideas were identified:

1. The professional community of the school can be strengthened via classroom research,
2. Accountability is increased via classroom research, and
3. Classroom research can promote a growth cycle.

Action research was found to deepen professional knowledge by increasing collaboration, utilizing reflection to support research, and highlighting the importance of professional dialogue among teachers. Many teachers are now turning to action research, which leads to growth via the development of a question and the gathering and analysis of data. Action research confirms the idea that the best teacher learning occurs in experiences closest to the classroom (Gilles et al., 2010).

The empirical evidence in support of teacher professional growth proposes that authentic learning opportunities provide lasting experiences for

teachers (Slepkov, 2008). These experiences can include opportunities for collaboration with peers (Drago-Severson, 2004). Along the same line, Gilles et al. (2010) advocate action research as a way to promote collaboration and extend teacher learning while studying a relevant problem. Parise and Spillane (2010) highlighted the importance of the relevance of professional development opportunities, and Supovitz et al. (2010) pointed out that the principal plays a major role in providing teachers with collaborative opportunities that lead to professional growth.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

This literature review has explored the impact of principal feedback on teacher professional growth. The findings indicate that *A Nation at Risk* may have provided the impetus for a focus on instructional leadership, as it reported that teachers had become complacent and students were not succeeding in the educational status quo (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). In addition, Shaul and Ganson (2005) listed the accomplishments and challenges of NCLB, lending rationale to the importance of principal feedback and teacher professional growth. A highlight was that the main purpose of NCLB is to enhance student success and reduce the gaps in learning for some student groups. Also under NCLB, teachers must be qualified. Hence, it is important to explore the principal's actions in his/her efforts to ensure teacher quality is up to standard, as well as the influence of these actions on teacher professional growth.

A synthesis of the research on principal feedback and professional growth reveals three main ideas:

**1. The principal is inextricably linked to the success of teachers in the instructional process.** Blase and Blase's (2000) study highlighted the importance of principal actions geared to improving teacher practices. Under the guise of engaging teachers in conversations that lead them to reflect on practice and promoting practices that lead to teacher growth, this study suggested that principals play a major role in inspiring teacher learning. In the same vein, Drago-Severson (2004) described the learning-oriented model of leadership as leading to a transformation in teacher learning. The principal is seen as a key player in his/her role of professional developer and promoter of teacher learning. However, Duke (1993) indicated that principals' actions could also be detrimental to teacher practice. For example, an evaluation process that uses a one-size fits all model to evaluate teachers tends to be tedious for successful teachers, while preventing principals from assisting teachers who truly need help.

**2. Principal feedback is an effective way to effect lasting changes in instructional practice, particularly as it relates to immediate feedback, which increases the likelihood that the learning will be meaningful and lasting.** In 3 of 10 studies, immediate feedback was found to be more efficient than delayed feedback (Scheeler et al., 2004). Teachers changed specific practices based on the immediate feedback received, and supervisors were able to model techniques more often than in delayed feedback. Scheeler et al. (2004) authors drew three main conclusions about the effectiveness of feedback: (a) feedback is best (as opposed to no feedback), (b) immediate feedback is more effective than delayed feedback, and (c) targeted, corrective and positive

feedback promotes the most teacher change. Hattie and Timperley (2007) also noted that the correctness of feedback given may lower inconsistencies in implementation and contribute to the perception that feedback poses little threat, which in turn makes the behavior more likely to be internalized.

Robbins and Alvy (2003) offered evidence that when a principal visits classrooms often, positive changes in the teaching occur. Teachers feel efficacious and effective. Teachers who feel effective are more likely to get involved in training and evaluation matters. Duke and Stiggins (1986) contributed to this idea, adding that feedback must be specific, direct, and aligned to the context of the lesson. Downey et al. (2004) agreed as well, noting that a reflective cycle is initiated when principals persist in encouraging teachers to participate in observations followed by feedback.

Continuing with an exploration of the effectiveness of observations and feedback, Fink and Markholt's (2011) benchmarks for the analysis of observations and feedback were used as a lens through which the effectiveness of feedback could be measured. They refer to principals' actions during and after the observation, as well as the procedures followed by school personnel, as these practices become part of the fiber of the school culture. Finally, Marzano et al.'s (2011) contribution to this review is that focused, specific feedback is important. They outline four dimensions of teaching that principals can score on a scale from 0-4, giving teachers an idea of their standing in a continuum of performance.

**3. Teachers are learners, always seeking to refine their current practices, reflecting while in the act of teaching.** Slepkov's (2008) study of 26 teachers gives evidence that when teachers are engaged in meaningful learning practices, they improve. These practices are thought to be more effective when grounded in authentic classroom experiences and directly related to teachers' work with students. Gilles et al. (2010) concur. Their study of the effects of action research on teacher learning and growth found that action research enhances teacher practice. In addition, Fink and Markholt's (2011) dimensions of teaching and learning also support the concept of teachers as learners, as they illustrate the importance of teachers' and administrators' focus on instruction as a pathway to success. These dimensions directly impact the way an observer analyzes instructional practice during observations, and they are reflected in the follow-up conversations with teachers.

Ball and Cohen (1999), Guskey (1986), Hargreaves (1992), Putnam and Borko (2000), and Schon (1983) overwhelmingly agree that teachers are learners, that the most effective learning takes place in the act of teaching, and that reflection leads to teacher change, particularly when it occurs during teaching. Gilles et al. (2010) advocate for action research as a collaborative learning process that increases teacher knowledge via sharing. However, some offer that teacher growth is a process that results in teacher communication with the observer, and that it is ongoing and primarily occurs as a result of professional development efforts (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Drago-Severson, 2004; Duke, 1993; Duke & Stiggins, 1986; Slepkov, 2008).

Professional development is touted as a vital factor contributing to teacher professional growth. Borko (2004), Guskey (2002), and Hargreaves (1992) emphasize the importance of teachers participating in learning opportunities that are aligned with their practice, and note that professional development is more meaningful when teachers define its parameters based on their instructional needs. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) and Guskey (1986, 2002) address teacher change as a function of experience. Guskey (1986, 2002) states that teacher change is directly related to evidence of student learning. Clarke and Hollingsworth envision change as taking place in some areas of influence but not others.

The historical and theoretical considerations revealed by the research and empirical evidence cited overwhelmingly support the idea that there is a positive correlation between the classroom post-observation feedback principals give and the professional growth that teachers experience as a result.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter summarizes the research design and methodology of this study. It describes phenomenology and explains the rationale for utilizing it to conduct this study. The sites and the participants are described. In the *Instrumentation* section the interview protocol is explained, including the method for validating the questions, the process by which the interviews were conducted, and the way the data were collected. It continues with an explanation of the data set that was utilized, and an outline of how the data were managed, organized, and analyzed. Finally, the role of the researcher section provides clarity on the positionality of the researcher as it relates to this study.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Current leadership practices implemented in districts and schools across the nation fail to promote teacher learning to a level that yields high student learning (Fink & Markholt, 2011). Research on the typical day of a school principal indicated that the principal spent very little time observing teachers or interacting with teachers on curricular or instructional matters (Frase & Streshly, 1994). Specifically, “principals spent from 40% to 80% of their time in their office or office area, 23% to 40% in hallways and playgrounds, 11% off campus, and only 10% in classrooms” (Frase, 2005, p. 448).

Effective school leaders must ensure that ample time is dedicated to leadership that promotes sound instructional practices. Feedback after classroom observations is one powerful practice in which principals engage that can lead to the improvement of instructional practices. However, no extensive

studies have been conducted specifically on teachers' perceptions about the impact of feedback on their professional growth. Therefore, this research presented an opportunity to examine the practices in which principals engage during post-observation feedback and teachers' perceptions about the impact of these principal practices on their professional growth.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This phenomenological study specifically examined the experiences of selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools with regard to principal practices that have most influenced their professional growth. This study is especially relevant given the sense of urgency for ensuring that teachers are delivering effective instruction and that their principal is giving them the tools with which to do it. Meaning was derived from the experiences of teachers working with their principals after observations of lessons.

### **Research Question**

How might selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools perceive that principals' post observation feedback has influenced their professional growth?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study intended to capture teachers' perceptions of the quality of the conversations (i.e., feedback) in which they have engaged with their principals. Equally important, it captured their perceptions of the way those interactions have contributed to a change in their teaching practices. The researcher utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Moustakas (as cited in Creswell,

2007) describes phenomenology as a process whereby the researcher identifies an experience to study and collects data from people who share the experience of that phenomenon. Then the researcher analyzes the data by reducing it to significant statements or quotes and combines them into themes.

Phenomenology was the appropriate qualitative method for this study because the researcher relied on the common experiences of the participants in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

In this study teacher interviews were conducted in order to reveal how teachers perceive principal feedback has shaped their teaching practice. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol in which the interview questions allowed participants the latitude to describe their experiences. Interviews were an adequate way to gather data in this study because the pre-planned questions allowed the researcher to comfortably engage with the subjects, who shared details about their experiences in a non-threatening setting. Data analysis entailed transcribing the interviews to uncover meaning units, significant themes, a textural and structural description of the phenomenon, and an account of the *essence* of the experience (Creswell, 2007).

### **Setting**

Two Southern California Catholic high schools hosted this study. A trait they have in common is that a large percentage of their seniors attend institutions of higher learning beyond high school. Both share a tradition of excellence in teaching and learning. The researcher sought to explore the effects the

principals' instructional leadership has had on their teachers' expertise which in turn contributes to their students' success.

**Catholic High School A.** This site was founded in 1865. It is located in metropolitan Los Angeles, and it hosts an all-male student body that spans an area of 255 zip codes. Although a moderate tuition is charged, all students receive some level of subsidy. The students at this school, many of whom are children of former students, express a great deal of pride in their school, as evidenced by their support of sporting, religious, social, and philanthropic events. All activities in support of the school community are well attended by families, and long-term friendships and social networks are created and maintained.

The faculty at Catholic High School A is as much entrenched in the values of the school as the students and parents. The school is proud to have highly qualified faculty: of the 101 faculty members, 68 hold Master's degrees, 7 hold doctorates, and 17 have taught at the school for longer than 25 years. The school touts a strong academic program with small class sizes. It offers many options for electives, advanced placement, and honors courses, as well as study abroad opportunities. Not surprisingly, of the 99% of the graduates attending college, 96% attend four-year institutions. The students' academic efforts are tempered by their participation in curricular activities. Most students are involved in at least one curricular activity, whether sports, clubs, service-oriented organizations, and or academic groups.

As a requirement of graduation, during the senior year, all students must engage in community service during the month of January. This entails joining

an organization that provides services to the poor and disadvantaged. However, many students are involved in service projects throughout their tenure at Catholic High School A, and at graduation, some are awarded service awards to acknowledge their efforts. The school's value of providing service for others, the strong academic programs, and meaningful extra-curricular activities are major strengths of this school ("Did You Know?" n.d.).

The principal at this school describes himself as a *servant leader*, in the tradition of Robert Greenleaf's philosophy of servant leadership. He indicates that he has been an administrator in secondary education for 30 years, most of which he has held at his current location. Prior to becoming an administrator, he held other posts in academic, athletic, and student affairs, always emphasizing curriculum development and scheduling. He holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree from the University of California at Los Angeles. This principal attributes the continued success of this school to the ongoing examination and refinement of curriculum based on the core principles of the integrated curriculum model espoused by the Jesuits.

**Catholic High School B.** This all-male college preparatory school located in South Los Angeles was founded in 1962. One of its main goals is to give students who otherwise would not be able to afford a private education the opportunity to attend. A work-study program subsidizes the students' education at this school, as all students are required to work 5 days out of the month. Thus parents only pay a portion of the tuition plus a registration fee. The work-study program has led to an extended class schedule in order to allow students to work.

The student body at this high school is comprised of 260 students, 50% African-American, and 50% Latino. Students primarily reside in the surrounding cities of South Los Angeles. The school employs 50 faculty and staff members, and the teacher-student ratio is 1 to 12. The curriculum is competitive with other similar high schools, and meets the requirements of the University of California and California State University systems. Students are empowered to become intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually mature. This school is proud of its college attendance rate, as for the past 5 years 100% of graduating students have been accepted to either 2-year or 4-year institutions.

A variety of activities promote community at the school, including various clubs and sporting events. All students are required to complete service hours each quarter, and these service hours are counted as 10% of their religion grade. The parent community at this school is encouraged to be active and participate in school activities. In addition, all parents are asked to support the school by completing 30 service hours (“About us,” n.d.).

The principal at Catholic High School B has held this position since 2008. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of California Berkeley; he earned a Master’s degree in Secondary Education at Loyola Marymount University, and holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership for Social Justice degree from Loyola Marymount University. Prior to becoming a principal, he taught at another all-male Catholic High School in Los Angeles, serving in Campus Ministry and teaching English. In addition, he has served as chair of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Secondary Schools

Curriculum Committee since 2011. The success of this high school can be attributed to the multiple opportunities students are offered, such as mentoring, tutoring, and Saturday school.

### **Participants**

The targeted participants of this study were credentialed, full-time high school teachers at these two high schools. The sample was comprised of consenting teachers, regardless of teaching experience, age, gender, or ethnic background. All demographic information gathered was utilized solely for the purposes of describing the sample. Although all teachers at each school were invited to participate, three participated from High School A, and four from High School B. The researcher anticipated that veteran teachers (15 years or more experience) would be less likely to participate, deeming newer teachers more willing to engage in the study. Years of experience for teachers interviewed ranged from 3-16. Four of the participants were males and three were females. Six of the seven participants hold a Master's degree in their field of expertise. One participant is a doctoral candidate.

### **Human Subjects Considerations**

Approval for this study and access to the teachers in the selected sample was obtained from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (Appendix A), as well as from the school site principals. Approval meant that all teachers were allowed to participate in the study if they chose to. In addition, approval from Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board was obtained. The data gathered was used solely for the purposes of this study and posed minimal psychological, legal, social, or

economic threat to the respondents. A potential risk was the emotional, psychological, or behavioral response to a question that could have evoked the memory of a specific experience. As a benefit of participating, respondents were offered access to the disaggregated data to inform their future practice. All participants received a \$10 Starbucks gift certificate. Participants consented to the interview voluntarily and without coercion. A signed informed consent was obtained from each subject before participation in the interview. Individual interviews were held in locations that afforded basic comfort to the participants, and most of all, privacy. Some of the interviews were conducted via video chat. These factors helped to reduce the participants' anxiety level and helped to increase their level of comfort with the process.

The researcher ensured that the participants' understanding the data was confidential. In order to ensure the participants' confidentiality, each one was designated a number, rather than utilizing his/her name. Only the researcher had knowledge of the number assigned to each teacher. Respondents had no access to each other's responses, and the data were kept private and confidential. Participants were invited to request copies of their interview transcripts and or a summary of the findings of this study by contacting the researcher via phone, email, or U.S. mail.

### **Instrumentation**

**Interview.** The interview (Appendix B) was comprised of 10 questions in two parts. Part I asked background questions, such as years of teaching and specific areas of expertise. These questions allowed the researcher to describe



the participant group. Part II, the core questions, were intended to generate responses to address the research question guiding this study. All questions were supported by the extant literature. Each school follows a prescribed observation protocol: Catholic High School A has allowed each department to devise its own observational tool (Appendices C-E). The principal at Catholic High School B utilizes Charlotte Danielson's (2007) *Framework for Teaching, Domain 3: Instruction*, to conduct classroom observations (Appendix F). When developing the interview tool, the researcher gave consideration to this nuance.

Table 2 outlines the links between the research question and the primary questions utilized in the interview, as well as a list of the authors that lent a rationale to them.

Table 2

*Sources Supporting Interview Questions*

Interview Question	Links to Literature
4. In what ways would you like to improve your practice?	Guskey (2002)
5. How often does your principal observe your teaching?	Frase (2005)
6. How does the design of your department's/ Danielson's observation tool inform your practice?	Blase & Blase (2000)
7. While addressing the dimensions of your department's/ Danielson's tool, how does your principal address specific strengths or weaknesses in your instructional practice?	Scheeler, Ruhl, & McAfee (2004)
8. What role do you perceive your principal has played in your professional growth?	Blase & Blase (2000); Downey et al. (2004)
9. What are some changes you have made in your teaching as a result of the feedback you have received from your principal?	Duke & Stiggins (1986)
10. What suggestions might you have for your principal regarding the type of feedback you would like to receive that might have a direct impact on your practice?	Marks & Printy (2003)

**Part I: Background questions.** Question #1 asked, *How many years have you been teaching?* This background question was supported by Holland's (2008) research, which found that teacher experience serves as a mechanism for reflection when teachers build on what they know. Question #2, *What grade levels or subjects have you taught,* was written as a result of Hargreaves' (1992) assertion that teachers are learners for the duration of their career. Question #3 asked, *What specific degrees/credentials do you hold?* This question aligned with Weems and Rogers' (2010) suggestion that teachers are entering the profession today more qualified than they did in the past, per requirements of NCLB.

**Part II: Core questions.** Question #4, *In what ways would you like to improve your practice?* was supported by Guskey (2002), who stated that in order for professional development efforts to be effective, they must be crafted by teachers and not by others, and that these efforts must be aligned with their practices and needs. Frase (2005) stated that teachers saw frequent classroom visits as a way to effect positive changes in their efficacy and in their organizational effectiveness. This research provided a rationale for Question #5, *How often does your principal observe your teaching?* Question #6, *How does the design of your department's/Danielson's observation tool inform your practice?* aligned with the study conducted by Blase and Blase (2000), which found that follow-up conversations with teachers that were targeted and focused on student learning, praised them, and promoted critical thinking led to teachers becoming reflective, creative, and self-assured. Question #7, *While addressing the dimensions of your department's/Danielson's tool, how does your principal*

*address specific strengths or weaknesses in your instructional practice?* was inspired by Scheeler et al. (2004), who asserted that many teachers' behaviors could be modified as a result of feedback. They further added that teacher behavior changes with targeted, constructive, and corrective feedback. Interview question #6 specifically requested feedback related to each school's practices (examples of tools can be found in Appendices C-F).

Question #8, *What role do you perceive your principal has played in your professional growth?* was supported by Downey et al. (2004) as well as Blase and Blase (2000), who offered that when principals encourage teachers to participate in reflective feedback after observations, teacher expertise increases. Question #9, *What are some changes you have made in your teaching as a result of the feedback you have received from your principal?* was aligned to Duke and Stiggins' (1986) claim that teachers believe change in their practice occurs as a result of feedback from a convincing source, and it must offer suggestions specific to their teaching. Finally, Marks and Printy (2003) assert that when principals invite their teachers to collaborate and to practice integrated leadership, their students perform at a higher level. This statement supported the construction of Question #10: *What suggestions might you have for your principal regarding the type of feedback you would like to receive that might have a direct impact on your practice?*

**Validity.** The interview questions were subject to review and validation by a team of three experts in the field: Roberto Salazar, Ed.D., Elementary School Principal; David Baca, Ed.D., Instructional Data Coordinator; and Frances

Esparza, English Learner Compliance Specialist. The team members considered the interview questions in light of the purpose of the study and the research question guiding it. Each question was subject to scrutiny, and the reviewers revised them as needed, at times offering suggestions as to the best way to re-write the questions (see Figure 1). The researcher conferred with the team of experts to discuss the validity (or lack thereof) of each question, making the necessary additions or deletions per the team's suggestions. The list of interview questions that emerged from this process was submitted for approval by Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board.

<b>Validation Tool Interview Questions</b>		
Researcher: Dalys A. Stewart		
Expert: _____		
Project Title: <i>Principals' Post-Observation Feedback and its Influence on Teacher Professional Growth at Two Southern California Catholic High Schools.</i>		
Expert: Please consider the tool in light of the Research Question in my study. In the boxes below each question, indicate whether a question is appropriate as is, should be edited, or deleted. Please provide comments as it relates to edited or deleted questions. If you feel that a question should be added, please do so at the bottom of the document. Thanks.		
<b>Part I-Background Questions</b>		
1. How many years have you been teaching?		
<b>Appropriate as is</b>	<b>Edit</b>	<b>Delete</b>
Comments:		
2. What grade levels or subjects have you taught?		
<b>Appropriate as is</b>	<b>Edit</b>	<b>Delete</b>
Comments:		

Figure 1. Excerpt of interview validation tool.

**Data collection.** Some of the interviews were conducted in person at various locations and times convenient to the participants, whereas others were

conducted via online chat. No interview exceeded a period of 1 hour. The interviewer began by welcoming participants and reviewing the purpose of the study. The protocol included reminding participants that they were voluntary participants, and that as such they could decide to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Then the researcher explained the informed consent form (Appendix G) and the participants were invited to sign it. At the end of the interview, the interviewee was thanked and awarded a Starbucks gift certificate.

Each participant was notified that the interview would be recorded on a digital audio recorder. The recordings were transcribed verbatim after the interviews and analyzed to identify emerging themes. The researcher kept and will keep records of interviews in a locked file cabinet at home, and only the researcher has access to them. Electronic copies of the transcripts will be kept in the researcher's password-protected computer for a period of 5 years, after which they will be deleted.

### **Analysis of the Data**

In this study, the data analysis allowed the researcher to construct a description of the phenomenon. Data collected in the interviews were analyzed following Creswell's (2007) suggested six steps to analyzing phenomenological data. The researcher followed these steps in analyzing the data:

1. Bracketing her own experiences receiving feedback from administrators during her teaching years. This allowed the researcher to identify and set aside her personal ideas about the phenomenon,

and to focus on the participants' responses. Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that this step is reflected in the personal statements of the researcher offered in the "Role of the Researcher" section of the study;

2. Listing significant participants' statements with the help of a coding system. The coding system facilitated the identification and categorizing of ideas into common themes; specifically, Richards and Morse (2007) describe coding as the finding of patterns and the opportunity for the researcher to explore and reflect on the data collected.
3. Categorizing the statements into themes;
4. Synthesizing the experiences. This textural description of the phenomenon is an account of what the participants experienced;
5. Describing how the experiences happened (structural description);
6. Crafting a new story that describes the essence of the phenomenon as represented by the participants in their interview responses. The essence is also known as the "invariant structure" of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 62).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's interest in this study stems from a desire to become an effective leader: one who is actively involved in the advancement of her teachers' practice and in the fine-tuning of their craft, and who helps them develop into leaders of learning. As a principal she strongly believes that the administrator

plays a major role in teachers' professional development. Hence, classroom visits, observations, and subsequent conversations about instruction are of utmost importance. She believes that, when used properly, these tools can advance the work of teachers and create a school climate that values learning and student achievement.

The researcher's interest also stems from the experiences she had as a teacher receiving little useful feedback from administrators. The methods they used to evaluate her performance were superficial at best. The feedback received was mostly positive, and it was seldom followed by suggestions for improvement. A teacher was either effective or ineffective, with no regard given to a continuum of development. Feedback was given in light of an evaluation ritual that needed to be completed every other year. As a participant in the process she was never consulted about the types of feedback that she felt would best improve her teaching.

The researcher's journey in the field of education began in 1986 as a second grade teacher in a bilingual classroom. She held various positions at the elementary level -- such as bilingual coordinator, literacy coach, and coordinator of literacy at the district level -- that equipped her with the tools necessary for leading a school. She had the opportunity to interface with teachers developing and delivering professional development and facilitating their learning. This researcher often wondered whether teachers perceive that the feedback they receive from their administrators contributes to their professional growth. Hence, her experiences with teachers whetted her appetite for the exploration of this

topic of study. This research was intended to uncover information that will hopefully empower school leaders to lead their teachers to higher levels of effectiveness. In order to ensure that the participants' responses were honest, the researcher remained objective and maintained a professional demeanor at all times.



## Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

### Overview

This chapter will outline the findings of this research study. Following the restating of the purpose and the research question, the first section reviews the research design utilized in this study, as well as the procedures for data collection and data analysis. The second section reveals the findings of the interviews of seven teachers, and includes the significant themes identified, as well as a textural and structural description of the phenomenon leading to the essence of the experience. The composite findings of the interviews are detailed in the subsequent section. Finally, this chapter ends with a final summary of findings.

**Statement of purpose.** This phenomenological study specifically examined the experiences of selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools with regard to principal practices that have most influenced their professional growth. This study is especially relevant given the sense of urgency for ensuring that teachers are delivering effective instruction and that their principal is giving them the tools with which to do it. Meaning was derived from the experiences of teachers working with their principals after observations of lessons.

**Research question.** How might selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools perceive that principals' post observation feedback has influenced their professional growth?

The researcher-developed interview tool was comprised of 10 questions in two parts. Part I, the first three questions, asked background information in order to allow the researcher to describe the participant group. Part II, the core questions, were specifically intended to generate responses to address the research question.

**Background interview questions.** The first three questions in the interview tool were general questions providing the researcher with descriptive information about the participants. These questions shed light as to the teachers' level of expertise in terms of their years of service, the grades and subjects they have taught, and the degrees they hold. This information is germane to this study in that the path teachers have taken shapes their current experiences. The following questions were asked, and Table 3 summarizes the participants' responses:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade levels or subjects have you taught?
3. What specific degrees/credentials do you hold?

**Core interview questions.** Questions 4-10 were identified as core questions. These questions were intended to address the research question by inviting teachers to reflect on their experiences. The core questions were:

1. In what ways would you like to improve your practice?
2. How often does your principal observe your teaching?
3. How does the design of your department's/Danielson's observation tool inform your practice?

4. While addressing the dimensions of your department's/Danielson's tool, how does your principal address specific strengths or weaknesses in your instructional practice?
5. What role do you perceive your principal has played in your professional growth?
6. What are some changes you have made in your teaching as a result of the feedback you have received from your principal?
7. What suggestions might you have for your principal regarding the type of feedback you would like to receive that might have a direct impact on your practice?

Table 3

*Interview Sample*

Participant	Gender	Grades Taught	Subjects Taught	Years of Experience	Degrees Held	Credentials
<u>High School A</u>						
Teacher 1	M	9-12	Biology	16	MS/Ed.D	SC
Teacher 2	M	9-12	SS	15	MA	CT
Teacher 3	M	9-12	US History	15	MA/MA	EP
<u>High School B</u>						
Teacher 1	M	9-11	English	15	BA	CT
Teacher 2	F	9	English/SS	13	MA/MA	EP
Teacher 3	F	9-12	Theology/SS	7	MA/MA	PT
Teacher 4	F	9/11	Chemistry/PS	3	BS/MA	SC

*Note.* SS = social science; PS = physical science; SC = secondary science; CT = California teaching credential; EP = emergency permit.

## **Research Design, Data Collection, and Data Analysis**

This qualitative, phenomenological study focused on the experiences of teachers who were interviewed to capture their perceptions of ways in which principal post-observation feedback has enhanced their instructional practices. Data were collected via interviews of teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools. All teachers at both high schools were invited to participate. Seven agreed to participate. Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and some via video chat as a convenience for the participants. All interviews were conducted individually.

Interviews began with an explanation of the purpose of the study and a review of the informed consent, including a reminder that the interviews were audio-recorded, and a reminder to participants that they could withdraw at anytime and keep the Starbucks card reward. Participants signed the informed consent, and all participants' questions and or concerns were addressed prior to starting the interviews. The interview process was uniform for all participants. Questions were asked in the order that they appeared in the tool, and the researcher, in addition to audio-recording each interview, kept written notes.

The next step was the transcription of each interview into a Microsoft Word document in preparation for coding. The coding process included highlighting the statements in the participants' responses that could represent emerging themes. This process is known as horizontalization: "an interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). The coding process included insights by two other doctoral graduates, who

reviewed the researcher's coding and confirmed her identification of emerging themes.

The next step in data analysis was to develop "clusters of meaning" from the significant statements into themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). The categorizing of clusters of meaning was followed by a textural description of the phenomenon: a description of what happened. The researcher then described how the phenomenon took place (structural description). The next step in data analysis was the crafting of a new story that included composite themes and a description of the essence of the phenomenon. Finally, two doctoral students were consulted on the coding process in order to validate the researcher's interpretation of themes and key findings.

### **Research Findings**

The findings of the teachers' interviews are summarized in this section. The researcher sought to explore the participants' experiences with principal post-observation feedback to determine its impact on teacher practice. This section includes a textural and structural description, as well as the essence of the phenomenon for each school. These are followed by the composite description of the findings. It is important to note that the teachers at High School A indicated that the principal himself does not observe their teaching. That task is assigned to the department chair and the assistant principal. Therefore, some High School A responses pertaining to the principal giving feedback actually refer to the department chair and or the assistant principal,

operating in the capacity of the observing school administrator. For the purposes of this study, these responses will suffice.

**High school A themes.** Four themes emerged: *teachers want more technology in the classroom; administrators and teachers utilize the observation tool to focus observations; teacher collaboration yields more teacher growth; and teachers benefit from immediate, frequent, specific feedback.*

***Teachers want more technology in the classroom.*** Teachers overwhelmingly expressed that technology would be one way for them to improve their practice, and that the principal could make innovations in the classroom possible. As Teacher 2 reported:

They can provide more and more professional development on how to include technology in the classroom. I think most teachers want to include technology. We're just not quite sure how some of the new technology coming out fits into the classroom. So the more resources for that the better.

Teacher 3 reported that as a result of the feedback he received from an administrator, he has incorporated more technology in his classroom. He stated that he "used more technology...I said I need to have an iPad or device that will allow me to be among the students all the time, so the administrator gave me an iPad." Teacher 1 also expressed a desire to improve his practice by incorporating more technology. He said:

Being trained in the newer, more innovative ways, utilizing technology in really the most effective ways. Not just merely having technology in the classroom but probably being able to leverage best practices. Finding out how it really improves student learning, and then getting trained in that way.

***Administrators and teachers utilize the observation tool to focus***

**observations.** At High School A, each department has created a tool that addresses the elements of instruction specific to their subject area. Teacher 1 indicated:

As a department we come to some sort of agreement on what the observer is actually looking for, and because we've agreed that these are the key characteristics of good science teaching, these are things that I actually look at before they come in. I would know that they want to see these explicit characteristics, so I would say now that it is a better form it is guiding my practice more.

He further added:

In my experience they've been very positive. They usually start out with really applauding your strengths and then working into the risks that you've taken. Like knowing that you've really been trying to improve in the area of technology they say, "I see you trying to embed more technology, or I see you working on an area of growth; I really appreciate you working on an area of growth." Then they would lead into, "here are some other areas of growth that I see, given the observation."

Teacher 1 also indicated that the tool has helped him plan and organize his lessons. He stated, "I've really been pushed by them to be explicit about my goals with the students and how I'm going to get them there. So like road-mapping the lesson or road-mapping the week." Teacher 3 indicated that he utilizes the elements of the tool to plan his lessons. He stated, "So I would say that I try to do much of what the observation form expects of us." He reported that the administrator points out strengths and weaknesses in his lessons as in the example he offered of a particular lesson:

Yes as a matter of fact, I would say that he said one area I could improve in was that my lesson was euro-centric. It was more euro-centric than it should be in World History. And he thought that I should have addressed Asian issues and South America...I remember that as specific criticism.

***Teacher collaboration yields more teacher growth.*** A consideration of the role that a principal plays in his professional growth led teacher 2 to reflect on the idea that teachers might derive more benefit from collaborating with their peers. He stated:

I think it's a much better idea for teachers to work not only within disciplines for vertical and horizontal relationships, but also to work across disciplines. A lot of times teachers who have been around for a while or even new young teachers coming in will have great ideas and the problem all too often in education is that we get so focused on our own subject matter and our own department that we don't hear about these great ideas and great content ideas from other disciplines.

Teacher 3 added:

I think they could really almost mandate peer observations. We're reluctant to go into each other's classrooms to just watch. I think we're a little nervous, or jealous, or whatever it is. I think it is nerves, actually. And so we do not really observe each other the way that we could. And I think we need a gentle push in that direction.

***Teachers benefit from immediate, frequent, specific feedback.***

Teachers at High School A felt that feedback needs to be specific to what is being observed, and it needs to occur more frequently. Regarding specific feedback, Teacher 1 stated:

The most frustrating thing has been having an observer come in and I am specifically working on a certain teaching skill, or a delivery method of content and hoping that they see it, and then being completely blinded. Like not even noticing it and responding to like, my tie was crooked or a kid had his head on his desk in the back. While that observation was valid it's most frustrating when what you're actually trying to show them they don't see. Therefore, I would say you have to ask me before you come and observe me what you hope to see.

Teacher 2 added:

Whenever he meets with us, he will always do a little bit of research on his own to find two or three articles to give to us just to enhance the activity that we did. So that always helps on the informational level.



Teacher 3 stressed the importance of frequency when he stated:

Well, maybe more often. I haven't been observed since November...It is important for a teacher to have as much feedback as possible because we tend to get involved in our own little bubble, in our own world, and think that we are more effective than we are. We don't understand how much more effective we could be by thinking in a new way.

***Textural description.*** The teachers at High School A have all been teaching approximately the same number of years. Their experience with the administration (principal, assistant principal, and department chair) has been that they hold collegial relationships. These teachers share a concern for student learning and expect administration to lead them in the direction of resources, professional development, and new and innovative techniques for addressing student needs. As stated by Teacher 2, "I think department chairs and administrators can provide more professional development on how to include technology in the classroom."

Although they appreciate and value the feedback they receive from their administrator, they hold a high regard for teacher collaboration and peer interaction. Teacher 2 believes it is long overdue that teachers should observe each other while teaching and give each other feedback. He stated, "I think it's a much better idea for teachers...to work across disciplines." Although collaboration efforts have begun somewhat, as in the creation of their departmental tools, they are far from collaborative in the sense of learners learning from each other while teaching.

***Structural description.*** The teachers at High School A enjoy working at their school. They seek opportunities to enhance their teaching experience to

provide their students with more opportunities for higher learning. Teacher 3 stated, “And so I guess I’d like to find the time to plan specific exercises that would make them more passionate about world and U.S. history.” To that end, these teachers would appreciate more frequent observations, and not just by the department chair or assistant principal, but by the principal as well. They wish their administrators would visit their classrooms more often, giving specific feedback based on the observation of the lesson. Teacher 2 stated:

My principal doesn’t observe too often. He observes about once every other year. The main two people who observe my teaching are my department chair and also we have an assistant administrator for curriculum development. Both of them will come into my room pretty much once every other month to observe.

He further added:

What the typical observation looks like is the assistant principal for curriculum development and my department chair will come in, they will observe my class for a good half of the class if not more. And then they will provide a description of what happened; a positive statement about what happened, and then recommendations for the future.

These teachers also share a strong desire to incorporate new technology into their instructional routines. They see administration as the source for these resources, and they indicate that most times requests for resources of this sort are honored if they are accessible or available to the school. Teacher 2 reported, “Then our department chair typically looks to our professional development. So he’ll send out resources about upcoming professional development and then we can always go to him in order to get resources like funding.” Teacher 1 indicated that he would like to improve his use of technology in the classroom, “not just

merely having technology in the classroom but probably being able to leverage best practices.”

**Essence.** Generally, the teachers at High School A are conscientious and actively seek ways to improve their teaching. Even though they have been teaching for at least 15 years, they are aware of new and innovative techniques that would enhance their current practices. Although they have a general respect for their administrators, their responses do not necessarily reflect a strong commitment to the observation protocols currently followed at their school, and they do not express a strong belief that these protocols improve their practice. Yet, they are hopeful that the administrators have good intentions for teacher learning and share resources with them to advance their practice.

**High school B themes.** Five themes emerged: *teachers want to find ways to connect with students, Danielson’s tool provides focus for observations, feedback is grounded in what was observed, principal is seen as role model and provider of resources, and principal should visit more frequently.*

**Teachers want to find ways to connect with students.** The teachers at this school expressed a concern for connecting with students in order to enhance the teaching and learning experience. Teacher 1 stated:

We’ve had a focus in our school in recent years on total participation strategies. Although I made strides in that area, there is still the opportunity for students to kind of detach from the lessons. So a way of engaging more students more often would definitely be something I want to work on.

Teacher 2, also concerned with engaging her students, indicated that she desires to “move more toward project-based learning as opposed to teacher-

centered learning.” Teacher 3 added, “Becoming more aware and educated of my specific students’ backgrounds, the cultures they’re coming from, the histories, their family histories. All of that stuff that sort of makes up who they are specifically.” Finally, Teacher 4 also added:

Improving my science teaching practices so that I can make science more interesting for my students. I want to keep finding more ways to incorporate interactive activities and hands-on things for my students in the classroom. And I also would like to find ways of connecting with students more in terms of like their personal life. I do a good job of that, not in the classroom. But for my classroom students I don’t get to really know them very well. So I would like to find ways to build up those student relationships so that it can transfer into the classroom.

***Danielson’s tool provides focus for observations.*** In regards to the observation tool utilized at their school, 3 of the 4 teachers at High School B responded positively. Teacher 1 stated:

Well it provides kind of a rubric for instructional practice. Which I think is good. I mean a rubric is always a good grading tool or evaluative tool so I enjoy having that. And part of this was a self-evaluation, which we did this year for the first time. Last year was kind of a pilot program, but this year we looked at each aspect of the Danielson framework and then evaluated ourselves in relation to that rubric, charting our own areas for improvement. That self-evaluation served as the talking points for a meeting with the principal to chart some progress, you know, plan for progress.

About the Danielson (2007) framework, Teacher 2 stated:

I think it’s really good because it first of all divides all aspects of the teaching profession into the four domains and it continues to break them down into smaller pieces so you can pin-point areas that you are proficient or advanced in, or whatever. It helps you really pinpoint, to articulate areas of strength and weakness.

Teacher 3 also added:

It kind of gives me things to focus on, areas to focus on, and sometimes areas that I might not necessarily think of on my own. Maybe the areas of improvement that I’m not necessarily aware of on my own, but when I see

it written and we decide to focus on that area for a while, I think, oh yeah, how do I do that or how don't I do that?

***Feedback is grounded in what was observed.*** Teachers felt confident that the principal gives feedback that is specific to the element observed.

Teacher 1 stated:

So he's pretty prompt about returning feedback. And I think the feedback he has given is very germane to the elements of the practice that he's looking for. So he doesn't look for everything in an observation. He's looking for maybe one or two instructional practices and keying in on those areas. And it's kind of hit or miss because he may come in at a time when you're not doing total participation strategies, the lesson at that point, or that element of the activity isn't suitable for that particular observation. But I guess the point is over a period of time he will be able to tap into all of those elements that he's looking for.

Teacher 2 added:

He lets us know ahead of time which particular benchmark or descriptor he's looking for. He gave us all of the domains at the beginning of the year. So we kind of know. When he says "ok, I'm looking for domain 1b" or whatever it is, he lets us know ahead of time that he's doing observations based on that one descriptor. And then, it is helpful with the feedback. He comes in, he does his little record and then he'll give us feedback on it.

Teacher 3 stated:

He lets us know for the next couple of months, "I'm going to be specifically looking at this area." And then when he gives us feedback after he observes us, he lets us know what he saw or didn't see in regards to that particular area.

Teacher 4 added:

I do remember that he did address strengths and weaknesses. He gave me recommendations on what he would like to see improved. I think a lot of it was like the logistics of a classroom, having my agenda posted on the board, and things like that because it was the beginning of the year and the focus was on classroom management or classroom protocols.

***Principal is seen as role model and provider of resources.*** Teacher 1

enthusiastically stated:

I'd like to think that principals are your champions. They highlight the things you do well, and gently draw your attention to things you need to focus on. So they're kind of coaches and cheerleaders and teammates all at once. So I think probably the way that this particular principal has influenced my teaching is that he's very supportive of things I'm trying to do in my classroom. Although, when he feels that things aren't going as they should, he's not adverse to bring that to my attention. But he does that in a positive way.

Teacher 2 added:

Between the two that I've worked for I would say that probably the first one was much more impactful because I was a new teacher and she was my principal for 7 years. I started with her at my first school and I followed her to this school when she became the principal here. She has been just an absolute role model, and mentor. Really taught me a lot of important concepts about teaching that I still think of today when I'm in the classroom. So in every way, classroom management, instructional strategies, how to deal with parents, how to deal with colleagues, planning, just in every way.

Teacher 3 noted that the principal is:

Someone to bounce ideas off of, give feedback, bring me opportunities for professional development. Probably one of the biggest ways is keeping their eyes open for professional development and then be willing to fit the bill if it is going to be beneficial.

Finally, teacher 4 stated that the principal is often "Encouraging professional development."

***Principal should visit more frequently.*** Regarding the frequency of classroom visits, Teacher 1 reported that the principal should:

Include in observations those key areas that the teacher him/herself feels that he/she needs to improve in. So ongoing, because you've identified this is an area for work, make that an ongoing focus in every observation. I think that would be useful rather than just hit on it at the dialogue.

Teacher 2 added, “It’s really kind of more time. Spending more time in conversation with him and I know he’s very busy so that’s not always a possibility. But probably more frequent observation and immediate conversation following.” Similarly, Teacher 3 stated:

For me personally I think it would be just be to come in the class more often. I mean he just saw me once this year, maybe twice last year. And he just stays for ten minutes or whatever, Yeah so I think to increase the frequency.

Finally, related to the frequency of the principal’s visits, Teacher 4 added:

It’s tough because I know that the job of principal is really busy. But the biggest thing is to actually observe me. It’s something that I would want from everybody in the administration just because it’s actually something that I’m really frustrated with. It’s not being observed because I’m not getting the feedback that I want. So making the time to observe all teachers. Even the ones that are not the in departments he oversees.

***Textural description.*** The 4 teachers interviewed at High School B expressed a desire to establish better relationships with students. Teacher 3 reported that she would like to know more about “specific students’ backgrounds, the cultures they’re coming from, their family histories.” Teacher 1 also added, “That’s a big issue at our school. It’s an issue I think at all schools too, that there are students that just get disconnected from the content.” The culture of this school, reflected through these teachers, supports an interest in engaging students both in and outside of the classroom.

Most teachers also expressed a great deal of respect for the role of the principal, in terms of the experiences they have had with observations and the ensuing conversations, and in terms of the learning they have derived. Teacher 1 described principals in general as “kind of coaches and cheerleaders and

teammates at all once.” Three of the teachers held the role of the principal in high regard, and believed the principal has had an impact on their professional growth, whereas Teacher 4 did not feel that the principal has made a difference in her practice. She stated:

So I'm just not observed often enough for it to make an impact. And when I am observed I don't get the follow up meeting. For the beginning of the year, when occasionally I would be observed I would pay attention to the recommendations put after the short mini observation...He hasn't really had a direct impact on any of my teaching, my lesson plan, grading, nothing...except to encourage me or give me opportunities for professional development.

At this school, the use of the Danielson (2007) framework guides teacher planning as well as principal observations. The teachers reported that the tool provides clarity of what and how to teach. The tool's implementation is in its early stages, being used for the first time this year at this school. However, teachers indicated that it has given the observation protocol a focus on the elements of teaching.

***Structural description.*** The context within which the experience occurred at this school is that the teachers interviewed generally respect the principal of High School B. Teacher 1 stated:

He's a team... he's looking for collaboration and not top to bottom kind of dictatorial approach. His focus seems to be on the students' learning. You know? Are we maximizing student learning in our classrooms. That seems to be the mission behind anything...any interaction I've had with him.

The interview responses of 3 out of 4 teachers indicate that this principal has established the conditions for teacher learning by introducing Danielson's (2007) framework and using it to observe their teaching routines. He is explicitly focusing on the dimensions of the tool, and now teachers are starting to use the



tool for planning purposes as well. Regarding the use of the tool, Teacher 3 reported, “it kind of gives me things to focus on, areas to focus on.” Teacher 2 agreed, stating, “I think it’s really good because first of all it divides all aspects of the teaching profession into the four domains.”

However, even though the teachers hold this principal in high esteem, there is a general concern that observations do not occur frequently enough. Teacher 4 indicated several times that the principal had not observed her. She stated, “Going off of his one observation of me I have been more cognizant of my classroom protocols.” When asked what suggestions she might have for her principal, Teacher 2 reported, “spending more time in conversation with him.”

**Essence.** The teachers at High School B seek to address student learning via a humanistic approach. They believe that learning personal information about their students opens the lines of communication and builds trust, which can lead to better learning conditions. These teachers generally believe that immediate, specific, frequent principal feedback should be the norm at their school. However, currently the principal does not visit or give feedback as often as they would prefer. Nevertheless, this school is moving in the right direction related to teacher observation protocols, as the Danielson (2007) framework is becoming a staple for observation and planning. The principal is indeed utilizing this instrument, grounding his feedback on the observations, and teachers indicated that the tool has become a planning instrument for them as well.

**Composite findings.** This section will provide an explanation of the composite findings of this study. It begins by offering a composite textural description of the phenomenon, followed by a composite structural description. It concludes with the composite essence of the phenomenon. Table 4 provides a summary of the composite findings.

Table 4

*Composite Findings*

Key Themes	School A	School B
Teachers want more technology in the classroom	X	
Admin/teachers use observation tool to focus observations	X	X
Teacher collaboration yields more teacher growth	X	
Teachers benefit from immediate, frequent, specific feedback	X	X
Teachers want to find ways to connect to students		X
Danielson's tool provides focus for observations		X
Feedback is grounded in what was observed	X	X
Principal is seen as role model and provider of resources	X	
Principal should visit more frequently	X	X

**Composite textural description.** All the teachers who participated in this study agreed that it is important to be observed if they are to improve their teaching practices. Their responses reflect that the feedback they have been given has been well received and they recognize it has encouraged them to make some changes to their practice.

The principals (and other administrators) at both schools actively utilize an observation tool to focus observations, and the tool also guides teacher planning. However, although principals utilize the tool, they do not observe frequently, as reported by the teachers who would like them to visit more often.

**Composite structural description.** A look at the *how* of the experience at both schools reveals that although teachers see the principal as a key figure in

their development, not all teachers believe this to the same degree. Some see the principal as a role model and mentor, while others believe that the principal is key in that he provides them with the necessary tools and resources to advance their practice. At High School B the principal gives feedback to teachers, whereas at High School A the principal does not, but tasks the department chairs and the assistant principal with observing teachers and giving feedback. Each school's principal plays a distinct role in teachers' professional development, which is a determining factor in whether or not the observation/post-feedback experience is successful.

***Composite essence.*** The teachers at both schools are eager to excel, and they acknowledge the importance of classroom observations followed by relevant feedback. They recognize that the feedback they receive from their administrators is indeed grounded in what the administrators have seen in their teaching. However, though they have been observed, they feel it has not occurred enough, and some feel that the observations have not led to professional growth.

Table 5 summarizes the four key themes shared by both schools:

*Administrators and teachers use an observation tool to focus observations; teachers benefit from immediate, frequent, specific feedback; feedback is grounded in what was observed; and principal should visit more frequently.*

Table 5

*Common Themes*

Key Themes	School A	School B
Admin/teachers use observation tool to focus observations	X	X
Teachers benefit from immediate, frequent, specific feedback	X	X
Feedback is grounded in what was observed	X	X
Principal should visit more frequently	X	X

**Final Summary of Findings**

Earlier in this work, perception was equated with reality, and it is said to have a bearing on how humans behave (“Perception,” 2012). In this study, perception is accepted as truth based on accounts of lived experiences. This research study relied on the perceptions of seven teachers about their experiences with principals observing their lessons and giving post-observation feedback. The findings relative to the research question were outlined in this chapter.

The general impression of the teachers in this sample is that the principal is to be respected as a role model, a mentor, and a professional developer. At both schools he is seen as key to making resources available to teachers, such as: technology, articles on current practices, and workshops. All teachers expressed no reservation to having the principal (or designee) visit their classrooms, and they were not intimidated by the observation or the subsequent feedback.

The interviews revealed nine themes, of which both schools shared four key themes. Not surprisingly, the overarching perception of the seven teachers is that principal feedback is indeed vital to teachers’ professional growth. Interviews also revealed that teachers not only expect their principals to observe,

but also want them to give feedback aligned directly to what was observed.

Some expressed frustration about planning and delivering lessons that the administrator overlooked. Therefore, teachers believe that effective feedback is specific, and when it is, it leads to a change in their instructional routines.

However, the research question in this study did not seek to explore whether feedback is essential to promote teacher growth. Instead, it sought to explore the question of *how* teachers perceive that it does. Although teachers reported that observations were taking place, they also added that they were not frequent enough. They reported that they were observed between two and four times a year: not enough to have an impact. On a positive note, the observation tool (departmental tools/Danielson's Framework, 2007) was believed to be useful in focusing the pre-observation conversations and guiding the classroom visits by honing the element of the lesson observed. It also provided a focus for the post-observation conference, as observers were able to discuss areas of strength and weakness and possible next steps. Furthermore, teachers reported that the tool has given them a structure for lesson planning and organization, as it outlines the elements of teaching.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Discussion of Significant Findings for Research Question**

This chapter summarizes the findings of the interviews conducted with teachers. The common themes that emerged from the interviews are outlined and discussed in light of the research question to explain the impact of principal feedback on teacher professional growth from participants' perspective. This chapter begins by restating the purpose of the study and the research question that guided this work and summarizing the study's methodology. It continues with a discussion of conclusions, followed by recommendations for policy and practice, as well as recommendations for further study. This chapter concludes with the researcher's final reflections.

This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the experiences of seven teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools with regards to principal practices that have most influenced their professional growth. The teachers were interviewed, and their responses were utilized to derive meaning from their experiences working with their principals after observations of lessons. The researcher-developed Interview tool (Appendix B) was validated by a team of three experts. It was comprised of 10 questions, including three background questions and seven core questions. The interview tool was developed in consideration of the extant literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (see Table 2). The core interview questions were written with the intention of addressing the research question: How might selected teachers at two Southern California Catholic high schools perceive that principals' post observation feedback has

influenced their professional growth? The responses to the interview questions were subjected to a coding process and validated by two doctoral graduates who confirmed the researcher's categorizing of key statements into themes.

This research study did not set out to determine whether principal feedback impacts teacher practice or not. Many studies, some of which were cited in this work, have indicated that it does. Rather, this study sought to investigate *how* principal feedback impacts teacher practice. The subjects interviewed were teachers who, despite their years of experience, subjects taught, and degrees and credentials held, expressed four common themes: *administrators and teachers use an observation tool to focus observations; teachers benefit from immediate, frequent, specific feedback; feedback is grounded in what was observed; and the principal should visit more frequently.* Interestingly, these themes are interrelated and provide a context for addressing the research question.

**Administrators and teachers use an observation tool to focus observations.** The sample interviewed agreed that the instrument the principal used while observing gave structure to the follow-up conversations. This practice is consistent with Duke and Stiggins' (1986) idea of grounding the post-observation conversation in the actual context of the lesson so that its effects can be more significant. Some of the teachers in this study alluded to the importance of reflecting on the levels of performance identified by their tool, which allows them to plan their lessons and gauge their performance along a continuum of expertise. This idea is congruent with Downey et al.'s (2004) reflection on

practice as a way to internalize the experience. It also agrees with Marzano et al.'s (2011) suggestion that in order for feedback to be focused, it must address levels of teaching performance.

**Teachers benefit from immediate, frequent, specific feedback.** This theme is woven throughout this study. The literature supports this theme, and the teachers in this sample validated it as well. Although teachers acknowledged that administrators conduct observations and give feedback, some indicated that the feedback did not address specific elements of the lesson taught. Scheeler et al. (2004) described the crucial attributes of effective feedback as timing, method, and source. They confirmed that feedback needs to occur immediately following the teaching situation if it is to be effective. In addition, Duke and Stiggins (1986) offered that feedback is more effective when it addresses specific elements of the lesson observed.

**Feedback is grounded in what was observed.** The observation tool used at each school provided a structure and a context for the conversation following the lesson. However, grounding the post-observation conversations in a tool is only effective when the principal and teacher share the instructional knowledge to engage in productive discourse. Blase and Blase (2000) suggested that principals inspire teachers to change when they engage them in meaningful discourse about instruction.

The observation tool allows for an accurate identification of areas of growth. At High School A, the tool is specific to the subject area, and the elements of the subject are specified within the teaching context. The Danielson



Framework (2007) utilized at High School B provides specific information about levels of teaching. Each tool gives structure to the observation in its own right. Marzano et al. (2011) offer that evaluating teachers' level of performance tracks their professional growth in developmental increments. If used properly, an observation tool can become the perfect medium to engage in what Fink and Markholt (2011) labeled as benchmark #3, analysis and debrief: an opportunity for principal and teacher to debrief the lesson and analyze its elements to determine next steps.

**Principal should visit more frequently.** Another element of feedback about which the teachers in this sample were concerned is frequency. They felt that their administrators were not visiting as often as they would like. Duke and Stiggins (1986) advocated for feedback occurring with regularity. So did Downey et al. (2004), who added that frequent classroom visits followed by feedback are important; however, they cautioned against leaving notes after every visit, as notes may provide extrinsic motivation for teachers and not lead to long term change. Finally, Frase (2005) indicated that teachers felt frequent visits increased their self-efficacy.

Both sites in this study are making attempts to address teacher growth. The use of an instrument with which teachers are familiar and that sharpens the pre- and post-observation conversation is a starting point. However, teachers are looking for more. They are seeking to engage in ongoing learning, and whether that learning comes from the feedback they receive from their principal

or from observing each other teach, they all agree that principals must still play a significant role in advancing their work.

### **Conclusions**

Three conclusions were drawn from the findings: First, teachers perceive that an observation tool that is research-based and proven to be effective in guiding classroom observations and follow-up conferences is important to the observation cycle. Second, teachers perceive that effective lesson feedback adheres to the criteria of the tool used for the observation. Third, teachers have specific expectations of the role the principal plays in advancing their instructional practices.

**The importance of a research-based observation tool in the observation cycle.** The current efforts at including teacher input into the evaluation process at both schools paint an optimistic picture. High School A has allowed teachers in each department to collaborate on the creation of an observation tool as it applies to their subject area. This form has become a guide for planning and observation. High School B is utilizing Charlotte Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching. This instrument explicitly outlines the elements of teaching; it requires the principal and teacher to engage in a conversation before the lesson regarding areas of focus, and after the lesson concerning areas of strength and growth. The common language of the tool facilitates the conversation around shared understandings and gives coherence to the evaluation process.

Regardless of the tool, the opportunity for practitioners to engage in conversation based on the elements of teaching is valuable. These schools are moving toward empowering teachers to participate actively in their own learning. Therefore, one can conclude that the tool is essential to the success of the process. Its elements, specific to the dimensions or levels of teaching, provide a context within which the observation can occur. The observation tool can provide a starting point for what Robbins and Alvy (2003) call reflection leading to increased expertise. Furthermore, it eliminates the random, non-specific, reflection on practice that does not lead to professional growth.

**Effective feedback adheres to the criteria of the tool.** The act of giving feedback in and of itself is not enough, and past efforts have focused on whether or not a teacher possesses a skill. However, more recently, Marzano et al. (2011) have offered that in order for feedback to have an impact it must take into consideration the dimensions of teaching on a developmental spectrum, which can spark reflection on specific areas of strength and growth. This is consistent with Hattie and Timperley's (2007) belief that "feedback is a consequence of performance" (p. 81). Therefore feedback must be offered with deliberate intent.

The findings of this study also lead to the conclusion that feedback must address the specific elements of the lesson observed, it must be given immediately following the teaching, and it must occur with relative frequency. Downey et al. (2004) advocated for reflection in and on practice because it allows teachers to re-live the teaching experience, to re-think those elements of the

lesson that could be expanded, and to validate their use of good teaching skills and tools. In addition, Coulter and Grossen (1997) asserted that feedback that addresses specific behaviors leads to long-term change. However, Lieberman and Miller (2001) also advocated for the process to be ongoing.

**Teachers' expectations of the principal's role.** The teachers in this study expressed a distinct need for opportunities to interface with other teachers and to find ways to learn from each other: an opportunity that seldom presents itself. However, research indicates that when teachers participate in a community as learners, both teachers and community benefit (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Principals who allow teachers to collaborate and to observe each other's teaching foster an environment of trust and open avenues for reflection and inquiry (Drago-Severson, 2004). So not only do teachers want the principal to observe lessons and give feedback, but they also expect him/her to promote other opportunities for growth.

Classroom observations and subsequent feedback are not enough to promote teacher growth. The principal must facilitate access to professional development, innovative teaching techniques, workshops, professional readings, and even technology. Principals who offer flexible growth opportunities that include the possibility of making choices reduce the barriers to professional growth that often prevent teachers from advancing their practice (Duke, 1993).

The findings of this study could be utilized by the sites in the sample and other schools as the impetus for planning professional development that directly aligns with teachers' skills and instructional needs. More collaboration and peer

tutoring were two concepts that appeared repeatedly in this study, pointing to the need to allow teachers to share what they know in a non-threatening setting. One way to accomplish this is to ensure that teachers have access to authentic learning opportunities.

Finally, this study may also serve as reminder to teaching institutions that educators cannot operate in a vacuum. All stakeholders -- including parents and students -- must be active participants in the educational process. Administrators must provide teachers with the knowledge and the tools they need to own the strategies and skills necessary for success, and teachers must be expected to do the same for their students, with the support of their parents.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

**Policy recommendations.** Traditional educational reform is a top-down process, mandating laws and policies. The ultimate goal of educational policy is to establish norms of practice that lead to improved student learning. The policy decisions that strongly influence the way schools operate must take into consideration key players that they impact: teachers and students. The recommendations given in this study are consistent with and support current educational reform thinking, such as the standards and accountability movement, including the upcoming widespread implementation of the Common Core Standards. Teachers will play a significant role in executing these reforms.

The exciting task of implementing new standards, which will also require new ways of thinking and teaching, can also become the daunting job of determining how to teach. A recommendation for policy makers and other

decision holders is to empower teachers to become policymakers, engaging them in a process whereby they identify the teaching practices that will best serve students' needs. Providing them with standards for teaching is not enough. A focus on ensuring that teachers collaborate, observe other teachers, and engage in meaningful discourse on best practices should be the focus of educational policy at the state as well as at the local and school levels. This could require the leveraging of state, local, and school-level funds in support of this endeavor. The schools represented in this sample and others like it may have more flexibility than public institutions to implement new models of teacher collaboration, peer mentoring, reflection and evaluation.

With regard to the need for administrators to be versed in the language of teaching, Fink and Markholt (2011) advocate that administrators should strive to become knowledgeable of what sound instruction looks like. These researchers have encountered many administrators who are versed in the language of teaching, and many who are not. Their *Dimensions of Teaching and Learning* – (a) *purpose*, (b) *student engagement*, (c) *curriculum and pedagogy*, (d) *student assessment*, and (e) *classroom management and culture* – should be incorporated into administrator trainings to ensure that school administrators at all levels know and understand the elements of effective, good teaching, and how to evaluate it. This effort is needed at the federal, state, and school level, private and public.

**Practitioner recommendations.** Establishing a culture of trust is an initial step towards creating a culture of collaboration and mutual respect among

teachers. K-12 schools have traditionally isolated teachers in their learning and growth (Marzano et al., 2011). Therefore, it behooves school administrators to empower teachers to plan lessons, observe each other's teaching, engage in post-observation conversations, and proceed with changes in their practice per peer recommendations. Some of the participants in this study indicated that they were eager to become more inter-disciplinary, observing others and learning new ideas in the process. Administrators must create the conditions for teachers to learn in authentic, collaborative settings, while still participating in the process as observers and learners. They must continue to offer immediate, specific feedback to teachers, contributing to the work in which they engage with their peers. In order to do this, principals must be willing to visit classrooms on a daily basis, placing a priority on supervision of instruction, providing guidance and leadership, and offering feedback leading to better teaching, which in turn produces greater student learning.

The findings of this study may benefit schools and or school districts in their quest to develop policy on teacher supervision that directly improves the teaching practice. This effort has begun in districts and schools that are utilizing Charlotte Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching or a similar tool that considers teaching along a developmental continuum. A tool of this kind will provide the educational field with a concrete way to gauge teachers' level of knowledge and expertise. It will also prompt teachers to reflect on the elements of teaching in which they are successful, and those upon which they would like to improve. Therefore, while conducting observations, principals must consider

using a form that will guide their efforts. It is hoped that the opinions of the teachers in this study can promote reflection on the part of principals and other officials that are responsible for effecting changes in the evaluation process.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Although previous research has focused on the dimensions of instructional leadership and how teachers benefit from it, this study only sought to focus on one aspect of instructional leadership: feedback. It revealed that the teachers in this sample perceive that feedback has the potential to change their practice when it is immediate, explicit, and recurrent. This area of study lends itself to many dimensions and elements for further exploration.

One recommendation to expand this study is to replicate it making a distinct comparison between newer and veteran teachers to discern the differences or similarities in the experiences that shape their current perceptions about how the feedback they receive from their principals helps them improve their teaching.

This study only focused on teachers and did not consider the perspective of the principal. However, future studies could involve both in the following ways:

- Rather than focusing only on post-observation feedback, future studies could conduct observations of teachers and principals engaging in pre- and post-observation conversations to craft a story based on firsthand observations and anecdotal records.



- Interview individual principals and teachers to capture how they perceive useful feedback, triangulating the data to find agreement (or lack thereof).
- A future researcher may also conduct focus groups with teachers and principals, exploring the benefits of principal feedback to their practice, stressing the role it plays in improvement efforts. Morgan (1988) asserts that focus groups are best used when the researcher believes that the group will be cooperative and that the interview would be better conducted in a group setting than individually.

The professional development of school leaders entails ensuring that principals are highly qualified in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and student and adult learning (Southworth, 2002). Another possible future study could interview principals to ascertain their level of knowledge and understanding of the dimensions of teaching and learning. These recommendations for future study involve qualitative approaches, as they imply that understanding the lived experiences of the participants are the most effective way to capture the essence of their daily practice.

### **Summary of the Literature**

**Instructional leadership.** The theoretical framework offered a foundation for this research study, deepening the understanding of the behaviors that effective instructional leaders display. Blase and Blase's (2002) study offered a wealth of information on these behaviors and expounded on their effects on the developmental journey of both principals and teachers. This model also stressed

the importance of principals' commitment to collaboration with teachers in an integrated leadership as a way to promote excellent teaching and learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). Southworth's (2002) study of successful instructional leadership interviewed 10 principals, revealing that the principals were hard workers, staff appreciated their efforts, they had a positive outlook toward their schools' success, and they had created a culture of learning at their sites. Thus, instructional leadership as the theoretical framework gave this study the footing needed to engage in the exploration of principal feedback and its effects on teacher professional growth.

**Principal feedback.** This study explored feedback from the perspective of teachers. The literature cited included an exploration of: the dimensions of teaching and learning, the benefits of feedback, giving effective feedback, and levels of performance.

The study of feedback began with a look at the historical role of the principal, which has evolved from supervisor, to curriculum developer, and finally to a diagnostician of teaching and learning (Brown, 2005). The famous 1983 publication, *A Nation at Risk* (as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2008), pointed out a national deficit in teacher knowledge related to content and skills. This publication, coupled with the standards and accountability movement, may have motivated principals to shift their focus to instruction.

The literature as well as the study findings consistently support that principal feedback is an effective strategy that sparks teacher reflection on practice (Downey et al., 2004). Scheeler et al. (2004) add that feedback can

increase positive teacher behaviors and decrease negative ones. Feedback can take on many forms, but when offered regularly, the benefits are greater (Duke & Stiggins, 1986). However, Fink and Markholt (2011) offered that principals cannot offer feedback unless they have an understanding of the dimensions of teaching and learning: purpose, student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment of learning, and classroom management and culture. Proficiency with these dimensions, they add, represents the difference between an expert and a novice observer.

**Teacher professional growth.** This study explored teacher professional growth as a function of the following concepts: professional development and teacher growth, theories of teacher change, and barriers to professional growth. The historical literature cited indicates that, early on, teacher learning focused on developing specific teaching skills (Guskey, 1986). However, subsequent studies showed that teacher growth as an ongoing learning process became the norm (Ball & Cohen, 1999). More recently, Weems and Rogers (2010) cite NCLB's requirement for hiring highly effective teachers as the possible reason that teachers are entering the profession better equipped to teach.

Relative to their ongoing learning, Guskey (2002) indicated that teachers who participate in the crafting of their learning opportunities tend to align the efforts to their needs. These authors add that these efforts must indeed be teacher-centered, rather than professional developer-centered. Additionally, Drago-Severson (2004) highlighted the importance of teachers working together as leaders, participating in collegial inquiry and mentoring each other. Putnam

and Borko (2000) offered a similar idea when they indicated that teaching and learning should be grounded in experience.

However, Duke (1993) offered that efforts toward professional growth can be thwarted by organizational and personal barriers. He listed teacher evaluation and annual goal setting as examples of activities built into many school systems that may stunt teacher growth due to the monotonous nature of completing paperwork. He also identified personal barriers such as distrust, stress, lack of motivation, and poor time management as possible reasons why teachers do not develop their practice.

### **Final Reflections**

A call for more qualified teachers is also a call for efforts geared toward and a commitment to improving teacher practice. However, efforts that encourage collaboration among teachers and seek to include their input in evaluative processes seem to be downplayed, even if they guarantee a greater buy-in on the part of teachers that leads to improvement in teaching. This may be due to the fact that traditional schema models in the educational arena are hard to undo. However, Blase and Blase (2000) found that principals and teachers who collaborate on instructional matters engaging in inquiry, reflection, exploration, and experimentation generate more flexible teaching.

This study provided the researcher with the distinct opportunity to engage in conversations with teachers who gave insights into a question that has long occupied the researcher's mind: how does principal feedback change your practice? The interview findings were consistent with much of the extant

literature; they revealed that teachers need more feedback, they see the value in it, and they also seek opportunities to collaborate with peers as a way to improve teaching.

However, the full story has not yet been told. One of the delimitations of this study was evident in the fact that the researcher only conducted interviews. A deeper study would have also included observations and anecdotal records to capture firsthand teacher experiences with principals and even with students. These endeavors would prove fruitful for another researcher to tackle in the future.

This study did not intend to dismiss the principal's role by not including him/her in it. It merely sought to explore teachers' perceptions to determine how they view the role of post-observation feedback in their growth. As one considers the role of a principal in advancing the work of teachers, one must consider that among the many tasks a principal must perform, he/she must be able to multi-task, communicate, provide a vision, and nurture. The theoretical framework utilized in this study, instructional leadership, describes instructional leaders' priorities as mission, goals, curriculum and instruction, and the nurturing of a community of learning (Hallinger, 2003).

If indeed the teacher of today and tomorrow is entering the profession better prepared, then an instructional leader has the responsibility to engage in a collaborative experience that will continue to provide opportunities for learning and growth. Teachers want to be empowered, and they want to be allowed to lead the efforts in their own learning. Instructional leaders have the tools to

make this happen, and in so doing, they can promote stronger teaching and learning communities and establish cultures of mutual trust and respect.

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## APPENDIX A

## Permission to Conduct Study

Email from Archdiocese of Los Angeles, received March 20, 2013, 1:09 pm

**Dalys,**

**As long as the Archdiocesan policy is followed, you may begin your study.**

**Jim McClune**

**Archdiocese of Los Angeles**

## APPENDIX B

## Interview Questions

Project Title: *Principals' Post-Observation Feedback and its Influence on Teacher Professional Growth at Two Southern California Catholic Schools.*

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Interviewer: Dalys Stewart

Interviewee #:

Position of Interviewee: Teacher

## Part I-Background Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade levels or subjects have you taught?
3. What specific degrees/credentials do you hold?

## Part II-Core Questions

4. In what ways would you like to improve your practice?
5. How often does your principal observe your teaching?
6. How does the design of your department's/Danielson's observation tool inform your practice?
7. While addressing the dimensions of your department's/Danielson's tool, how does your principal address specific strengths or weaknesses in your instructional practice?

8. What role do you perceive your principal has played in your professional growth?
  
9. What are some changes you have made in your teaching as a result of the feedback you have received from your principal?
  
10. What suggestions might you have for your principal regarding the type of feedback you would like to receive that might have a direct impact on your practice?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses will be utilized solely for the purposes of this study, and will remain confidential. (Adapted from Creswell, 2007, p. 136).

## APPENDIX C

Catholic High School A

## Social Science Department Observation Tool

**Teacher Name:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluator Names:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>1. Lesson Planning</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks Big Questions based upon themes</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety of activities for differentiated learning</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well organized with clear transitions</li> </ul>				
<b>2. Student Engagement</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are engaged with questions or taking notes</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities incorporate technology and media for student engagement</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher demonstrates clear leadership and expectations with students</li> </ul>				
<b>3. Assessment</b>				



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson has a clear evaluation for student knowledge and understanding</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson has a method for evaluating different levels of learning</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson evaluates higher level thinking skills</li> </ul>		
<b>4. Communication of Knowledge</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher shows understanding of subject matter</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher shows openness to student questions and criticisms</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher demonstrates acceptance of different learning styles and student personalities</li> </ul>		
<b>5. Classroom Environment</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher displays examples of student work</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher maintains a classroom environment that inspires learning subject matter</li> </ul>		
<b>Commendations for Class Activities</b>		
<b>Suggestions for Future Development</b>		

## APPENDIX D

Catholic High School A

## Fine and Performing Arts Department Observation Tool

High School  
 Teacher Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Subject \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Observer \_\_\_\_\_

1-5 scale: 1-2 Low 3-4 Medium 5 High

**RIGOR AND RELEVANCE**

The teacher

**1.1** Engages students in critical thinking by expecting them to question assumptions, make references and look for supporting evidence for their judgments.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**1.2** Structures lesson to encourage problem-solving.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**1.3** Incorporates project-based learning into lesson.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**1.4** Exhibits high expectations for student learning.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**1.5** Supports students' understanding of curricular material through careful questioning and re-teaching as necessary.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**1.6** Encourages students to reflect on learning.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**1.7** Effectively addresses varying grade-levels in the classroom through differentiation of instruction.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O  
Evidence/Step Next

### **CONNECTIONS**

The teacher

**2.1** Provides opportunities for students to incorporate prior knowledge.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**2.2** Guides students to make connections between subject matter and content in other subject areas.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

The teacher

**2.3** Makes connections between the subject being taught and social justice issues.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**2.4** Makes connections between lesson and possible future arts/music/drama careers.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

### **UNDERSTANDING**

The teacher

**3.1** Uses a variety of teaching methodologies to differentiate instruction for a variety of student learning styles.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**3.2** Creates a non-intimidating environment where students are free to ask questions.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**3.4** Uses a variety of means to engage students in the lesson (media, audio-visual, classroom display, realia)

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

The teacher

**3.5** Checks for understanding throughout the lesson.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**3.4** Uses formative assessments to check for learning.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**3.5** Presents and clarifies key vocabulary, terms and concepts as needed.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

### **INTERACTIONS**

**4.1** Uses collaborative learning methods to promote active participation in the lesson.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**4.2** Makes necessary accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**4.3** Exhibits respect for students.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/ Next Steps

### **CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

The teacher

**5.1** Displays evidence of student work in classroom.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**5.2** Supports students in process-learning.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

**5.3** Guides students in constructive critiques of student artwork and/or performances.

1-2-3-4-5 N/O

Evidence/Next Steps

### **FOLLOW-UP**

The teacher

**6.1** Collaborates together with observer to discuss and develop new strategies and innovations suggested by the teacher.

Description of process:

## APPENDIX E

## Catholic High School A

## English Department Observation Tool

Date:

Class/Period:

Number of Students:

Duration of visit:

Observer:

When an observer comments on a specific domain, he/ she should specifically state areas where critical growth is needed, using such language as "immediate attention is needed in the following area." Observers should have specific evidence of these areas of growth. When a teacher provides an outstanding performance in any one domain, observer should use specific evidence and language that pronounce the instructor's level of competence as "superb." Observer may use the following key if no specific evidence is recorded: Needs Improvement (NI), Competent (C), Outstanding (O), and Not Observable (N/O)

Domain I: Instructor is sensitive to a variety of learning styles, i.e., provides opportunities for visual, audio and kinesthetic learners  NI C O N/O
Domain II: Critical thinking is found in problem solving tasks, i.e., close readings of text, vocabulary acquisition, editorial analysis, or composition tasks.  NI C O N/O
Domain III: Study skills are effectively reinforced through note-taking and attention to class lecture.  NI C O N/O
Domain IV: Class discussions reflect a Socratic method that compels students to go beyond surface level observations in composition, grammar, vocabulary, and literature.  NI C O N/O
Domain V: Teacher maintains effective class management, i.e., students are engaged, attentive, and on-task.  NI C O N/O
Domain VI: Teacher works from an organized, thoughtful lesson that uses time appropriately. (needs improvement, competent, outstanding)  NI C O N/O

Evidence (specify for which domain):

Suggestions (specify for which domain):

## APPENDIX F

## Catholic High School B

## Excerpt of Charlotte Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching

<b>DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTION</b>				
<b>Component 3a: Communicating with Students</b>				
<small>Elements: Expectations for learning • Directions and procedures • Explanations of content • Use of oral and written language</small>				
ELEMENT	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE			
	UNSATISFACTORY	BASIC	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
<b>Expectations for learning</b>	Teacher's purpose in a lesson or unit is unclear to students.	Teacher attempts to explain the instructional purpose, with limited success.	Teacher's purpose for the lesson or unit is clear, including where it is situated within broader learning.	Teacher makes the purpose of the lesson or unit clear, including where it is situated within broader learning, linking that purpose to student interests.
<b>Directions and procedures</b>	Teacher's directions and procedures are confusing to students.	Teacher's directions and procedures are clarified after initial student confusion.	Teacher's directions and procedures are clear to students.	Teacher's directions and procedures are clear to students and anticipate possible student misunderstanding.
<b>Explanations of content</b>	Teacher's explanation of the content is unclear or confusing or uses inappropriate language.	Teacher's explanation of the content is uneven; some is done skillfully, but other portions are difficult to follow.	Teacher's explanation of content is appropriate and connects with students' knowledge and experience.	Teacher's explanation of content is imaginative and connects with students' knowledge and experience. Students contribute to explaining concepts to their peers.
<b>Use of oral and written language</b>	Teacher's spoken language is inaudible, or written language is illegible. Spoken or written language contains errors of grammar or syntax. Vocabulary may be inappropriate, vague, or used incorrectly, leaving students confused.	Teacher's spoken language is audible, and written language is legible. Both are used correctly and conform to standard English. Vocabulary is correct but limited or is not appropriate to the students' ages or backgrounds.	Teacher's spoken and written language is clear and correct and conforms to standard English. Vocabulary is appropriate to the students' ages and interests.	Teacher's spoken and written language is correct and conforms to standard English. It is also expressive, with well-chosen vocabulary that enriches the lesson. Teacher finds opportunities to extend students' vocabularies.

<b>DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTION</b> <b>Component 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</b> Elements: Quality of questions • Discussion techniques • Student participation				
ELEMENT	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE			
	UNSATISFACTORY	BASIC	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
<b>Quality of questions</b>	Teacher's questions are virtually all of poor quality, with low cognitive challenge and single correct responses, and they are asked in rapid succession.	Teacher's questions are a combination of low and high quality, posed in rapid succession. Only some invite a thoughtful response.	Most of the teacher's questions are of high quality. Adequate time is provided for students to respond.	Teacher's questions are of uniformly high quality, with adequate time for students to respond. Students formulate many questions.
<b>Discussion techniques</b>	Interaction between teacher and students is predominantly recitation style, with the teacher mediating all questions and answers.	Teacher makes some attempt to engage students in genuine discussion rather than recitation, with uneven results.	Teacher creates a genuine discussion among students, stepping aside when appropriate.	Students assume considerable responsibility for the success of the discussion, initiating topics and making unsolicited contributions.
<b>Student participation</b>	A few students dominate the discussion.	Teacher attempts to engage all students in the discussion, but with only limited success.	Teacher successfully engages all students in the discussion.	Students themselves ensure that all voices are heard in the discussion.

<b>DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTION</b> <b>Component 3c: Engaging Students in Learning</b> Elements: Activities and assignments • Grouping of students • Instructional materials and resources • Structure and pacing				
ELEMENT	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE			
	UNSATISFACTORY	BASIC	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
<b>Activities and assignments</b>	Activities and assignments are inappropriate for students' age or background. Students are not mentally engaged in them.	Activities and assignments are appropriate to some students and engage them mentally, but others are not engaged.	Most activities and assignments are appropriate to students, and almost all students are cognitively engaged in exploring content.	All students are cognitively engaged in the activities and assignments in their exploration of content. Students initiate or adapt activities and projects to enhance their understanding.
<b>Grouping of students</b>	Instructional groups are inappropriate to the students or to the instructional outcomes.	Instructional groups are only partially appropriate to the students or only moderately successful in advancing the instructional outcomes of the lesson.	Instructional groups are productive and fully appropriate to the students or to the instructional purposes of the lesson.	Instructional groups are productive and fully appropriate to the students or to the instructional purposes of the lesson. Students take the initiative to influence the formation or adjustment of instructional groups.
<b>Instructional materials and resources</b>	Instructional materials and resources are unsuitable to the instructional purposes or do not engage students mentally.	Instructional materials and resources are only partially suitable to the instructional purposes, or students are only partially mentally engaged with them.	Instructional materials and resources are suitable to the instructional purposes and engage students mentally.	Instructional materials and resources are suitable to the instructional purposes and engage students mentally. Students initiate the choice, adaptation, or creation of materials to enhance their learning.
<b>Structure and pacing</b>	The lesson has no clearly defined structure, or the pace of the lesson is too slow or rushed, or both.	The lesson has a recognizable structure, although it is not uniformly maintained throughout the lesson. Pacing of the lesson is inconsistent.	The lesson has a clearly defined structure around which the activities are organized. Pacing of the lesson is generally appropriate.	The lesson's structure is highly coherent, allowing for reflection and closure. Pacing of the lesson is appropriate for all students.

<b>DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTION</b>				
<b>Component 3d: Using Assessment in Instruction</b>				
<small>Elements: Assessment criteria • Monitoring of student learning • Feedback to students • Student self-assessment and monitoring of progress</small>				
ELEMENT	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE			
	UNSATISFACTORY	BASIC	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
<b>Assessment criteria</b>	Students are not aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated.	Students know some of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated.	Students are fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated.	Students are fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated and have contributed to the development of the criteria.
<b>Monitoring of student learning</b>	Teacher does not monitor student learning in the curriculum.	Teacher monitors the progress of the class as a whole but elicits no diagnostic information.	Teacher monitors the progress of groups of students in the curriculum, making limited use of diagnostic prompts to elicit information.	Teacher actively and systematically elicits diagnostic information from individual students regarding their understanding and monitors the progress of individual students.
<b>Feedback to students</b>	Teacher's feedback to students is of poor quality and not provided in a timely manner.	Teacher's feedback to students is uneven, and its timeliness is inconsistent.	Teacher's feedback to students is timely and of consistently high quality.	Teacher's feedback to students is timely and of consistently high quality, and students make use of the feedback in their learning.
<b>Student self-assessment and monitoring of progress</b>	Students do not engage in self-assessment or monitoring of progress.	Students occasionally assess the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards.	Students frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards.	Students not only frequently assess and monitor the quality of their own work against the assessment criteria and performance standards but also make active use of that information in their learning.

<b>DOMAIN 3: INSTRUCTION</b>				
<b>Component 3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness</b>				
<small>Elements: Lesson adjustment • Response to students • Persistence</small>				
ELEMENT	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE			
	UNSATISFACTORY	BASIC	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
<b>Lesson adjustment</b>	Teacher adheres rigidly to an instructional plan, even when a change is clearly needed.	Teacher attempts to adjust a lesson when needed, with only partially successful results.	Teacher makes a minor adjustment to a lesson, and the adjustment occurs smoothly.	Teacher successfully makes a major adjustment to a lesson when needed.
<b>Response to students</b>	Teacher ignores or brushes aside students' questions or interests.	Teacher attempts to accommodate students' questions or interests, although the pacing of the lesson is disrupted.	Teacher successfully accommodates students' questions or interests.	Teacher seizes a major opportunity to enhance learning, building on student interests or a spontaneous event.
<b>Persistence</b>	When a student has difficulty learning, the teacher either gives up or blames the student or the student's home environment.	Teacher accepts responsibility for the success of all students but has only a limited repertoire of instructional strategies to draw on.	Teacher persists in seeking approaches for students who have difficulty learning, drawing on a broad repertoire of strategies.	Teacher persists in seeking effective approaches for students who need help, using an extensive repertoire of strategies and soliciting additional resources from the school.

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## APPENDIX G

## Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: Dalys A. Stewart

Project Title: *Principals' Post-Observation Feedback and its Influence on Teacher Professional Growth at Two Southern California Catholic High Schools.*

Participation in this research project is strictly voluntary. This Informed Consent provides you with an explanation of the terms of participation, and information regarding your rights as a participant in this project. You will be awarded a \$10.00 Starbucks gift certificate for agreeing to participate. Please read the description of the study carefully before agreeing to participate.

1. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of teachers with regard to principal practices that have most influenced their professional growth. Given the sense of urgency for ensuring that teachers are delivering effective instruction and that their principals are giving them the tools with which to do it, this study is relevant. Meaning will be ascribed from the experiences of teachers working with their principals after observations of lessons.
2. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have agreed to voluntarily participate in the study conducted by Dalys A. Stewart, under the guidance of Dr. Robert Barner. I understand this study is required as partial fulfillment of a dissertation.
3. I will be participating in an interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I will be interviewed at my school or at another agreed-upon location, after hours, not during the workday.
4. I understand that the interview will be recorded on a digital tape recorder. The researcher will keep records of interviews in a locked file cabinet at home, and only the researcher will have access to them. Electronic copies of the transcripts will be kept in the researcher's password-protected computer and **securely** deleted after 5 years. All hard copies of interview transcripts and informed consents will be shredded.
5. I understand that in order to ensure the confidentiality of my responses, I will be designated a number, rather than utilizing my name. Only the researcher will have knowledge of the number assigned to my responses. I will have no access to other participants' responses, and the data will be treated with confidentiality. I may request copies of the interview transcripts and/or a summary of the findings of this study by contacting the researcher via phone, email, or U.S. mail.
6. I understand that I do not have to answer every interview question, and that I may choose to discontinue participation at any point in the process. If I choose to discontinue participation, I will still retain the \$10.00 Starbucks gift certificate.

7. I understand that the findings of this research study may benefit administrators' trainings, school districts seeking to enhance teacher development programs, and principals in pursuit of ways to engage their teachers in learning. Findings may also add to the existing body of knowledge about how principals' actions support teachers in modifying their practice. This work could give guidance to school leaders and teachers in designing a system for school improvement that focuses on classroom practice and is grounded on educational research. It also highlights the importance of principals leading improvement efforts by promoting reflection in practice.

8. I acknowledge that there are potential minimal risks associated with participating in this study, including an emotional, psychological, or behavioral response to a question that might evoke the memory of a specific experience.

9. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this study.

10. I understand that the researcher will be forthright with any and all information pertaining to this study. I understand that if I have further questions regarding this study I may contact Dr. Robert Barner at XXXXXXXXXX. Furthermore, I understand that I may obtain additional information regarding my rights as a participant by contacting Dr. Doug Leigh, Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board Chairperson, at XXXXXXXXXX.

11. I fully understand the information pertaining to this research study. The researcher has answered all my questions and I have received a copy of this Informed Consent form. I consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Researcher Signature	Print Name	Date
Witness	Print Name	Date

## APPENDIX H

## Invitation to Participate in Research Study

To: Teachers  
 From: Dalys A. Stewart, Doctoral Student  
 Subject: Interviews for Doctoral Dissertation Research

Dear Teacher:

As partial requirement of the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program at Pepperdine University, I am conducting a study under the supervision of Dr. Robert R. Barner, my dissertation chairperson.

I would like to invite you to be a part of this study by participating in an interview, which will last no longer than 60 minutes and will be conducted at a location and time convenient to you.

The purpose of this study is to examine the practices principals engage in during classroom post-observation feedback, and their effect on teacher professional growth. Five teachers at each of two Southern California Catholic high schools will be interviewed to capture their perceptions of the effect that principal feedback has had on their professional growth. Capturing the perceptions of teachers about the way their instructional practice is impacted by the actions of their principals may add to the existing body of knowledge in the field of education as it relates to the way principals promote the use of effective practices at their schools.

For participation in this study I will award you a \$10 Starbucks gift card. You may discontinue participation at anytime, and still keep the gift card. If you have further questions about my study, I can be contacted at XXXXXXXXXX or via email at XXXXXXXXXX, or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Robert R. Barner, at XXXXXXXXXX or via email at XXXXXXXXXX.

Sincerely,

Dalys A. Stewart

Please sign, tear off, and return in the envelope provided.

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I am interested in participating in this study.

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_