4-2016

The Experience of Teachers and Deans in an Intensive Weekly Observation/Feedback Model

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THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS AND DEANS IN AN INTENSIVE WEEKLY OBSERVATION/FEEDBACK MODEL

by

Kathleen A. Grinwis

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Western Michigan University
April 2016

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This phenomenological study looked at the lived experiences of 12 teachers and deans participating in an intensive weekly observation/feedback model in several charter school academies. In this model, teachers and deans work to grow as educators and to reach their professional development goals. While we know that a major factor in increasing the proficiency rate of our students is improving teacher effectiveness, not as much is known about how to provide the necessary guidance for teachers’ professional growth and efficacy development. The challenge for leaders is to develop effective systems of supervision that support teachers and administrators as they work to improve instructional quality in schools. Using the constructs of teacher and leadership efficacy, this study examined the impact of weekly observation and feedback sessions on both teacher and leader development. Qualitative data collected through three in-depth interviews with each participant was analyzed to determine reoccurring categories and themes. Profiles of each participant give information about their lived experiences.

Data analysis revealed 14 themes within four categories: growth, the structure and effectiveness of the model, teacher/dean relationships, and feedback issues. Findings revealed that most teachers acknowledge that working with their dean has
resulted in changes in their teaching practices, yet most see their growth more as a result of their own efforts and connections with co-workers. Additionally, teachers and deans reported that a consistent implementation of this model along with a relationship founded on trust and authentic, genuine connections is critical. For teachers in this study, meaningful feedback impacts their practices, yet most claimed they have received minimal meaningful feedback. Many participants shared that they see the model as one where they are checking things off of a list rather than improving instructional practices. Deans reported that focusing on reflective rather than directive feedback resulted in greater impact in their work with teachers.

Findings led to recommendations for further research and future practices. Current changes to this model are also discussed. This study contributes to research on teacher/leader efficacy, supervision, and feedback, as school systems strive to improve teacher and leader effectiveness.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been blessed with support and encouragement from many, many people throughout the process of completing this study. Throughout the countless days, weeks, months, and years they never failed to believe in me and to remind me that I could indeed complete this process.

To my committee, Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer, Dr. Patricia Reeves, and Dr. Gloria McDaniel-Hall, words cannot express how much I have valued your guidance, input, and expertise. Dr. Palmer, it goes without saying that your determination that I could in fact complete this study has kept me buoyed up for years and years. Thank you for not letting me quit on my dream. Dr. Reeves, from the very first class I attended as a doctoral student with you as my professor, you have sparked a love for qualitative research and for diving deeply into the lives of those we study so that we can better understand the common threads and the unique qualities that make us human. You have challenged me with your thinking and your questioning and have inspired me to continue seeking to understand through research. Dr. McDaniel-Hall, your passion and dedication to this challenging world of urban education has touched me deeply and taught me mightily. You exemplify leadership in everything you do. Through your words and examples, you continue to fuel me to stay on my quest to become the best educator I can be.

To my family and friends, thank you for listening to me talk about this research for so long and for patiently asking me if I was ever going to be done. My
Acknowledgements – continued

three incredibly talented daughters, Amy, Andrea, and Zoe, have sacrificed a great deal over the years so that I could remain a student working toward this goal. This work is dedicated to them. Thank you for your support and continued love.

To the deans and teachers who participated in my study, thank you for letting me into your lives. I will always value your openness, honesty, and willingness to share your experiences with me.

Finally, to my husband Tim for your never-ending love, patience, and support. Your ability to believe in me continues to amaze me.

Kathleen A. Grinwis
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.”

(Mahatma Gandhi)

At a time when educational reform is a hot topic at the federal, state, district and local levels, there looms a question that remains unanswered: “What is the most effective way to close the achievement gap in K-12 education?” As educators grapple with ever-dwindling financial resources and increasing demands for accountability, researchers, policy makers, and educational leaders have focused their attention on a number of factors believed to be a potential answer to this question.

Despite the best efforts of policy makers and educators, there remains a considerable achievement gap in our nation’s schools. Administrators and school leaders are currently under increasing pressure to close the achievement gap in order to avoid sanctions including, but not limited to, school closures and loss of funding, and to answer increasing measures of accountability from stakeholders. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, U.S.C. § 6319 (2008), and the competition brought about by the Race to the Top (RTTT) policy by the U.S. Department of Education has further fueled the need to determine factors that will most effectively increase student achievement in K-12 education. Through a competitive grant program of $4.35 billion for states, the RTTT has challenged educational reformers to develop plans to improve student achievement levels and to close the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).
As a result, significant educational reforms are now focused on improving the quality of our nations’ teachers by improving the systems currently in place for developing and evaluating the effectiveness of K-12 classroom teachers. One of the six requirements for the RTTT grant applications focuses on Great Teachers and Leaders, and requires the use of evaluation systems for principals and teachers that “differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth…as a significant factor” (p. 34). While NCLB focuses on teacher qualifications, the RTTT focuses on teacher effectiveness as measured by student achievement, linking teacher evaluations and effectiveness (Mangiante, 2010).

Of all the frequently touted educational reform initiatives, it appears that increasing teacher quality and effectiveness, and the resulting need to change long held beliefs and systems of teacher observation and evaluation is perhaps the most critical reform to date (Borman & Kimball, 2005; Danielson, 1996; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Milanowski, 2004). Much of the research points to the impact that an effective teacher or teachers can have on the overall educational success over the lifetime of a student, as well as the detrimental impact that may be present if a child has several ineffective teachers in a row (McLaughlin, 1984; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Strong, 2006; Strong, Ward, & Grant, 2011). Meta analysis research conducted by Marzano (2003) and Hattie (2009) concludes that of all the factors impacting student achievement, the quality of instruction that students receive from a classroom teacher is the most important variable to determining student academic success.

Measures such as student socio-economic background, class size and make up, along with other variables have been the subject of much research in an attempt to determine how to level the playing field for the educational success of this nation’s
children. For example, research reveals that black and Latino students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch are, on average, two to three years academically behind white students of their same age (McKinsey & Company, 2009). In an attempt to halt the decline of student achievement levels when compared to other countries around the world, a growing body of research has suggested that a major factor in increasing the proficiency rate of our students is a focus on teacher quality and teacher effectiveness (Marshall, 2009; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). The Marzano, et al., (2011) research suggested that for students in schools with a low-socioeconomic status, three years of consecutive strong teaching closes the achievement gap.

So then, how do we measure a teacher’s effectiveness and more importantly, how do we provide the necessary guidance and support for teachers’ continued professional growth and developing self-efficacy? Traditional systems of supervising teachers through observation, feedback, and evaluation remain largely unchanged and have done little to enhance student achievement. A 2006 report by the Teaching Commission stated that “Teacher evaluation and on-the-job training are arcane and largely ineffective; novice teachers are usually left to sink or swim, and far too many sink. Close to 50 percent of new teachers leave within five years, with attrition rates highest in schools serving low-income students” (p. 16). Sadly, the majority of teachers in our current system claim that the current evaluation process in their schools is merely a formality and does little to help them (Duffett, Farkas, Rotherham, & Silva, 2008).

Expecting that more effective teachers should result in more proficient students seems obvious. The challenge for educational leaders today is to develop
more effective and sustainable systems of supervision that adequately support both teachers and administrators as they work together to improve the level of instructional quality in our nation’s schools. Several studies and policy initiatives have focused on developing comprehensive, researched based observation and evaluation protocols that will promote teacher quality and teacher effectiveness. These standards-based teacher evaluation reforms attempt to define and represent a common conception of effective instruction (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

In order to further ensure teacher success and increased levels of student achievement, many school systems have begun the practice of using instructional coaches, lead teachers, or deans, in addition to principals in order to observe teachers on a more frequent basis. Practices such as coaching and delivering positive (affirming) and negative (adjusting) feedback require considerable training of administrators and coaches as well as a solid understanding of the professional development needs of teachers over the life time of a teaching career (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999; Ebmeier, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2010). These coaches or administrators provide necessary coaching, training, and resources in order to guide teachers toward the use of effective, research based instructional practices. In order to maximize the amount of support and coaching available to foster the professional growth for teachers, and to make a greater impact on student achievement, in a few schools, systems are now in place where instructional coaches or administrators observe in classrooms and meet weekly with every teacher to give affirming and adjusting feedback (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

What is not well understood is the link between teacher efficacy, defined as a teachers’ belief that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may
be difficult or unmotivated, and that their actions will have a positive impact on student achievement (Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Ross, 1994) and leadership efficacy, a leaders’ belief that he or she can effectively set a direction and build relationships with a team, in order to gain a commitment to change and achieving goals (Paglis & Green, 2002). It is also not clear how teachers with various degrees of efficacy experience or make meaning of increased observations and feedback from their supervisors. Finally, there is not a good understanding of how new supervisors make sense of the process of observing and delivering feedback to teachers with a wide range of teaching experiences.

**Statement of the Problem**

A great deal of research has been conducted over the past several decades on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 1986) and teacher efficacy (Gibson, & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1987; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Such research has led to a greater understanding of the self-efficacy and teacher efficacy constructs, and the power that personal beliefs about one’s competencies and confidence can have on a teacher’s success with his or her students in the classroom.

While we have a research base that suggests that highly effective teachers can produce measurable achievement gains in their classrooms, we do not know whether or not more frequent (weekly) observations of teachers and ongoing affirming and adjusting feedback from administrators will actually result in changes to a teacher’s sense of efficacy. It is not clear how, or if, classroom teachers learn from more frequently conducted observations and weekly feedback sessions and if, or how, these sessions change teachers’ daily practices and interactions with their students.
Considerably less research has been conducted on the construct of principal or leader efficacy, especially in the development of new leaders. Paglis and Green (2002), explained leader efficacy as a leader’s beliefs in their perceived capabilities to organize the positive psychological capabilities, motivation, means, collective resources, and courses of action required to attain effective, sustainable performance across the varied leadership roles, demands, and contexts. Understanding principal or leader efficacy is important in such areas as leadership, innovation, decision-making, communication, and motivation. Having a strong understanding of instructional leadership is critical for an administrator seeking to support teachers in becoming highly effective in the classroom. Hoy (1998) pointed out that a leader’s efficacy beliefs affect all of these processes “by influencing which course of action will be taken, how much effort will be expended, how long administrators will persevere in the face of adversity, and the level of success they will eventually achieve” (p. 154).

We do not know how new administrators learn to conduct frequent and effective observations of classroom teachers and consequently how they experience learning to deliver feedback from these observations that is meaningful to the developing practitioner. We also do not have a clear understanding of how those who are new to administration gain these critical feedback and instructional leadership skills.

Finally, although there is a rich body of quantitative research on supervision, feedback, and the resulting connections to teacher efficacy, there are far fewer qualitative studies that look deeply into the lived experiences of teachers and their supervisors as they make meaning of these interactions and how these conversations become a part of their being as educators. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) pointed out that there are far fewer qualitative studies of teacher efficacy than quantitative
studies. They suggest that interviews and observational data might provide a “thick, rich description of the growth of teacher efficacy” (p. 242), and that such qualitative case studies and phenomenological investigations are needed to better develop our understanding of how efficacy is developed in educators. My qualitative study seeks to add to that body of knowledge.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of my qualitative study is to explore how classroom teachers and their deans (as supervisors) make meaning of an intensive observation and feedback process. Through this study I explored how they each describe their own developing sense of teacher or leader efficacy, the potential changes to their developing classroom and leadership practices, and the developing relationship between teachers and dean. Through a series of several interviews, I sought to understand the lived experiences of these educators as they work together as professionals committed to improving their craft and desire to better educate their students.

The overarching research question for my study is to explore how teachers and deans as their leaders make meaning of an intensive observation and feedback process. Specific research questions include:

1) How do teachers engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process describe:

   a) the perceived changes in their teaching practices after receiving frequent and ongoing observations and feedback; and

   b) the perceived changes in their teacher-efficacy as this process unfolds;
c) their perceived developing relationships with their dean; and

d) the perceived value obtained from this observation and feedback process in
their professional development as teachers?

2) How do deans engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process
describe:

a) their perceived development as instructional leaders as they implement this
model;

b) the perceived changes in their leader-efficacy as they participate in this
process;

c) their perceived developing relationships with the teachers with whom they
make frequent observations and give ongoing feedback; and

d) the perceived value obtained from this observation and feedback process in
their professional development as leaders?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The conceptual/theoretical framework for my study is presented in Figure 1.

This framework represents the process of the intensive weekly observation/feedback
model being explored. The primary goal of this framework and for my research is to
examine the lived experiences and the relationship between the teachers and their
deans as they experience the work they do together. Using Bandura’s (1977) social
cognitive learning theory of self-efficacy as the theoretical framework, I looked at the
changes in both teacher and leader efficacy as a result of both giving and receiving
ongoing feedback. Additionally, I examined the changes in practices, if any, which
occur over time for both the teachers and the deans as a result of their weekly
observations and feedback sessions. Finally, I sought to determine the value that each participant in this study places on their relationship with each other as a result of this intensive model of observation and feedback.

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Albert Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive learning theory of self-efficacy which addresses motivation based on appraisals of outcomes and feedback. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as “peoples’ judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (p. 391). Most people take on tasks or roles that they believe they have the ability to handle. According to Bandura (1977; 1986), once engaged in these tasks, an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs determine how much effort they will devote to the task and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles. These self-beliefs are motivational factors and are a content specific evaluation of one’s ability to successfully complete a task or reach a goal. Self-efficacy beliefs, as defined by Bandura, are formed through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social/verbal persuasion, and the interpretation of physiological states as emotional arousal, nervousness or anxiety while completing a task.

Through the lens Bandura provides, for the past several decades educational researchers such as Gibson and Dembo (1984); Guskey (1987); Woolfolk and Hoy (1990, 1993), and Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (1998, 2001), have examined the construct of self-efficacy as it manifests in educators as “teacher efficacy.” Teacher efficacy has been defined as a “teacher’s belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated” (Guskey & Passaro, 1994, p. 4) and a teacher’s belief that their efforts will have a
positive impact on student achievement (Ross, 1994). If teachers are to believe that all students can achieve at high levels, they must first believe in their own ability to impact student achievement.

Leadership efficacy is a lesser-known construct defined as a leader’s level of confidence in the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to lead others (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008). In their theoretical framework, Hannah et. al (2008) linked the efficacy of the leader with the efficacy of each follower, stating that in time this collective efficacy helps to drive and sustain positive performance outcomes. In their review of the literature on the differences between leadership and management, Paglis and Green (2002) described leaders as those who are agents of change. They defined leadership efficacy as the leader’s belief that “he or she can successfully exert leadership by setting a direction for the work group, building relationships with followers in order to gain their commitment to change goals, and working with them to overcome obstacles to change” (p. 217).
Perceived changes in practice as a result of frequent observations and ongoing feedback

Perceived changes in teacher efficacy as a result of receiving frequent feedback

Perceived changes in practice as a result of making frequent observations and delivering ongoing feedback

Perceived changes in leader efficacy as a result of delivering frequent feedback

Perceived developing relationship with dean

Perceived developing relationships with teachers

Perceived value (Relationship to Dean)

Perceived value (Relationship to Teacher)

*Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.*
Significance of the Study

In this time of increasing accountability for our nation’s schools, teachers and administrators, educational reformers and policy makers are deeply invested in changing systems that currently do not lead to increased student achievement at the levels required to close the existing achievement gap. One system that is in a state of considerable change is the current practice of observing and evaluating classroom teachers. The purpose of my study is to explore the experience of teachers and their leaders who are engaged in a new model of observation and evaluation designed to increase teacher effectiveness. Through this study, teachers and administrators explored their lived experiences as participants in weekly observations and feedback sessions. Their voices add to a growing body of research on teacher and leader efficacy. Administrators and teachers currently participating in this observation/feedback model may benefit as they shared this rich experience of providing and receiving continual feedback as they work together to close the achievement gap. My study may further our understanding of the value of these frequent and ongoing observations and feedback sessions on the development of teacher and leader behaviors, practices, and relationships over the course of this study and may contribute to the growing conversation about effective reforms in the current teacher observation/evaluation models.

Overview of Research Methodology

The purpose of my research is to explore the shared experiences of teachers and their administrators (deans) in a school system currently engaged in an intensive weekly teacher observation and feedback model. In my study, I explored how the teachers and deans involved make meaning of this observation/feedback model.
Through the sharing of their lived experiences, I strive to better understand the impact of this model on the development of teacher and leader efficacy, the changes that come about in each of their practices, and the resulting relationships between teachers and their leaders.

To complete this study, I conducted a qualitative phenomenological investigation. As defined by Creswell (2007), “phenomenology is a research strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 13). As the researcher, I served as both the interviewer and the data collector. Data collected came from three in-depth interviews over the course of 10 - 12 weeks.

The setting for my study was four public charter academies in the mid-west. Each of these K-8 schools is currently using the “Dean Model” as part of their organizational structure. In each of these schools the leadership structure has traditionally consisted of a principal and one assistant principal. Prior to implementing the dean model, building principals were responsible for completing two formal observations and evaluations per year while assistant principals primarily handled discipline and facility issues. Under this new model, the leadership structure of each school is made up of a principal and three to four deans, all serving as instructional leaders. The majority of the deans in this system are in their first administrative roles and are often engaged in educational leadership training programs designed to prepare them to become building leaders.

Chapter 1 Closure
This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of teachers and deans as they participate in an intensive observation/feedback model. Through a series of three interviews over the course of several months, participants shared how this model has changed their classroom and leadership practices and its impact on their sense of teacher or leader efficacy. Additionally, through the stories of all participants, I sought to gain a better understanding of the developing relationship between teachers and leaders and how they make meaning of and find value in this intensive process.

This study addresses a growing need to understand how conducting frequent classroom observations and delivering ongoing feedback can improve current systems of supervision in our nation’s schools and impact the practices and professional lives of both teachers and instructional leaders. Let us now turn to Chapter 2 where I review the literature related to this topic.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature supporting the need to conduct my study. It begins with a discussion of Bandura’s social learning theory (1977, 1978), his construct of self-efficacy (1977), and the development of his social cognitive theory (1986). From this theory of how self-efficacy is developed, a review of the development of teacher efficacy and leader efficacy measures and models is presented. The history of supervision in the field of education and current trends in educational reform of supervision practices, along with a review of literature on teacher feedback, and the impact these practices have on both teacher and leader efficacy is also presented.

Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy

The foundation of a social learning theory was laid by behavioral and social psychologists. The earliest contributor to social learning theory was Williams James in 1890. James’ construct of “social self” laid the foundation for the current social learning theory concept of the interaction between personal factors and the environment. Other major contributors to social learning theory include Lewin (1890-1947), Adler (1870-1937), Tolman (1932), and Miller and Dollard (1941). Bandura’s social cognitive theory was developed in the late eighties as a further development of the social learning theory dating back to the 1800s. Bandura’s work and development of social learning theory (1977, 1978, 1986, 1989) places a major focus on cognitive concepts. His theory focuses on how children and adults operate cognitively in social situations and how these cognitions impact behavior and development. As Bandura’s social learning became social cognitive theory he introduced the concept of modeling
or vicarious learning as a method of social learning. He also introduced the concept of self-efficacy. Social cognitive theory assumes that people are capable of human agency, defined as the capacity of individuals to exercise control over their own thought processes, judgments and actions (Bandura, 1989). Bandura believed that human behavior can be better predicted by the beliefs that individuals hold for themselves regarding their capabilities rather than what they are actually capable of accomplishing. According to social cognitive theory, a person’s behavior is largely determined by the interaction of personal factors such as cognition, emotion, and biological processes, behavior, and environmental influences. This multi-directional model of human agency is known as triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b, 1986, 1989).

Bandura (1977) defined *self-efficacy* as a person’s estimate of their ability to successfully execute the necessary behaviors that are required to produce desired outcomes. It is these personal estimates or self-beliefs that determine how well knowledge and skill are acquired (Pajares, 2002). Bandura (1977b) differentiated between outcome expectancies, described as a person’s estimate that certain behaviors will lead to desired outcomes, and efficacy expectations, which he defines as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcome” (p. 193). An individual can hold a belief that a particular behavior will produce a specific outcome, but if they doubt their personal ability to perform these behaviors, this knowledge does not influence their behavior. It is the strength of those convictions in an individual’s beliefs about their personal effectiveness, or efficacy expectations that will determine whether a person will even try to cope with a given situation. According to Bandura (1977b), people will fear and avoid situations which
they believe exceed their coping skills, but will engage in activities or behaviors when they consider themselves capable of handling a challenging or previously intimidating situation. These efficacy expectations determine a person’s choice of activities, how much effort they will extend, and how long they will remain involved in dealing with difficult or stressful situations. Efficacy expectations also influence how resilient a person will be in the face of challenging or adverse situations. Those with a higher sense of efficacy demonstrate greater effort, persistence, and resilience. These same beliefs also influence an individual’s thought patterns and emotional reactions (Pajares, 2002). According to Pajares, those with lower self-efficacy often believe situations to be harder than they really are and consequently are prone to experiencing greater stress, higher rates of depression, and fewer options for how to solve a problem while those with high self-efficacy, experience a greater sense of calm when approaching difficult tasks.

Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986) stated that efficacy expectations vary in magnitude, generality, and strength and are based on four major sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states.

Performance accomplishments are an influential aspect of self-efficacy as they are based on personal mastery experiences. According to Bandura (1977b, 1986) performance accomplishments have the greatest potential for raising self-efficacy as they directly involve the successful completion of a task. Often labeled as mastery experiences, when these experiences are successful, mastery expectations increase personal efficacy while repeated failures lower them. Self-efficacy beliefs gained through performance accomplishments are often generalized to other situations,
especially when the situations are similar in nature (Bandura, 1977b). Once a person
has developed strong efficacy expectations through repeated successful mastery
experiences, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced.

Vicarious experiences impact self-efficacy beliefs when an individual
observes another person successfully complete a task. Observing others successfully
complete a task can result in the observer feeling an increase in efficacy, especially
when several models are used to demonstrate achievement. People tend to persuade
themselves that if others can handle a difficult situation or master a task, then they
should be able to achieve at least some improvement in performance (Bandura, 1977).
However, Bandura considered such experiences to be a less dependable source of
information about one’s own capabilities as compared to direct evidence of personal
mastery. Consequently, efficacy expectations acquired through vicarious experiences
involving modeling and observation tend to be weaker and more vulnerable to
change.

Verbal persuasion is a readily available and frequently used method for
developing efficacy expectations. Bandura pointed out that people are often
encouraged by others to believe that they can cope successfully with what might have
overwhelmed them or seemed too difficult in the past. Efficacy beliefs acquired
through suggestion and verbal persuasion tend to be considerably weaker than those
that develop from one’s own accomplishments and authentic experience (Bandura,
1977b, 1986, 1997). The impact of verbal persuasion may vary considerably
depending on the credibility of those persons doing the persuading. According to
Bandura (1977b), “the more believable the source of the information, the more likely
are efficacy expectations to change” (p. 202). In addition, although, in isolation,
verbal persuasion may have limits as a successful means for creating a long-lasting sense of self-efficacy, it can contribute to the successes achieved through corrective performance when coupled with performance aids. People who are encouraged or persuaded that they possess the capacity to master challenging situations and are also given aids or support to help them master a skill are more likely to persist in accomplishing a difficult task than are those who receive only the performance aids.

Physiological states or emotional arousal is the fourth source of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), people rely in part on their physiological responses such as sweating and shaking when determining whether or not they are vulnerable for failure or debilitated by their fears. Such high arousal and anxiety typically diminishes and debilitates performance. Individuals are more likely to believe they can be successful when they are not tense or physiologically agitated. People who are more prone to high states of anxiety often become self pre-occupied with their negative self-beliefs when faced with difficulties rather than focusing on the performance task at hand. Once a person begins to believe that they are less vulnerable than they previously believed they are less likely to create frightening thoughts in difficult or threatening situations. Those who have fewer or weaker fears may reduce their negative self-talk and anxiety to the point where they are able to perform successfully, thereby strengthening their self-efficacy beliefs.

Self-efficacy beliefs and expectations are defined and measured independently of actual performance. In Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, people choose their behaviors and the amount of effort they will expend based more on their efficacy beliefs than by other driving conditions. People typically approach, explore, and manage situations within their self-perceived capabilities and will frequently avoid
stressful situations or tasks that they consider beyond their capabilities. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and perform through four major processes. These processes are: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection (Bandura, 1993). Cognitive processes shape behavior through thought. In his definition of human ability, Bandura stated that ability is not a fixed attribute, but rather a “generative capability in which cognitive, social, motivational, and behavioral skills must be organized and effectively orchestrated to serve numerous purposes” (p. 118). There is a considerable difference between possessing skills and cognitive knowledge and being able to actually use that knowledge and skill in a new or difficult situation. The stronger a person’s perceived efficacy beliefs, the more likely they are to set challenging goals for themselves and to remain strongly committed to achieving those goals. People with a high sense of efficacy actually visualize themselves being successful and use this process as a guide and support for performance, while those who have low self-efficacy tend to visualize failure and dwell on the possibilities of what could go wrong, even if they possess the same skills and knowledge as those with a higher sense of personal efficacy.

People motivate themselves through the beliefs they hold about what they are capable of accomplishing. Through these beliefs they anticipate likely outcomes, set goals for themselves and plan strategies for achieving these goals. When people commit to achieving a goal, perceived discrepancies between what they currently do and what they seek to achieve creates self-dissatisfactions that act as motivations for increased effort (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). Bandura (1993) distinguished between three different forms of cognitive motivators: casual attributions, outcome expectancies, and cognized goals. These motivators are the basis for three
corresponding theories of motivation: attribution theory, expectancy-value theory, and goal theory.

Self-efficacy beliefs are formed through each of these forms of cognition motivation. Through causal attributions, people who see themselves as highly efficacious believe that failures are the result of insufficient effort, while those with low efficacy see their failures as a result of their low ability. In expectancy-value theory, motivation comes from the belief that a behavior or performance will produce a given outcome and that these outcomes have differing values. People act on their beliefs about what they can or cannot do as well as their beliefs about the likely outcomes of their behaviors. People with a low sense of personal efficacy will often not take on a challenge because they believe they lack the ability to be successful.

Locke and Latham’s (1990) research on goal setting and motivation gives evidence that explicit and challenging goals enhance and sustain motivation. Locke, Shaw, Saari, and Latham (1981) found that an individual’s perceived self-efficacy greatly affects the level of self-set goals, the strength of commitment toward achieving those goals, and the level of cognitive performance. In goal theory, people judge their successes and satisfaction conditional on accomplishing their chosen goals. They are satisfied when they have achieved a goal to which they have ascribed value and are motivated to increase their efforts when they are not satisfied with a low level of performance. Those with a low sense of self-efficacy may be easily discouraged by failure, while those with a great sense of efficacy intensify their efforts when their initial performances fall short and persist until they have reached their goal (Bandura & Cervone, 1983).

**Teacher Efficacy**
Over the past few decades, much of the research on self-efficacy has been in the area of educational research, primarily in the area of academic motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). Others have focused on developing the construct of teacher efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1982, 1986; Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983; Gibson & Dembo, 1984, 1985; Guskey, 1987; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). One strand of research is grounded in Rotter’s (1996) social learning theory, in which Rotter proposed that teachers who believe that the influence of the environment overwhelms their ability to impact a student’s learning maintain a belief system that the impact they have on a student’s learning is external to them, as opposed to those teachers who are confident in their ability to teach even the most difficult or unmotivated students, a belief that he considered within the teacher’s control, or internal. A second strand of research grew out of Bandura’s social cognitive theory as his construct of self-efficacy was being defined. In his theory Bandura (1977) defined perceived self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3).

Increasingly, researchers are concluding that a teachers’ sense of self-efficacy plays a major role in influencing important outcomes for teachers and students. Teachers’ self-efficacy is reported to influence the achievement level of students as well as their level of motivation (Bandura, 1977; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Ross 1994), and has been shown to positively impact teachers’ beliefs about their teaching and instructional behaviors (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Teachers’ sense of self-efficacy appears to be the most important motivational factor for explaining teacher learning and teaching practices, a finding that is supported by earlier studies regarding the role of teachers’ sense of self-
efficacy for teacher learning and educational change (Bandura, 1993; Geijsel et al., 2009; Thoonen et al., 2011).

Teachers with low self-efficacy have been reported to experience higher levels of job-related stress, lower levels of job satisfaction, and more difficulties in teaching and reaching their students (Klassen et al, 2011). Gibson and Dembo (1984) wrote that data from classroom observations of both high and low efficacy elementary teachers suggest that there are significant differences in the behaviors of these teachers, specifically the behaviors of classroom organization, instruction, and teacher feedback provided to students who are struggling academically. These differences correlate to variations in student achievement. Other researchers show similar relationships between student achievement and teachers’ sense of efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1982; Brophy & Evertson, 1977).

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfok Hoy (2001) defined teacher efficacy as a teacher’s “judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 783). Using Rotter’s (1966) locus of control theory as a foundation, these RAND researchers developed the idea of teacher efficacy as the extent to which teachers believed that they could control the reinforcement of their actions, meaning did the control of reinforcement lie within the teachers or within the environment? (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). This research assumed that student learning and motivation were the primary reinforcers of teaching action (Armor et al., 1976). Teachers who believe that the influences of the environment are greater than their ability to make an impact on a student’s learning are said to believe that reinforcement of their teaching efforts is external or outside of
their control. Teachers who are confident of their ability to effectively reach unmotivated or difficult students demonstrate a belief that reinforcement of teaching activities is within their control or is internal.

Teacher efficacy in the RAND study was measured by teacher’s response to two items. The sum of these two items revealed the extent to which individual teachers believed that student motivation and learning were in the hands of the individual teacher or internally controlled. Item 1 states: “When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can’t do much because most of a student’s motivation and performance depends on his or her environment.” Item 2 states: “If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.” These two items guided most teacher efficacy research from 1976 through the early 1980s.

Ashton and Webb (1982) expanded the construct of teacher efficacy when they developed a multidimensional model of teacher efficacy based largely on Bandura’s social cognitive theory. This model focused specifically on both outcome expectations and efficacy expectations (Bandura 1977, 1978; Gusky & Passaro, 1994). In this model, Ashton and Webb (1982, 1986) suggested that a teacher’s outcome expectations about the consequences of their classroom teaching were reflected in a measure they labeled “teacher efficacy.” This measure is believed to be the same dimension as measured by the first of the Rand items. Efficacy expectations, defined by Ashton and Webb as an individual’s personal ability to execute certain courses of actions to bring about desired outcomes or results were labeled “personal efficacy.” They believed that this personal efficacy measure was related to the second Rand item (Gusky & Passaro, 1994). Webb concluded that low efficacy is one way in which teachers deal with the frustration and difficulty that low achieving students
might cause feelings of teacher inadequacy. If teachers believe that there is little that they, or any other teacher, can do to prevent student failure, they can preserve their own sense of competency and self-esteem. Furthermore, his research indicates that low-efficacy teachers believe that low achieving students’ problems stem from the students’ lack of ability or to their poverty or poor background, rather than from the teachers’ ability (Dembo & Gibson, 1985).

In 1984, Gibson and Dembo expanded on Ashton and Webb’s measure of teacher efficacy when they developed a new teacher efficacy measure consisting of 30 items. Their measure, titled the Teacher Efficacy Scale, found two major factors accounting for the majority of the major variance between the original two dimensions of teacher efficacy as defined originally by the Rand Study and later by Ashton and Webb. Gibson and Dembo interpreted the first factor as one representing “a teacher’s sense of personal teaching efficacy or belief that one has the skills and abilities to bring about student learning” (p. 573). They considered this belief to be one clearly reflecting a teacher’s sense of their own personal teacher efficacy and personal belief that they possess the skills and abilities required to bring about student learning. This factor is also related to Bandura’s self-efficacy dimension in that it reflects a teacher’s sense of personal responsibility for a student’s learning and behavior. Gusky and Passaro (1994) pointed out that this personal teaching efficacy factor is largely an internal factor and appears to represent a teacher’s perceptions of their personal influence, power, and impact in teaching and learning situations, tends to come from a perspective that is positive and optimistic, and is not strongly related to a teacher’s perceptions of any external environmental conditions such as demographic or economic conditions.
The second factor that Gibson and Dembo (1984) identified was related to Bandura’s outcome expectancy construct. This dimension was interpreted as “a teacher’s sense of teaching efficacy, or belief that any teacher’s ability to bring about change is significantly limited by factors external to the teacher” (Gibson & Dembo, p. 574). This dimension is largely external and considers perceptions of the influence, power, and impact of factors that lie beyond the control of the classroom, and in most cases, the control of the individual teacher, such as social, demographic or economic conditions that may impact a child’s life. Unlike the internal factor, the items in this scale tend to emphasize their negative impact (Gusky & Passaro, 1994). These two factors of personal teaching efficacy and outcome expectancy are related but appear to operate independently. Some teachers believe that even though the impact of social, demographic and environmental factors are strong, they can still have a strong and powerful influence on their students. Other teachers may hold the belief that no matter what the social, demographic or environmental factors in which their students find themselves, a teacher’s ability to affect his or her students is very limited.

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) expanded existing models measuring teacher efficacy into a multidimensional scale. Their 24 item Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale consists of three dimensions: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy believed that these three dimensions of efficacy represent the richness of teachers’ work lives and the requirements of good teaching. This measure, which the researchers named the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES), was actually examined in three different studies in which the original 52 items were eventually
reduced to 24. The goal of the measure was to assess a teacher’s personal assessment of their competence across a wide variety of activities and tasks they are called upon to perform in their work in the classroom. The measure looked at both personal competencies and at an analysis of the various tasks in terms of resources and constraints that are present in different teaching contexts. Findings from this work indicate a need for more research on how the efficacy beliefs of mentors and supervising teachers impact the sense of efficacy of novice teachers, and on what structural features and supports most make a difference in an individual teacher’s development of efficacy beliefs. Additionally, there is a need to determine what leadership behaviors on the part of the principal or other building leaders make a difference in the efficacy beliefs of teachers (Ts channen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Sources of Teacher Efficacy

Today it is believed that teacher efficacy is impacted by all four sources previously identified by Bandura in his work on self-efficacy, but it is most directly influenced by mastery experiences and the physiological arousal that comes from those experiences. When a teacher is actively engaged in the act of teaching, he or she can best assess what capabilities are being brought to the task and the directly experience the consequences of those capabilities.

According to Bandura (1997), a performance that is successful creates a new mastery experience that will serve as a new source or self-efficacy either confirming or disrupting a teacher’s existing self-efficacy beliefs. Gradually, this process of developing self-efficacy stabilizes and a more constant set of efficacy beliefs is developed that tends to be resistant to change.
Emotional and physiological arousal is an important factor in the development of teacher efficacy. Feelings of relaxation and positive emotion will greatly contribute to an individual’s sense of self-assurance and the anticipation of future successes. An individual teacher experiencing a moderate level of emotional arousal can improve performance by focusing energy and attention to the task. However, when that emotional arousal becomes heightened, a teacher’s ability to function may become impaired and may interfere with making the best use of one’s capabilities and skills.

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (1998, 2009) pointed out that vicarious experiences, or watching other professionals teach in a skillful and adept manner can affect the observer’s personal sense of teaching efficacy, especially if the teacher being observed is admired, credible, and has some similarities to the observer. When a novice teacher can compare themselves to others, they may begin to believe that they too have the capability to become a successful teacher given similar circumstances. Bandura (1997) pointed out that because teaching lacks a method to absolutely measure adequacy, teachers must judge their capabilities in relation to the performance of others. Competent teachers and coaches who successfully model skills and strategies for managing difficult tasks as well as sharing their thinking about those tasks can impact the observer’s sense of teaching efficacy (Tshannen-Moran, 2009).

Verbal or social persuasion may actually lower a teacher’s self-perception of their personal competencies as a teacher, especially if the feedback is overly harsh or global as opposed to focused and constructive. When given critical feedback, a teacher may become self-protective and conclude that given the current set of circumstances that achieving the desired results is impossible, whereas constructive
and meaningful feedback often results in promoting teacher reflection, encourages teachers to plan and achieve new goals, and ultimately leads to an increased sense of efficacy (Feeney, 2007; Tshannen-Moren & Wolfhoolk Hoy, 1998, 2009).

**Efficacy and the Development of the Effective Teacher**

According to Ebmeier and Nicklaus (1999), research has linked the construct of teacher efficacy to student achievement, student motivation, and the adoption of innovations and classroom management skills on the part of classroom teachers. Teacher self-efficacy is a context-specific and malleable belief about what an individual teacher can accomplish within the parameters of the external conditions (Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2007). It is believed to be most malleable when a teacher is in the first few years of his or her career. After the first, most challenging years, teacher self-efficacy tends to increase and become more firmly established as a teacher gains experience (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Tshannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Wolters & Daugherty; 2007). It is a construct that is quite different from a teacher’s verbal ability or flexibility (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Ashton, Webb, and Doda (1983) defined it as a way teachers use to view the relationship between teaching and learning. Personal teaching efficacy is the best predictor of teacher behavior. Their research indicates that it is possible to predict different cognitive and affective outcomes based on whether a teacher’s low sense of efficacy comes from their general belief in their own ability to motivate students or from a more personal sense of incompetence in their ability to motivate.

Teachers often develop negative feelings of inadequacy when they fear that they do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to deal with the situations before them. Helping new teachers prepare to deal with their own uncertainties about
whether or not they are making a difference in student achievement, as well as coping with student failure, is critical. Helping teachers learn how to analyze their own teaching skills so that they can then determine the sources of their own sense of efficacy will help them to solve the problems that they will inevitably face and to prevent them from developing a sense of helplessness (Ashton et al., 1983; Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Teachers who believe that they possess the necessary skills, attitudes and means to achieve their personal and professional goals (efficacy expectations) and believe that they have the ability to overcome common obstacles such as low student motivation, limited resources, and lack of parental support (outcome expectations) will work to improve their own instruction. Conversely, if a teacher lacks confidence in his or her own ability to succeed, or believes that their behaviors will not lead to instructional improvement, lead to increased achievement, or if they are unwilling to persist, low teacher efficacy beliefs may impact student achievement.

There is a need to learn how beginning teachers can keep the enthusiasm and commitment to teaching that initially attracted them to the profession. There is a body of research that indicates that novice teachers are initially concerned with survival and basic adequacy in the classroom, and that it is not until later in their careers that they become concerned with mastery of teaching tasks and the resulting effects on students (Fuller & Brown, 1975; Pataniczek & Issacson, 1980). Additionally, research shows that organizational factors, and the ways in which principals interact with their staff, influence school climate, and provide opportunities for decision making all have an impact on a teachers’ sense of efficacy (Ashton et al., 1983; Dembo & Gibson, 1985)
As a malleable belief, how then does a teacher increase their efficacy level? In a 2004 study, Labone indicated that there is a need for a greater understanding about those factors and variables that are linked to higher self-efficacy. The factors determined to most likely impact teacher efficacy include school level and setting, availability of teaching resources, and quality of the school facilities. When considering how efficacy beliefs can be increased, Bandura (1977) stated that producing a positive change in one’s self-efficacy beliefs requires “compelling feedback that forcefully disputes the preexisting disbelief in one’s capabilities” (p. 82). Dembo and Gibson (1985) made the following recommendations to school leaders and pre-service educators:

1. Provide a variety of experiences in different contexts to pre-service teachers.

2. Provide strategies for all teachers for dealing with student failure. Help teachers to carefully examine their teaching in order to identify the sources of their sense of inefficacy.

3. Consider the differences between teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy in order to determine the needs of teachers with varying levels of experience and skill.

4. Develop programs within schools to assist novice teachers as they deal with the transition from student teaching to full time classroom teaching.

5. Give teachers timely and appropriate feedback regarding their performance.

6. Examine the social norms within the school organization that may contribute to or detract from teachers’ involvement in the organization.
7. Evaluate the styles of leadership among the administrators in a building to determine how they may affect teacher involvement in decision making.

8. Encourage collaborative and collegial interactions when teachers are faced with personal and organizational problems to solve.

9. Help teachers to develop skills and opportunities to interact effectively with parents. (pp. 181-182)

Ebmeier (2003) stated that increasing teacher efficacy in terms of Bandura’s four sources of efficacy is a result of the involvement of teachers in decision making about their classroom activities, support of teacher collaboration and innovation, increased clarity of school-wide goals, ongoing feedback about teacher performance, and opportunities to observe the practice of other effective teachers. According to Ebmeier, the most critical factor in predicting teacher efficacy, commitment, and job satisfaction is the level of teacher perceptions of an administrators’ caring and concern for teachers and their classrooms.

**Leader Efficacy**

While much research has been published over the past several decades on teacher efficacy, the concept of leader efficacy has not been considered as frequently in the literature on leadership. According to Bandura’s self-efficacy theory, people get involved in activities they believe they are capable of successfully handling and that once engaged in practices or activities, a person’s efficacy beliefs influences how much effort they will put into the task and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Paglis and Green (2002) extended Bandura’s self-efficacy theory to that of developing leader efficacy, especially in regard to leading change. Leaders or managers who consider themselves capable of leading change are
likely to be seen by those they lead as initiating more change efforts and persisting longer in order to successfully implement those changes even when faced with challenges and obstacles. Bandura and Locke’s (2003) statement that efficacy beliefs “affect whether individuals’ think in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways, how well they motivate themselves and persevere in the face of difficulties, the quality of their well-being and their vulnerability to stress and depression, and the choices they make at important decision points” (p. 87) sets the stage for developing a greater understanding of how leadership efficacy develops.

Research on Leader Efficacy

In their 2007 review of research in leadership efficacy, Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, and Harms, distinguished between leader efficacy and leadership efficacy. Leadership efficacy is defined as a specific form of efficacy associated with the level of confidence in the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leading others. Leader efficacy is then defined as “leaders’ beliefs in their perceived capabilities to organize the positive psychological capabilities, motivation, means, collective resources, and courses of action required to attain effective, sustainable performance across their various leadership roles, demands, and contexts” (p. 2).

In their 2002 study, Paglis and Green defined leadership self-efficacy as a person’s belief that he or she can successfully exert leadership as they set a direction for the work group, build relationships with those they lead in order to increase commitment and willingness to adopt new change goals, and continue to persevere even in the presence of obstacles. Those in positions of leadership continually diagnose the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for growth among the members of their team and determine the direction and need for change in order to excel. As
personal mastery experiences are believed to be one of the most powerful sources for developing efficacy beliefs, a continual experience of successes builds a person’s belief in his or her capabilities, especially when that success is achieved by overcoming obstacles through persistence and perseverance (Bandura, 1986; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Consequently, those in positions of leadership who have experienced success in past leadership positions would be expected to have higher leadership self-efficacy (Paglis & Green, 2002).

**Efficacy and the Development of an Effective Educational Leader**

The role of school leadership has become increasingly complex as educational systems increase expectations of teachers, principals, and others in leadership roles. Principals are expected to improve teaching and learning, to develop and hold the vision for the buildings they lead, to be instructional and curriculum leaders, to be experts at understanding and developing assessments, and to be effective disciplinarians. Additionally, they carry out daily managerial tasks and administrative duties such as analyzing budgets, managing the school facility, serving as public relations expert, and overseeing legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives (Fisher, 2009). Davis et al. (2005) pointed out that being a school principal also requires that a leader develop skills in building community and managing the sometimes conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies, all the while being sensitive to the ever increasing range of student needs. Fisher (2011) conducted a longitudinal study of aspiring principals designed to explore the “structure and relations between the components of self-efficacy and to determine that nature and direction of change in the perceived self-efficacy of aspiring principals following a 2-year training program”
Findings from this study indicate that a training program can change aspiring principals’ perception of self-efficacy and that although no research as of the time of this study had yet compared self-efficacy and preparedness for successfully carrying a position of leadership, Fisher stated that it can be assumed that high levels of self-efficacy will correlate with high levels of readiness and preparation.

The earliest measure of principals’ efficacy beliefs was developed by Hillman (1986). This Principal Self-Efficacy instrument consisted of 16 items related to the achievement of their total school. In an educational setting, a principal’s sense of efficacy is a judgment of his or her capabilities to develop a plan or course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Bandura, 1977; Hillman, 1986). According to McCormick (2001), it is a principal’s self-perceived capability to perform the cognitive and behavioral functions necessary to regulate group processes in relation to goal achievement. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) stated that those in positions of educational leadership continually assess personal capabilities such as skills, knowledge, strategies, or personality traits against perceived personal weaknesses or constraints present in the individual school setting. It is the interaction of these two components that lead to an individual leaders’ judgments about their self-efficacy for leadership.

Maintaining a strong sense of efficacy is critical for a principal to successfully sustain the necessary attention and perseverance of effort needed to meet organizational goals. Principals with strong self-efficacy have been found to be persistent in meeting these goals. In addition, they are more flexible and willing to adjust and change strategies as necessary and they view change as a slow process. They are typically open minded and ready to learn from others, are resilient and
optimistic, and maintain high expectations for staff motivation, commitment, learning, and achievement for every student (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Osterman & Sullivan, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) noted that high efficacy principals do not interpret their inability to solve problems as failure. Instead they remain calm and confident, keep their sense of humor and regulate their own expectations to correspond with the conditions at hand. On the other hand, as Bandura (2000) explains, “When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in their capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenge” (p. 120).

Supervision History and Perspective

In order to fully understand the significance and the need for examining the intense observation/feedback model presented in my study, it is important to consider the history of educational supervision and its impact on teacher and leader efficacy in K-12 schools in the United States of America. As school systems across this country begin to develop large-scale reforms in how classroom teachers are supervised and evaluated, many educational reformers have presented the path these processes have taken throughout the past several hundred years.

In 1993, Cogan, Anderson, and Krajewski identified supervision practices that have been presented in the professional literature between 1850 and 1990. These practices include: scientific management, democratic interaction approaches, cooperative supervision, supervision as curriculum development, clinical supervision, group dynamics and peer emphasis, and coaching and instructional supervision.
Glickman (1985) defined supervision as “the school function that improves instruction through direct assistance to teachers, curriculum development, in-service training, group development, and action research” (p. xv). A more recent view of supervision developed through Costa and Garmston’s (2002) cognitive coaching model states that supervision is a process intended to mediate and enhance teachers’ intellectual functions, decision-making capabilities, and capacity to modify their own teaching behaviors.

**Supervision in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) wrote that prior to the 1800s, education was not considered a field of study or a professional discipline in the United States of America. Teachers were considered servants of the community and those serving in government or clergy were responsible for hiring and monitoring teachers. As the industrial base grew, and large urban areas began to grow and develop, the common schooling movement resulted in a demand for teachers with specific disciplines. Often, one teacher was selected as the “principal teacher” to handle administrative duties, a position that grew into the role of building principal. Tracy (1995) noted that as the roles of educators became more specialized, clergy no longer had the knowledge or understanding to adequately judge teacher effectiveness.

By the mid 1800s those in supervisory roles in schools began to focus on improving instruction (Blumberg, 1985).

According to Marzano et al. (2011) in the period of time between the end of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, two competing views of education were present. Dewey argued that democracy, not scientific management was the basis of human progress and that schools should be structured in a way that
students can develop into citizens who understand the ideals of democracy. Dewey advocated for a more progressive stance on education in which classrooms were connected to the real world and differentiation was based on individual student needs. At the same time, Taylor’s principles of scientific management began to impact K-12 education. Using Taylor’s principles as a guide, Thorndike led educators to begin viewing measurement as a tool toward a scientific approach to educating the nation’s children (Marzano et al., 2011). Ebmeier and Nicklaus (1999) pointed out that in these early days of supervision, the centralization of school systems led to an increased emphasis on standardizing practices, largely for efficiency reasons and for the development of a bureaucracy to support the school system. The goal of this hierarchical system was to standardize pedagogy and curriculum and was a reflection of the current industrial model.

Through the 1930s, American schools debated between the scientific approach with its reliance on standardized testing and the democratic approach that focused on social development. Following World War II, Marzano (2011) reported that there was a move away from the scientific approach of education and supervision toward a philosophy of focusing on teachers as individuals. Lewis and Leps’ (1946) guidelines for supervision of teachers included (1) democratic ideals, (2) opportunities for initiative, (3) understanding human limitations, (4) shared decision making, and (5) delegation of responsibility (p. 163).

Clinical supervisory models for teachers began to develop in the 1950s. Cogan (1973) began lecturing on a process called the “cycle of clinical supervision” in 1958. In his 1973 book, Clinical Supervision, Cogan wrote that “the teacher involved in clinical supervision must be perceived as a practitioner fulfilling one of the first
requirements of a professional – maintaining and developing his competence’’ (p. 21). He believed that supervisory practices should be viewed as a means for a teacher to continually improve his or her practice through a focus on specific classroom behaviors and that supervisors should look for “critical incidents” that may interfere with student learning and achievement (Marzano et al., 2011).

Later, Goldhammer, a practitioner who worked closely with Cogan, developed a five-phase process of clinical supervision designed to involve teachers and their supervisors in a reflective dialogue. This model included pre-observation conferences, classroom observations, analysis, a supervision conference, and an analysis of the analysis (Goldhammer, 1969). Goldhammer viewed supervision as a process for developing teachers’ self-awareness and independence through a “spirit of collective enterprise” (Ponticell & Zepada, 2004, p. 43).

Following Goldhammer’s and Cogan’s clinical supervision models of the 60s and 70s, Hunter’s seven-step model of lesson design began to take center stage in education and in developing teacher effectiveness. According to Marzano (2011), Hunter identified several purposes for supervisory conferences, including but not limited to: identifying, labeling and explaining instructional behaviors, encouraging teachers to consider alternative approaches, helping teachers identifying components of lessons that were not as effective as they had hoped, and promoting the continued growth of excellent teachers.

Current Models of Supervision
In the mid-80s McGreal (1983), Glatthorn (1984) and Glickman (1985) began promoting supervisory models that included differentiation based on an individual teacher’s career goals and needs. In this differentiated approach, Glickman outlined his approach to supervision through the development of a clinical supervision “coaching” model that includes “(1) direct assistance to teachers, (2) group development, (3) professional development, and (5) action research” (p. xv).

Glickman’s model places a heavy emphasis on the individual meaning teachers develop toward their work and states that the primary responsibility of a supervisor is to encourage teachers to become more reflective as they become increasingly aware of the methods and processes they are using in their classrooms. This developmental model also sought to increase teachers’ self-direction and decision-making capabilities (Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999; Ponticell & Zepada, 2004). According to research conducted by Blase and Blase (2004), Glickman’s model represents the approach most frequently adopted but not necessarily consistently adhered to by the effective principals discussed in their study. Additionally, Marzano et al. (2011) noted that Glickman’s perspective is that supervision should be a systemic process, occurring within the context of the school community.

Danielson’s *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* was first published in 1996 and later updated in 2007. According to Marzano (2011), this model clarifies and defines the process of classroom teaching. Danielson’s model includes four domains: Planning and Preparation, the Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. Danielson (1996) developed this framework in order to honor the complexity of teaching, to develop a language for professional dialogue, and to create a structure for self-assessment and reflection.
Danielson considers this framework to be comprehensive in that it includes all phases of teaching from planning to student achievement. She also noted that the framework is grounded in research and flexible enough to use across all disciplines and levels (Marzano et.al, 2011).

According to Marzano et al.(2011), the purpose of supervision should be “the enhancement of teachers’ pedagogical skills, with the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement” (p. 2). Pajak (1989, 2002) stated that the goal of supervision is to help teachers discover and construct professional knowledge and skills. This knowledge and skills (listed in order or importance by practitioners) include: (1) communication; (2) staff development (professional growth); (3) instructional program (improvement); (4) planning and change (collaborative work); (5) motivating and organizing (shared vision); (6) observation and conferencing; (7) curriculum; (8) problem solving and decision making; (9) service to teachers (support for teaching and learning); (10) personal development (reflection on beliefs, abilities, actions; (11) community relations; (12) research and program evaluation (assessing outcomes and encouraging exploration. (Pajak, 1989, p. 73).

In their discussion of the history of supervision and evaluation in this country, Marzono et al. (2011) stated that strength of the Hunter model and the utility of the Danielson model provide an adequate knowledge base for teaching, but that this “well-articulated knowledge base should not be used as a prescription for teacher or teacher evaluation” (p. 28). Rather, that focused feedback and practice promoting teacher self-reflection will result in true pedagogical development and clear goals for improvement.

**Effective Supervision and Teacher Efficacy**
There is considerable research that recognizes the link between teacher efficacy, student achievement, and the behaviors of school leaders (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Gusky, 1987; Hipp, 1996; Hipp & Bredeson, 1995; Tschennen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). According to Ashton and Webb (1986), principal behaviors that influence teacher motivation and efficacy along with student achievement include: (1) recognizing and supporting teacher efforts; (2) clarifying roles and expectations; (3) encouraging a sense of competence and confidence in teachers and students; (4) empowering teacher decision making; (5) buffering staff against classroom intrusions; and (6) building bonds of community within the school.

In schools where the principal effectively inspired a common sense of purpose among teachers, used their leadership to provide resources for teachers, and allowed teachers flexibility over their classrooms, strong self-efficacy beliefs developed among the teaching staff (Tschennen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

Principals who model and encourage risk-taking foster a culture of experimentation and continual growth. In his 1996 study in which he explored the connections between teacher efficacy and principals’ leadership behaviors, Hipp stated that teachers “spoke well of leadership which placed them on the “cutting edge” and supported requests to engage in professional growth (p. 21). Teachers in schools where there was an overall high level of efficacy reported the prevalence of a spirit of trust and a sense that principals believed in the practices of and decisions made by teachers. Principals in these schools encouraged teachers to establish rapport and demonstrate positive beliefs in their students. Leadership behaviors such as modeling behavior, inspiring group purpose, providing contingent rewards, holding high performance expectations, and providing support were found to increase teacher
efficacy. Conversely, in schools where there is an overall lack of trust, a divisive climate, increasing student discipline problems, and lack of support, recognition, empowerment, and teacher decision-making, teachers reported feelings of despair, betrayal, uncertainty, loneliness, and vulnerability that can diminish teachers’ sense of efficacy.

Ebmeier and Nicklaus (1999) produced empirical research that links teacher efficacy to supervision. Ebmeier and Nicklaus named this specific form of supervision developmental or active supervision and stated that this type of supervision can produce enhanced levels of teacher efficacy and results in increased academic achievement (Ebmeir, 2003). Their study investigated links between teacher efficacy, teacher commitment, teacher supervision, and a set of organizational variables that included: confidence in the principal, commitment to the buildings, goals, satisfaction with working conditions, and confidence with peers (p. 113). Principal supervision in the form of encouraging and actively supporting effective instruction increases teacher efficacy as well as confidence in the building administration. It also increases a teachers’ commitment to teaching, confidence in peers, and commitment to building goals.

Ebmeier (2003) stated that the effects of active principal supervision on teacher confidence, commitment, and satisfaction are a result of the extent to which teachers believe that building leaders are interested in and committed to supporting teaching. Principals who desire to increase teacher efficacy through active supervision focus on classroom teaching, reward sound teaching, and provide technical and symbolic leadership.

According to Ebmeier (2003), the greatest predictor of teacher efficacy,
commitment, and job satisfaction are a teacher’s perceptions of his or her administrators as caring and concerned about life in the classroom. In his study, Ebmeier stated that principals who desire to increase teacher efficacy involve teachers directly in decision making about classroom activities, support innovations, encourage collaboration among teachers, provide clarity regarding school-wide goals, provide ongoing feedback to teachers about their classroom performance, and give teachers ample opportunities to observe other effective teachers. Additionally, these school leaders influence teacher efficacy through coaching, praise, and conferencing designed to clarify goals and provide substantive feedback.

According to Blase and Blase (1999), effective instructional leaders use six strategies for effectively developing teachers: (a) emphasizing the study of teaching and learning; (b) supporting efforts to collaborate between teachers; (c) developing strong coaching relationships among teachers, coaches, mentors, and supervisors; (d) encouraging and supporting program redesigns; (e) being knowledgeable of and applying adult learning, growth, and development theories to all phases of staff developing; (f) using action research to inform instructional decision making.

Good instructional leaders understand and value the power of ongoing instructional conferences with their teachers. They view these reflective conversations as a means for improving classroom instruction and providing support for classroom teachers. Educational researchers have stated that the practice of reflection gives teachers and their leaders deeper insights into the meanings of teaching events and provides opportunities for developing meta-teaching skills or the ability to think about the thinking of teaching (Marchant, 1989; Schon, 1987).
Schon’s (1998) definition of supervision emphasizes collegial supervision and focuses on support, guidance, and encouragement of reflective teaching. He described the reflective practitioner as one who is a “builder of repertoire” through inquiry rather than a collector of procedures and methods. Reflection, according to Grant and Zeichner (1984) is defined as “deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement” (p. 40). The reflective practitioner, then, is one who is engaged in a continuous cycle of recognizing and acknowledging doubt or uncertainty about one’s level of expertise, drawing inferences based on previous experiences, choosing a course of action, testing inferences and finally making choices through the practice of further reflection (Blase & Blase, 2004; Schon, 1983).

The most effective educational leaders in Blasé and Blasé’s study (2004) used strategies described as giving descriptive feedback to teachers, asking questions, soliciting feedback and opinions from teachers, and listening actively when engaged in teacher/principal conferences. According to Blasé and Blasé, teacher learning and growth, along with an increased sense of efficacy, can be increased by principals or other instructional leaders who engage in and value conversations encouraging teachers to become more aware of and reflective on their own learning and professional practice.

Similarly, one of Bambrick-Santoyo’s (2012) seven levers or core areas of school leadership present in those leaders who “drive consistent, transformational, and replicable growth” (p. 9) in successful schools, is observation and feedback, where all teachers are given professional, one-on-one coaching to increase their effectiveness as teachers. According to Bambrick-Santoyo, keys to a successful observation and feedback model include scheduled observations that occur once a
week. Within these observations, leaders must identify two or three most important areas for growth and be prepared to give direct face-to-face feedback as well as offer specific action steps for improvement. Additionally, there must be systems in place to ensure that feedback translates to practice.

In his discussion on developing teacher expertise, Marzano (2010) noted that “deliberate practice” is a multi-faceted construct and that one of the central features of deliberate practice is feedback. Erickson et al. (1993) wrote that “in the absence of feedback, efficient learning is impossible and improvement only minimal even for highly motivated subjects. Hence, mere repetition of an activity will not automatically lead to improvement” (p. 367).

**Feedback**

A critical component of the comprehensive observation/feedback model being examined in my study is that of feedback. Both teachers and their respective deans are engaged in a continual process of giving and receiving feedback based on weekly classroom observations and interactions. Understanding the value of and implications of this feedback is useful when looking at the impacts on overall teacher and leader efficacy and the resulting changes in practices.

According to Tschennen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007), the common practice of twice-a-year visits from an administrator with a preprinted evaluation form does not provide enough feedback to adequately shape a teacher’s belief about his or her capabilities. This lack of meaningful feedback that has been common in traditional supervisory practice frequently results in teachers who do not often look to their administrators as a reliable source to inform their self-efficacy judgments.
Ponticell and Zepada (2004) noted that rarely does learning occur through the traditional supervision and evaluation process that principals and teachers have most frequently experienced as they fulfill requirements established by law or district policy. They stated that adult learning is typically a self-directed, intrinsically motivated, individual process and is more about “expanding skills, developing new knowledge and perspectives, and honing expertise to solve real-life problems than it is about complying with directives issued with a performance rating” (p. 54).

Giving teachers opportunities for reflection on their goals and practice, self-assessments of their progress toward those goals, and collaborative goal setting enhances self-direction. Intrinsic motivation is enhanced through a focus on commitment as opposed to compliance when leaders create opportunities for teachers to identify areas of strength and choose areas for growth. When teachers set goals for their own professional growth based on developing skills needed to increase student learning, coupled with the identification of resources and supports needed to support their professional development plan, intrinsic motivation is increased (Ponticell & Zepada, 2004).

In his research on the power of feedback, Hattie (1987) stated that a critical aspect of feedback is the information given to an individual about the attainment of learning goals as they relate to a task or performance. In their research on motivation and personality as it relates to goal setting, Dweck and Leggett (1988) defined learning goal orientation as the motivation to improve one’s competencies through learning new skills, as well as through learning to complete new and increasingly complex tasks. Performance goal orientation refers to a person’s motivation to outperform others, to seek affirmation of one’s competencies, and to avoid negative
feedback. People who possess a strong learning goal orientation tend to view feedback, whether it is positive or negative, as diagnostically relevant information they can use to increase their skills and abilities, while people with a strong performance goal orientation, frequently view ability as challenging to develop and therefore are more likely to validate and demonstrate the ability they currently possess rather than focus on increasing capabilities (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

It is human nature for individuals to go to great lengths to confirm their own self-perceptions by focusing most closely on feedback that fits their view of themselves. Often they will try to arrange their environment and experiences to acquire additional self-confirming evidence. According to Hattie (1987), people also tend to reject or ignore negative accounts of their behavior that differ from their own beliefs or invoke an external frame of reference.

Feedback is most effective when it delivers information about an individual’s progress and/or about how to proceed in order to meet a goal. According to Kluger and DeNisi (1996), feedback is more effective when it gives the receiver information on correct rather than incorrect responses and when it builds on changes from previous attempts. Feedback is also influenced by the difficulty of the goals and tasks at hand and has the greatest impact when those goals are challenging, specific and of a lower task complexity. People are more likely to increase effort to reach a goal or change behaviors when those goals are clear, when there is a high level of commitment, and when belief in eventual success is high (Hattie, 1996, 2007).

Hattie and Timperley (2007) defined feedback as a “consequence of performance” and state that the main purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between a person’s current understandings, performance level, and a desired goal.
Productive feedback provides information that relates to the task or learning that fills in the gap between what is currently understood and what the learner desires to understand. This learning happens through a variety of cognitive processes including restructuring understandings, confirming that the learner is correct or incorrect, indicating that more information is needed or available, and/or presenting alternative strategies to understand information.

Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) research stated that effective feedback must answer three major questions: Where am I going (what are the goals?); How am I going (What progress is being made toward the goal?); and where to next (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?). Hattie calls this process “Feed up, feed back, and feed forward” (p. 85).

Without quality feedback to guide and inform teaching, it is unlikely that a teacher will independently create goals for his or her own professional growth. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) stated that creative individuals who are good at what they do, internalize constructive feedback to the extent that they can self-monitor and correct without the help of experts. Rather than continuing the practice of isolated annual or semi-annual events of the feedback that is offered in traditional evaluations, feedback presented continually throughout the school year better fosters teacher’s self-directedness, especially when delivered in a collaborative approach employing such skills as listening, clarifying, problem solving, presenting, and negotiating (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Feeney, 2007; Glickman, 2002). Winne and Butler (1994) claimed that “feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is
domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies” (p. 5740).

A primary element necessary for schools to develop teacher expertise and the resulting increase in teacher efficacy is a focus on feedback and practice. Hattie (1987) acknowledged the connection between feedback and self-efficacy when he states that the ways and manners in which an individual interprets feedback is the key to developing positive and valuable concepts of self-efficacy about learning and in turn leads to further learning. Positive feedback tends to increase motivation relative to negative feedback when considering a task that people “want to do” and decreases motivation relative to negative feedback for a task that people “have to do.” According to Hattie, people who are committed to a goal are more likely to learn as a function of positive feedback. When expected to complete a task that they are not committed to, those same individuals are more likely to learn as a function of negative feedback.

The ways and manner in which individuals interpret feedback is crucial to understanding how the positive and valuable concepts of self-efficacy are developed. Highly efficacious and low efficacious people tend to view and process both positive and negative feedback differently. For persons who have low levels of self-efficacy, positive feedback about initial successes may confirm that they have deficiencies needing to be remedied. These beliefs may result in a person striving to remedy these “deficiencies” to reach a passable level of performance with further tests running the risk of disconfirming any favorable outcomes. Hattie states that these same low efficacious people tend to react to negative feedback by experiencing negative affect, exhibiting less motivation on subsequent tasks, and attributing the feedback less to
effort and more to ability. Runhaar, Sanders, and Yang (2010) found that teachers who have a weak or low sense of occupational (teacher) efficacy are more likely to believe that reflection and feedback will expose more weaknesses than strengths. Consequently, they avoid reflection and feedback asking.

On the other hand, highly efficacious people who receive feedback about an initial success may view this as a talent or potential ability, which leads to better coping in the face of feedback that may eventually be disconfirming. These highly efficacious people translate feedback as positive verifications of themselves as learners. They tend to make optimistic predictions about their performance after initial failure than after initial success and according to Hattie (1987), seek specifically unfavorable feedback in order to excel at tasks. Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy expect that reflection and feedback will indeed reveal weaker aspects of their functioning, but will also lead to confirmation or discovery of strong points as well. These same teachers expect that with effort, they can overcome their weaker points and their skills and do not necessarily find that the discovery of weaknesses will have a negative impact on their behavior (Runhaar et al., 2010).

In his 1993 study, Bandura claimed that self-efficacy at the individual teacher level partly depends on the collective self-efficacy at the school level as people’s sense of self-efficacy is partly based on the positive feedback they get from others. Understanding this is important for leaders as they work to create a culture where successes and strengths of people are acknowledged and celebrated (Runhaar et al., 2010). Equally important for leaders to keep in mind is the understanding that the process of reflection and asking for feedback can be regarded as “risky” by teachers as they can potentially be given information that may be detrimental to their self-
confident. Runhaar et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of leaders being adequately equipped to provide an external support in order to encourage teachers to engage in such risky behavior. While teachers with a strong learning goal orientation generally already have the motivation to engage in reflection and feedback asking, for those teachers with a strong performance goal orientation, having a leader possessing a transformational style of leadership may significantly increase their willingness to reflect and seek feedback. As teachers grow in their beliefs that they can effectively cope with the difficulties they encounter in their classrooms, the more they reflect on their practices and ask colleagues, students, or their managers for feedback. As they set goals to improve their abilities and to master increasingly more complex tasks, the more willing they are to reflect and ask for feedback. According to Runhaar et al., “teachers’ convictions that in general they can cope with difficult situations and are able to execute the behavior that is needed to meet situational demands, is a prerequisite for their motivation to improve themselves” (p. 1159).

Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter I have presented Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory and his social cognitive theory (1986) along with Tschannen-Moran’s and Woolfolk Hoy’s (2001) construct of teacher efficacy and Paglis’ and Green’s (2002) theory of leader efficacy as the theoretical foundation for my proposed study. These theories discuss how those teachers and leaders with a high sense of teacher or leader efficacy demonstrate greater effort, persistence, and resilience when faced with obstacles and challenges in their profession, while those with a lower sense of efficacy doubt their capabilities and avoid challenging situations. Through the four major sources of information presented by Bandura as performance accomplishments, vicarious
experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states, both teachers and their leaders will typically approach, explore, and manage situations within their self-perceived capabilities. These beliefs will influence how they feel, think, and motivate themselves.

As there is considerable research linking teacher efficacy to supervision, student achievement, and the behaviors of leaders, especially as these behaviors pertain to teacher supervision, a brief history of and perspective of supervision practices is presented. A considerable amount of research shows that organizational factors, along with the ways in which educational leaders interact with teachers has a significant impact on increasing teacher efficacy, especially among novice teachers. Current reforms in teacher supervision and evaluation practices, especially those promoting developmental or active supervision call for a greater understanding of the value of encouraging teacher and leader reflection through the practices of frequent observations and ongoing feedback. Using Hattie and Timperley’s 2007 definition of feedback as a “consequence of performance” and understanding that the goal of feedback is to reduce the differences between both the teacher’s and the leader’s current understandings and their desired goals, my study explored the experiences of teachers and their leaders as they engage in an ongoing practice of intensive observations and feedback sessions together. My study sought to determine the value of this model for the participants as well as the changes to teacher and leader efficacy and practices.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of my phenomenological qualitative study is to explore how classroom teachers and their deans (as supervisors) make meaning of an intensive observation and feedback process. Throughout this study I explore the phenomenon associated with the teachers and deans involved in this process in an attempt to learn how they each describe their perceived sense of teacher or leader efficacy, the potential changes to their developing classroom and leadership practices, the developing relationship between teachers and deans, and the perceived value of this process for the professional development of each participant. To complete this study, I used a semi-structured interview protocol to elicit the lived experiences of all participants. This study further aims to answer the following research questions:

1) How do teachers engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process describe:

   a) perceived changes in their teaching practices after receiving frequent and ongoing observations and feedback;
   b) perceived changes in their teacher-efficacy as this process unfolds;
   c) their perceived developing relationships with their dean; and
   d) the perceived value obtained from this observation and feedback process in their professional development as teachers?

2) How do deans engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process describe:

   a) their perceived development as instructional leaders as they implement this model;
b) the perceived changes in their leader-efficacy as they participate in this process;
c) their perceived developing relationships with the teachers with whom they make frequent observations and give ongoing feedback; and
d) the perceived value obtained from this observation and feedback process in their professional development as leaders?

This chapter includes a discussion of the research methodology chosen for this study. The selection process of participants, data collection and analysis procedures, data validity and reliability, and the limitations and delimitations of the study will be presented.

**Study Design**

A phenomenological study describes the meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a concept. It focuses on what all participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon. Phenomenological research relies heavily on a philosophical component as defined by the German mathematician Husserl and American psychologist Moustakas (1994), where “the focus is exclusively and continually aimed at understanding human experience” (p. 19). Creswell (2007) described phenomenology as “the study of the lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are conscious ones, and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences, not explanations or analyses” (p. 58). Problems best suited for this type of research are those in which it seems important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon especially when understanding these common experiences can add to a clearer understanding of the development or improvement of practices or policies. The common experience of this
study is that of participation in an observation/feedback model designed to improve teacher quality in the classroom.

Creswell (2007) recommended that qualitative researchers reduce the entire study to a single overarching question with several sub-questions. In this phenomenological study one overarching question will guide the research with a few supporting questions to help focus the process. The overarching question or purpose of my phenomenological qualitative study is to explore how classroom teachers and their deans (as supervisors) make meaning of an intensive observation and feedback process and how they each describe their sense of teacher or leader efficacy and the potential changes to their developing classroom and leadership practices.

In a phenomenological study, the primary goal is to determine what an common experience means for those who have lived the experience and are able to describe it (Moustakas, 2004). Through careful investigation and exploration, I sought to discover the meaning of the lived experience of both teachers and their leaders in order to identify the core essence of a shared human experience taking place in the context of their professional lives, in this case the experience of both giving and receiving frequent observations and feedback, its potential impact on their perceived teacher and leader efficacy, their perceived growth as professionals, and the perceived value of their developing relationships.

Participants for this study were carefully chosen to be individuals who are all currently experiencing the phenomenon of observing or being observed and giving or receiving feedback so that a deep, rich understanding of the issue can be determined. Through an extensive and in depth engagement with a small number of individuals and individual interviews conducted over several months, I will begin to develop
patterns and relationships of meaning about what this process means to both teachers and their leaders and how their professional practices, sense of efficacy, and relationships change over the course of time.

**Setting**

The selection of subjects in a qualitative study is purposeful, meaning that individuals and sites selected for this study should “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). For the purposes of this study and to help me best understand the experiences of both teachers and leaders engaged in this process, I purposefully selected six teachers and six deans from several mid-west charter school academies that are currently implementing this comprehensive observation/feedback model. The schools I used for my study are all charter schools operated by the same management organization. This model has been in place in a number of schools within this organization for over seven years. Within this system, these schools are primarily located in urban areas and typically serve students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. Teachers in these schools have varied levels of experience although more teachers with fewer than five years of teaching experience are employed than are experienced teachers. The majority of the deans are in their first experiences of serving as administrators or instructional leaders.

Each of the participants in my study is actively serving as either a teacher or a dean currently participating in weekly observations and feedback sessions. As the primary method of instructional leadership in this organization, deans are typically assigned as the direct manager of nine to twelve teachers. The primary function of the dean is to serve as an instructional leader through a process of weekly observation
sessions of teachers and a weekly 30 minute one-on-one meeting with each direct report. In these meetings, the dean and the teacher reflect on the observed lesson and take part in an ongoing conversation designed to both support the professional development of the teacher and to build a strong working relationship between the leader and the teacher. Each teacher, with input from the dean, chooses two or more skills or instructional strategies that he or she would like to develop in their teaching practice. These skills and strategies are outlined and described in a document known to teachers and deans as the Teacher Observation Protocol, or TOPs.

Expectations for the number of skills mastered over the course of the years that this observation/feedback model has been in place have ranged from more than eight skills per year to four. During a brief weekly observation typically lasting from 12 to 15 minutes, the dean looks for evidence of these skills or strategies, along with evidence that the teacher is using other school-wide strategies and initiatives in their teaching. The data from this observation becomes the focus of the weekly feedback session. It is important to note that this feedback session is highly structured and allows for 15 minutes in which the teacher is free to share whatever information, thoughts, reflections, or concerns he or she wants to discuss. The second 15 minutes is set aside for the dean to provide feedback on the observation, discuss student achievement data, or address performance concerns. Each dean receives training by the management company and the building principal on how to give both affirming and adjusting feedback to their direct reports. Building principals provide ongoing support and mentoring for each dean in order to develop deans into effective instructional leaders.

Sample
Permission to use the school sites was obtained from the management organization and the building principal from each participating school. Once consent from both the management organization and each building principal was secured I contacted teachers and deans via e-mail in four schools inviting them to participate in my study. From a pool of all interested teacher and dean participants I selected six teachers with an experience range of less than one to 12 years, and six deans whose years of experience in the position ranged from less than one year to more than six years. A seventh teacher with less than two years and a seventh dean with three years of experience were selected to participate but chose not to continue with the study due to professional and personal obligations. Follow up phone calls and emails were made to each participant who responded and I held an informational meeting in which I explained the goals and significance of my study and the time commitment involved to interested teachers and deans. I also informed all parties both in writing and in person of the confidentiality of their participation in this study and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time (See Appendix A and Appendix B).

**Data Collection**

Data collection occurred throughout the winter and spring of 2015 over a time period of 10-12 weeks. All data gathered from participant resources was collected with explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. During the initial meeting with each participant I explained the purpose of and process for the study as well as the time commitment involved, answered any questions, and acquired participant consent to
participate in my study. Confidentiality was assured to each participant by assigning a code to each participant for use in data analysis and findings. Each participant chose the meeting time and place that was most convenient for them for each of the three interviews.

For the purposes of my phenomenological study, I interviewed six teachers and six deans using semi-structured, in-depth interview protocols as the primary means of data collection. In depth interviews are an appropriate method of data collection for a phenomenological study such as this because the purpose is not to get answers to questions or to test hypotheses, but rather to understand the lived experiences of the teachers and deans in this study and the meaning they make of this experience (Seidman, 2006). In phenomenological interviewing, Seidman (2006) recommended conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant. Doing so helped me, as the researcher, to put the experiences of the participants in context. While I used a series of three semi-structured interview protocols with each participant, these protocols served primarily as a guide while still allowing participants to openly share their own unique experiences with this observation/feedback model with follow up questions and further inquiries. I also sought to ensure credibility by conducting interviews that fully allowed each participant to identify the issues that are most critical to them in order to get to the essence of their experiences; 34 of the 36 interviews were done face-to-face in order to capture subtle nuances such as facial expressions, body language, etc. and to keep the conversations as natural and free flowing as possible. Two final interviews were conducted over the phone due to time constraints on the part of the participants. As the researcher, I took notes throughout the interview process in order the capture
information that seemed important or interesting. The interview protocols and questions are attached as Appendix A.

Throughout the course of this study each teacher and dean participated in three individual interviews to discuss the ongoing changes to their teaching and leadership practices, feelings of confidence and competence, and the developing relationship between teacher and dean. The first interview, lasting approximately 45 minutes, took place within the first two weeks of the study. The purpose of this first interview was to collect background information and to ask questions about previous experiences using this observation/feedback model. The initial interview also served to put the participants’ experiences in context as I asked them to tell me as much as possible about themselves and their experiences with this observation feedback model up to the present time. I gathered initial thoughts from both teachers and deans regarding their current thinking about their efficacy as teachers or leaders. In addition, I explored each participant’s professional goals that they hoped to achieve as a result of their involvement in the teacher/dean relationship.

Mid-way through the study, a second 45 minute interview was conducted as an opportunity for both teachers and deans to reflect on their personal experiences and to share with me how they are making meaning of the observation/feedback process and their developing relationships. The second interview concentrated on the present details of their experiences as they are living them throughout the study.

In the third and final 45-60 minute interview, I asked each participant to reflect on the meaning of his or her experience in this observation/feedback model. I also asked both teachers and deans to discuss what, if any, value this model has had for their professional growth as teachers or deans.
Each of these face-to-face interviews was recorded and then carefully transcribed and checked for accuracy. In order to more fully understand the context and expectations of this model, I also examined samples of the teacher observation protocol rubric and the observation protocols used for giving affirming and adjusting feedback in weekly one-on-one sessions and the teacher evaluation rubric. These protocols serve to guide both the observations conducted by the dean and the resulting feedback sessions. The teacher observation protocol rubrics provide detailed information of the various instructional skills and strategies that the dean and teacher decide to focus on in their work together. The one-on-one tracking form provides structure for the dean to make notes of teacher reflections, to prepare for the feedback they intend to deliver, and to outline future steps and follow up tasks or items.

**Data Analysis**

The goal of data analysis in a qualitative study is to prepare and organize the data, reduce it into themes through a process of coding, and finally to synthesize the data in figures, tables or a discussion. Creswell (2007) explained the process of phenomenological data analysis as one in which the researcher first reads through the data typically making margin notes to form initial codes, then begins to describe the essence of the phenomenon through the development of significant statements and meaning units. These statements and meanings are interpreted into a textural description of “what happened,” a structural description of “how the phenomenon was experienced,” and finally “the essence” is developed and reported in a narration.

After conducting each series of interviews I carefully transcribed each recorded interview. Initial notes and memos were taken even as soon as the first interviews were completed and continued throughout the entire interview
transcribing, data collection, and analysis process. After reading and re-reading through each interview, I began the process of identifying emergent codes, patterns, categories, and themes that would help me to better understand this experience through the voices of the participants. Richards (2009) explained this process of emergence as one in which the researcher, through careful exploration and inquiry, discovers themes or threads in the data. From these data, the researcher “emerges ideas, categories, concepts, themes, hunches, and ways of relating them” (p. 74).

Through both an analytic and topic coding process I categorized and coded emerging themes. Analytic coding required that I rethink and review these categories and codes throughout the study, making coding a process of discovery rather than descriptions (Richards, 2009).

Finally, I used the categories and themes that were emerging from the data to interpret the meaning and the experiences being shared. This analysis identified patterns or similar ideas based on the sharing of each participant of their experience of this observation/feedback model. To fully grasp each teacher and dean’s experience of this observation/feedback model I created participant profiles describing each participants professional background, professional goals, personal experiences with the model and its perceived value, and their thoughts on the potential impact of this model on their professional growth as teachers or leaders. A final analysis led to findings, including limitations, individual and independent insights, and generalizations of this study.

**Data Validity and Reliability**

Creswell (2003, 2007) suggested various methods for validating the findings in a qualitative phenomenology. For this study I utilized three different techniques
that have proven to be most useful: triangulation, member checking and peer-debriefing. These strategies address the need to show that the findings from this research are “trustworthy,” “authentic,” and “credible” (Mertens, 2005).

Through the examination of several different sources of data, specifically the transcribed interviews, I triangulated the data and used it to build justification for the themes that emerged. I also deeply considered my own biases, in which my own interests in and experiences with this observation/feedback model may have influenced the meanings I developed from the findings. Member-checking gave me an opportunity to take the final report and description of the themes back to those teachers and deans who I interviewed and determine whether or not they found these descriptions to be accurate and whether or not I have truly captured the essence of their experience. Peer debriefing gave me an opportunity to find an outside person to review and ask questions about my study in order to determine whether or not the research “makes sense” to anyone other than myself.

Additionally, I piloted my interview questions with one teacher and one dean prior to using them in the actual study. This helped to ensure that the questions were appropriate for exploring this phenomenon as well as provided me with an opportunity to better develop my own skills as an interviewer.

**The Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the primary data collection instrument. This requires me as the researcher to clearly identify my own personal values, assumptions, and biases prior to beginning my study and throughout the data collection and analysis process. In order for me to fully understand the experience of the others, it was important for me to “bracket” my own personal background and
experiences as a principal in a school currently using this observation/feedback model. It is important to note that research for this study was conducted in schools in which I am not, and have never been employed. In order to establish authenticity, it is necessary for me to present a fair and balanced view of all perspectives, values and beliefs of all participants. I did this by clearly and continually identifying any conflicts or value differences between the study participants and myself as the researcher. The best way to do this is through the creation of an epoche, a process defined by Moustakas (1994) as a process of setting aside pre-judgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the ideas being studied. Through the process of creating an epoche, I was better able to gain clarity from my own preconceptions. In addition, I also worked to maintain a high level of awareness of my own predispositions and assumptions through a process of memoing, and data analysis (Mertens, 2005). Patton (1990) suggested that this self-reflection on the part of the researcher should be an ongoing process throughout the research and not just a one-time event. This process of setting aside and questioning my own biases and pre-judgments continued throughout the duration of my entire study.

As the primary researcher who collected and analyzed the data for this study, it is important to note my background as a principal in a building currently using this model of teacher observation and feedback. As a building principal, I am responsible for supervising the deans who in turn supervise, observe, and give feedback to classroom teachers. Throughout this study, as principal in two different schools, I have worked very closely with six deans who were all in their first leadership experiences as we implemented this model in schools with both novice and experienced teachers. I currently serve as principal in a school that is in its third year
of implementing this process of weekly observations and feedback. Prior to being named principal of my current school, I was the principal of a school in which this observation/feedback model was being introduced for the first time after having had a traditional principal/assistant principal model for over ten years. It is important to note that while I have worked with several deans as a principal over the past seven years, I, myself, have never been in the dean role, nor have I served as a teacher in a school utilizing this observation/feedback model. While certainly the relationships and experiences of individual deans and teachers will vary from school to school, I believe that the findings of this study will add to our understanding of how both teachers and leaders might grow and become more effective as educators.

**Ethical Considerations**

All HSIRB protocols for approval of this study were carefully followed. All participants received and were asked to sign an informed consent document along with a research agreement outlining the study and ensuring confidentiality of their participation.

It is important to note that the participants of this study understood that if at any time they felt they needed to withdraw from the study that they may do so without penalty. No one was coerced to participate and in no way did participation in this study jeopardize employment within the district. A seventh teacher and seventh dean participant each withdrew from the study due to personal and professional obligations.

**Limitations/Delimitations**

Limitations are provided to identify potential weaknesses in a study (Creswell, 2003). The purposive sampling procedure I used for this study will decrease the
generalizability of my findings. The use of a small, specific, targeted population in this study limits the ability for findings to be generalized to the larger population (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). My study focused on the experiences of twelve educators within one school system and cannot be generalized to other educators or other systems.

Delimitations narrow the scope of this study and describe the population to which generalizations can be safely made (Locke et al., 2007). Educators participating in this study may benefit from the findings of this study by helping them to understand and explain how they make sense of and find value in this observation/feedback model, the changes in their practices, and the developing relationship between teacher and dean. Others may find this information interesting and beneficial as it adds to the body of knowledge of reforming supervision models.

Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter I have presented the design and methodology of my study. Using a phenomenological research design, I explored the rich, lived experience of six teachers and six deans involved in an intensive observation/feedback model. Through the theoretical lens of Bandura’s (1977, 1986) constructs of self-efficacy and social cognitive theory, and the resulting theories of teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfok Hoy, 2001) and leader efficacy (Paglis & Green, 2002), my study sought to better understand the “essence” of how these 12 participants make meaning of their experiences. Although my study is limited to several schools in one charter school organization, my findings can benefit other educators both within and outside of this organization as the voices and experiences of teachers and their deans as their supervisors share the impact that frequent observations and ongoing feedback
have had on their development as educators and on their perceived teacher and leader efficacy. Additionally, my study expands the body of knowledge on the importance of developing trust, delivering meaningful and actionable feedback, and the importance of having both teachers and leaders set professional development goals in order to increase both teacher and leader efficacy. Chapter 4 presents the findings for this study.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In Chapter 4, I provide a profile of each teacher and dean who participated in this study. These profiles outline each participant’s professional background, current school setting, experiences with this observation/feedback model, and the value they receive from it.

Teacher 1 – TCH1

Setting the Stage

TCH1 is a teacher with 11 years of teaching experience in urban communities, a role she describes as one for which she has a very big heart. Prior to her current school she served eight years at another school that she describes as a very negative experience. At her previous school she served as a second grade teacher in a challenging environment where she says it was a fight to get the resources and support she needed. She seldom saw anyone from administration and states that she received her evaluation at the end of the school year without having received any observations.

I went weeks without seeing my principal. There was nobody in my room! I could have been down there finger-painting with my kids and they wouldn’t have any idea, so even when they would say things like, “oh you’re a really good teacher…how do you know? You’re not in my room!

Shortly after her current school opened its doors four years ago, she accepted a third grade teaching position and remained in that position until this year when she became an intervention specialist working with those students who are most at-risk of not making grade level objectives. The school is an urban public charter school
academy, in the urban center of a major Midwestern city; 99% of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch. It currently has a student body of approximately 700 students in grades K-8 with a student body that is 99% African American.

TCH1 describes her school as one with “so much love;” one where staff members receive a great deal of support from their leadership team. Teachers have plentiful resources despite the struggles and upheaval present in this high poverty, learning environment. She describes a school where leadership is focused on building a community where all members feel safe and supported and help each other out, where the administration is visible, transparent, and actively working with teachers as they navigate the daily challenges this school faces such as low student achievement, challenging behaviors, a transient student body, and high teacher turnover. The school currently is short one dean, leaving three deans to implement this observation/feedback model.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

Though TCH1 came to this school seeking feedback and growth opportunities and “wanting to get better” she describes her initial reactions to the model as being “scared out of her mind.” Aware of her nervousness, her dean tried to make the process as easy as possible. Having previously received evaluations at the end of the year despite having had no administrative observation in her classroom, she was uncertain and anxious at first and needed someone to reassure her that she could trust the system. She reports not knowing what to expect, often wondering whether her dean was going to simply sit back and observe, step in during a lesson if something wasn’t correct, or wait until later to give her feedback. She reflected that perhaps she had a different perspective and increased anxiety as a new employee in this building
because of the negative working conditions she had recently come from. She reflected on how coming to this new organization after working at her previous school for eight years made her feel like a first year teacher again.

When I went to [school] I was scared and told my husband, I don’t know if I’m a good enough teacher to be there…I think I’m a great teacher, but how do I know? Maybe my past eight years I’ve just been screwing everything up, so it was scary to go into that. The culture, everything was so completely different. It really knocked me for a loop and it took me a year for me to be okay, I’m going to be alright, even though they told me, but from past experience I was like, yes, but what are you not telling me?

Turning to a co-worker she knew from her previous school, she was reassured that her dean was there for support not judgment. Her dean, knowing of her apprehension, made sure that initially she was told when observations would happen, a practice that would most likely change throughout the year.

I don’t always do this, you don’t always know about it…we sat down, talked about TOPs, he told me these are the things that we’re looking for, so when I come in, this is what I’m looking for specifically. I’m not going to tear you apart, when we’re done and we talk about it, I’m going to make suggestions to help you, not necessarily to knock you down. So that made a difference too because I knew after the first few times, I believed him when he said I’m coming to help you, not bring you down.

Despite clearly being very nervous the first couple of times she was observed, she reports that her dean never came back with anything that she was doing “glaringly wrong” and that when her dean saw something he had thoughts about, he did not
automatically make a judgment but rather asked her questions clarifying what was happening. She was relieved to learn that as an observer coming in for 15-20 minutes realized that he was only seeing a little piece of the instruction and didn’t necessarily see what had happened before or after their time in the classroom.

Her first one-on one-meetings with her dean were very casual sessions meant to get to know each other. These meetings consisted of her dean asking about her needs, asking clarifying questions about the observation, and avoiding any judgments or negative feedback, resulting in a “constant give and take of suggestions.”

Recommendations were made to watch videos on classroom management techniques and teaching practices that are required of every teacher in the organization, a practice that TCH1 admits was initially difficult for this self-reported stubborn teacher. Once TCH1 got over the fact that she was going from a culture of having very little structure and complete freedom in the classroom to now being in a highly structured environment that she labeled “a little more intense” where she did not have as much autonomy, she began to see the reasoning behind the expectations and recognized the difference it could make in her practice.

I was looking for something different, because I had been in the previous school and I was tired of fighting for everything and I just knew that there was something better out there, but I didn’t know how to find it on my own. I think that it made a difference because I was looking for some kind of change. I wanted somebody to come in and grab me and say, hey, you should try this because it will work better for you.

**Relationship with Dean**
TCH1 noted that building relationships with her dean was key to her success. Throughout her four years at the school she has worked with three different deans. While she reports becoming close to her first dean by the end of the first year, she states that she had significant anxiety in the beginning. Their relationship became stronger largely because of the dean’s visibility.

At [school] they are in our hallways and they speak to us everyday, they greet us at the door, or they’ll come in and just check in and that makes a difference too, and so [dean] was in my room everyday, even if it wasn’t to observe it was to just say Hi, how are you doing? Are you okay today?

She reports that building a relationship with her second dean was easier and more casual. By reaching out to her prior to the beginning of the school year and stating “I just want you to know that I’ll be your dean for the coming year and I’m excited to work with you” TCH1 and her new dean began their transition to a new relationship. The fact that this dean had more recently been in a classroom position than her former dean, coupled with their similar personalities made it “easier to mesh” and made her feedback seem a “little more realistic” to TCH1. While her prior dean held a model of “this is what teachers should be doing,” this new dean believed “Okay, in the real world we know this isn’t going to work but this is what we’re shooting for so how do we get there with the dynamics in the classroom that you have.”

Her dean this year has what TCH1 calls a “big personality, very, very real.” While she had a more personal relationship with her second dean, the relationship with this dean is much more of a coaching one. TCH1 appreciates this dean’s transparency and direct style of communication when she says, “This is what you
need to do, you’ve got to be okay with this…we promise you that you’re not just
going to be thrown under the bus.”

**Changing and Maintaining Relationships**

When sharing how her relationships with her deans have changed over time, TCH1 reports that she is not afraid to be honest with her dean or disagree when necessary. If she’s upset, she lets her dean know. Much of this is due to the transparency of her current dean who at times tells her “this is what you need to do.” As a result, her relationship with her dean has become much closer over the year. She can be very honest and direct with her at times making the relationship be “challenging, because she’s not afraid to tell me that I’m wrong, but we have the agreement to disagree.” Her view of her dean is that she is a leader who is there to support her and has her back. She views her relationship with her dean as a realistic relationship, one that is comfortable enough to talk about personal things with the confidence that it’s not going to go anywhere else.

**Weekly Observations**

In this observation/feedback model teachers are observed for 12-15 minutes every week. Deans may or may not tell the teacher when they are coming to their classroom. Twice a year, a full observation occurs, lasting a minimum of 40 minutes. During the observation in TCH1’s school, deans are typically sitting somewhere in the classroom where they will not interact with students or the teacher. They take notes, look for progress in agreed upon teaching practices and strategies, and occasionally take pictures or record videos of teachers. TCH1 states that once she got over her initial nervousness, having a dean observe her in the classroom became much easier. This was especially noticeable with her second dean as she had just
recently left her own classroom to move into leadership. TCH1 describes a distracting observation this year when nine adults came into observe. Though students are used to people coming in, having so many adults enter the room felt disruptive and caused students to stop listening and look around. She also commented that having pictures taken while she is teaching can be a bit distracting. She worries when observers start talking while she is teaching as she “wants to know what they’re saying because I automatically think that they’re talking about me.” While being observed, TCH1 reports that she goes through a mental check-list in her head to make sure she remembers all of the various skills and strategies she is being observed on.

Am I remembering all the skills? Am I doing that, am I reviewing the I can statement. And then I’m worried about the work for my independent groups. Is it rigorous enough? Did I pick the right activity for today? Are they going to understand that my one little boy is still at a kindergarten level and still working on recognizing letters? I keep telling myself it is what it is. It’s too late to do anything about it now because they’re already in here.

One-on-One Conversations and Receiving Feedback

After weekly observations, TCH 1 and her dean sit down for a half an hour, one-on-one conversation about the observation and progress being made toward her goals. There is generally a consistent structure to these one-on-one meetings known as 03s. TCH1 reported that her first dean was very casual in these initial 03s and would spend a lot of time getting to know her by asking how things are going, sharing good news and asking about any needs. Her next dean structured meetings in much the same way, giving TCH 1 the first 15 minutes to talk about anything she wanted to discuss before taking the next 15 minutes to share feedback about the most recent
Her current dean, in a similar fashion, will ask how things are, share good news and then continue the conversation where it left off the last time they met. TCH1 reports that her current dean has recorded some observations but that they have never watched them. TCH1 prepares for these meetings by “considering any major concerns or pressing student issues that need to be addressed.” She reports that she does not receive feedback at every 03.

She states that these feedback sessions are generally very positive and do not feel like a critique of her work with the students. Suggestions are made for her to try and she embraces this feedback because “they know me because they have been in my room.” She reports that the feedback she receives is specific and consistent, authentic and genuine. She states that for her feedback is always affirming…you’re doing well in this area, there’s always that little ‘try this’ to improve me. I’ve never had any dean tell me something that I didn’t agree with. If I did I would probably say, I don’t agree with you, but let’s figure out why, or I don’t understand what is meant.

The credibility of the feedback she receives is important to TCH1. She believes that it is the visibility of her dean that makes it more credible. She is “going to give more weight to the feedback that somebody gives me who knows me and is around me.”

In addition to the credibility of the feedback, consistency in this model is extremely important to TCH1. She reflected that her first dean was very consistent, and while the deans and members of the current leadership team are visible and check in with teachers every day, she wishes that observation and subsequent feedback sessions were more consistent. Increased challenges and upheaval in the school, the
demands of student testing, and the fact that the leadership team is currently short staffed, has impacted her dean’s ability to consistently meet with her for an 03. She notes that while she frequently stops in her dean’s office or her dean is in her classroom, and that they talk frequently, set meeting times “don’t always pan out.” This seems to be especially challenging and disappointing for her as the school year begins to wind down.

I know that’s really hard in a school cause things change all the time, I mean for me to personally have those 03s is fantastic but since testing is starting and we are short a dean, I haven’t had an 03 since before Easter break... I understand why, but it’s like you go in there and you kind of get a pep talk and this is the time when we need that. It’s a long haul to the end of the school year, so it kind of stinks that I don’t get that on a regular basis. It’s nice to have that half hour of just one-on-one time that’s just ours.

Setting Goals

TCH 1 and her dean work closely together to develop goals to enhance her professional growth. Using the Teacher Observation Protocol (TOPS) that is used throughout the organization, they choose strategies or skills that she will focus on in the classroom and that the dean will look for in weekly observations. She reports that she and the dean each pick three goals and have a conversation about why they have chosen those goals before narrowing them down to two or three focus areas.

It’s funny because we’ve been in sync so she picks hers independently and I pick mine and then we come together and they’re almost the same…she tries to give me goals that I kind of almost have with a little refinement or a little
more of this, you would get there…so it’s not like giving me something that’s so far away that I’m going to feel like I’m never going to get there.

TCH1 reports that her goals are “always in her face” and that her school is definitely very goal driven, stating that “it’s everywhere that you go, and honestly, it makes it easier to keep it [the goals] in the front of your head because it’s always there, someone is always talking about a goal.” She states that while her dean has never sat down and asked her specifically about her own professional goals, she has professional goals that are centered around the children she teaches. She tries to “stay away from performance type goals.” Instead, she creates a list of what worked well in the classroom along with what did not and uses these findings to help set a direction for the upcoming year. She reports that she shares these professional goals with her dean and uses dean feedback to measure her growth. However, she does not often talk to her dean about her personal goals, other than the possibility of beginning to work toward a leadership degree.

**Growing as a Professional**

TCH1 believes that her deans have had an impact on her growth as a professional in several ways. Whether it is helping her to look at more rigorous questioning strategies for her students or coming up with more authentic activities, the work she has done with her deans has made her look at her work in a different way.

I always thought…yes I ask those questions, but then when I talked to her she’s like, no you really don’t. Sometimes I’m shocked because I really
thought I was doing it, but it’s nice because she can give me specific examples of, well no, you asked this kind of question. It’s nice because sometimes when you’re in the moment, you don’t see everything else that’s going on. I like having that, that somebody can sit there and say no, you’re really not doing what you think you’re doing.

Additionally, while much of the feedback she has received from her deans has reinforced some of the things that she thought she was doing well, TCH 1 is aware that she now looks at things from a different perspective, is more flexible, has improved her pacing, and has students take more ownership of their learning.

**Thoughts about Effectiveness**

TCH 1 is clear that she has grown a great deal as a professional since coming to her school four years ago. She reports that she is aware that she plays a major role in keeping her students motivated and getting them to want to be in school. She acknowledges that she is the one who sets the tone in her classroom and works hard to make them feel safe and welcome. She reflected that as a teacher she feels more effective because she has the opportunity to see student progress more as she works with small groups and that she is more aware of what needs to be done. At the same time she has “become more critical of myself.” She no longer believes that there’s only so much she can do, instead she believes that she can make a difference with consistent focus and pushing and that she is very responsible for student growth and achievement.

I feel more personally responsible now than I have before…it has to be a change in me, something that I haven’t figured out yet that switched in my brain. I don’t feel any more pressure, it’s not like anybody at work is
specifically like “You’re not doing this.” I don’t feel that at all. I don’t know...it’s just something internally in me. I don’t know why.”

Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model

While she stated that she definitely values the relationship she has with her dean and finds the model to be extremely helpful, more than anything else, TCH1 values the consistent observations and feedback she receives from her dean. She states that she feels continually supported and knows that help is available should she need it. She is not afraid to go to her dean and admit that she needs help.

I feel like I have a lot of support if I have a question or if I know something didn’t go well. They’re going to give me some sort of direction to help me fix it. And the other side too is I might think something really was a total flop and they come back and they’re like no, did you see Johnny did blah, blah, blah? He wouldn’t have done that without whatever you said.

After having experienced this model for the past several years, TCH1 believes that it would be very stressful for her to return to a traditional principal, teacher school without the dean model. She expressed that, “I don’t think I would feel as confident because it’s not the same when someone’s in there every week and they can consistently see what’s going on with you. Their feedback means more.”

When considering advice to a teacher who might be new to this model she said,

Don’t be afraid and just embrace it for what it is and know that they truly are there to support you, because it can be intimidating to have people in your room all the time, but if you really embrace it and look at it, and if you believe
in the idea that [school] is there to build you up and not hang you up to dry, you be a much happier person.

Her suggestion to any dean new to the dean role is to “take the time to build a personal relationship first because the more comfortable your teachers are with you, the better they’re going to be for you.” In addition to building a relationship first and foremost, she suggests that deans take the time to make themselves available as much as possible and to be honest and transparent, “if you can’t something because of whatever reason, don’t say, oh well, I’ll get back to you. If you know you can’t do it, just tell me no…don’t string me along.”

As she reflected on the teacher/dean relationship she noted that she is very surprised with how comfortable she has become with the support she has. She feels less separation with her leaders than she has in previous schools and feels like she can be totally honest with them and,

even talk to them on a personal level and see them outside of work, not necessarily to hang out as friends because they are still my superiors, but comfortable enough to say, hey let’s go get coffee after work or something with them and not just my co-workers surprises me.

Teacher 2 – TCH2

Setting the Stage

A graduate from an institution outside of the Midwestern state she currently lives in, and a teacher with seven years of experience, TCH2’s first experiences in education were in an early childhood program, a program she called “a perfect fit” in a suburban community where parents were very involved in their children’s education. Coming from an environment she describes as affluent and relaxed where
the teacher/student ratio was significantly smaller than her current school, to an urban
school with class sizes of 30 students, was a bit of a shock to this teacher. While she
taught kindergarten for one year in her first teacher position, she has gained
experience in both first and second grade in her recent school where she has been on
staff for six years. Despite having familiarity with the community and area where her
current school is located, she admits that it has “definitely been a big learning curve”
where she has to “really be on top of things.”

Throughout her years at her school TCH2 has served as both a teacher leader
where she delivered professional development sessions to first year teachers and as a
teacher mentor to teachers who have fewer than three years of experience in the
classroom.

The school where TCH2 currently serves as a second grade teacher is an
established public charter school academy that opened 16 years ago in an urban mid-
western city. Throughout its history, this school has seen multiple principals,
experienced significant teacher turnover and weathered numerous challenges that
resulted in it growing into an award winning building with a culture focused on
student achievement. The school currently serves almost 800 students in grades K-8.
Approximately 88% of students qualify for free/reduced lunch. 38% of students are
African American, 44% Hispanic, 15% Caucasian, with 4% other; 25% of the
students are English Language Learners.

TCH2 describes this school as one where the academic culture has evolved
significantly over time.

We are one of the top schools in the [organization]. We really analyze data to
be able to give an individualized education and really be able to differentiate
with students. We encourage family involvement and the school is a place
where we want students to feel safe, we want the kids to have the most
enriching experience possible, so I guess we hold strongly to high
expectations, analyzing data, and collaboration amongst our staff.

When TCH2 first came to the school, she reports that teachers had a great
deal of autonomy to do what they wanted to do, using curricular tools as creatively as
they desired, but now as new common assessments and curricular tools have been
brought in, expectations have changed to follow programs with fidelity. She describes
this as a “change of mind-set now on what we’re expected to be teaching.”
Additionally, the school has school-wide initiatives in place such as increasing
cooperative learning, higher order thinking, and visible thinking.

Over time, the leadership structure of the school has changed as well, from a
leadership team consisting of a principal and an assistant principal, to a team of one
principal and five deans. Recent turnover in the building has resulted in a new
principal and several new deans.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

When first introduced to the observation/feedback model when she began her
work at the school TCH2 stated “I felt like it was a lot…almost too much!” She
described the process of trying to learn and figure out what the dean might be
expecting to see, admitting that

To be observed every week, you don’t know when they’re coming in. It adds a
level of stress to what you’re doing because you’re trying to learn and figure it
out and do your best at what you’re doing and you’re teaching and then
someone’s coming in and you almost feel like, what are they thinking? What
are they observing? You’re trying to figure out what they are looking for so it can become stressful for teachers and then you have to sit down and talk about it, like is this really the best use of my time, I’ve got a million other things to do…sometimes I can find value in it and sometimes it’s like I can really use that time to this, this, and this…

She recalls the first few times she was observed as being quite nerve-wracking, finding herself thinking really fast and describing that “everything goes like the speed of light.” She remembers wanting to know right away what her dean thought and wishing she could have “instant collaboration” despite the fact that she still had a class to teach.

I remember feeling that way like I just, I know that person has some kind of opinion, some thought about their experience in my room, but I don’t know what it is and then you have to wait until your one-one-one conversation to find out.

Her first experiences being observed left her wondering how to approach the dean when she entered her room. Should she keep on teaching or stop and greet her? She describes the thoughts that came into her mind as her dean entered the room.

Okay, I need to make sure that I am referring to my I can statement and make sure that every kid is on task because according to the form, they would mark how many kids, so you’re like, oh my gosh this kid is not paying attention so you could go over and make sure they are paying attention …you just get more conscious of every word that you’re saying or thinking and feeling. It almost would make me feel like I’m not teaching this adequately enough because they’re honing in on everything you’re saying or doing.
Fortunately for TCH2 these feelings of uncertainty and anxiety are no longer there when she is observed. She reported that after the first two years she grew more comfortable and positive with the observations. Her own style of teaching was changing along with the expectations in the school. She grew more confident, “I had it down, my kids were structured, they knew what they were doing, there were routines in place, I was more confident with what I had established with my class…when they would come in I wasn’t so stressed about it.”

As she prepared to go to her first one-on-one meeting, she recalls remembering feeling as if she had to rush, that it was much like just another meeting, another place she had to go. She shares that she felt she could not catch up. She remembers being asked “How’s it going in your life? Is there anything going on?” As she describes her initial experiences with these one-on-one meetings as if she felt so much pressure to master everything new in her role at this school, that the thought of sitting down with her dean was simply overwhelming.

**Relationship with Dean**

As she has had several years experience with this observation/feedback model and time spent with her dean, TCH2 sees the primary purpose of this model as one of building relationships between teachers and dean. She believes that “trust is the foundation for progression” and that with trust and strong relationships, a leader can have “open and clear discussions with your staff.” She remarked that when she first began building that relationship with her dean she saw it primarily as a conversation about “whatever was on the dean’s agenda.” Even though she understood that her dean was trying to build a relationship with her, she recalls feeling somewhat forced to talk about personal things and wondering
How genuine is that if you just have to sit down with this person and you’re not asked to you’re told to, you have to sign up for a time, everybody is doing it? But at the same time, I’m flexible, I did it, you do what you do when that’s an expectation for your job.

She remembers her early relationship with her first dean as one in which she just really wanted her dean to tell her what she wanted her to do because she, as a second year teacher new to the system, was just trying to learn. She appreciated knowing that her dean was always there should she need something as well as the nature of their open conversations. She stated, “I was just really eager to learn so I applied everything that she was suggesting for me to do.”

As she builds a relationship with a new dean this past year, whom she describes as “really laid back,” TCH2 uses her experiences as a mentor teacher and her practices with her former dean to help this new first year dean become more comfortable in the role, at times describing it almost as role reversal. Building this relationship has been much more focused on just getting to know her. She reflected that she while did initially experience some concerns after having had the same dean for five years, and sometimes wondering what her new dean’s perception of her was, and what she thought of her as a teacher, she does not feel the same level of stress or nervousness that she did in the past when working with her dean.

**Changing and Maintaining Relationships**

TCH2 discussed how the relationship with her deans has changed and progressed over time. She sees the focus of their relationship as being much more about supporting the children in the school. Along with the trust between teachers and deans, she keeps the focus on working with her dean to make sure that “the academic
experiences these children are having are intentional, purposeful, driven, and individualized.” She has worked collaboratively with her new dean to keep the focus on student learning. As a veteran teacher at the school she stated that she does not rely as much on her dean as she might have in previous years, typically dealing with challenging situations on her rather than going to her dean for support. She stated that she does not “want to overwhelm her because she has a lot on her plate.”

TCH2 views her dean as a coach and as her evaluator. She reflects that she appreciates her dean’s knowledge of how to enhance student reading and engagement in the classroom. She describes their relationship after this first year as being one that is constructive, helpful and friendly.

I feel like we’ve built a friendship this year, which is good...you have those apprehensions at the beginning of the year and now I just feel like we can go out for a cup of coffee or something and talk about whatever. I don’t feel the stress I used to feel or as nervous as even in the past with deans.

She also spoke of growing toward an understanding of rather than her dean being her superior or “over her” that instead she and her dean are both working toward the best interests of the students, “I realize that we’re all just in it to win it! We’re working as a team.”

**Weekly Observations**

TCH2 has grown very comfortable with the weekly observations she receives from her dean and sees these as opportunities to fine tune her teaching skills. Her dean’s goal is to be in her classroom a minimum of once a week and she is pretty consistent with that, though TCH2 reports that her dean does not spend as much time with her as she would like because she is typically focusing more on less experienced
or struggling teachers. As a teacher leader and teacher mentor, TCH2 states that she is much more confident now while being observed and is happy that the focus of these observations has become more on student performance rather than on teacher performance.

Throughout the interview process it was very clear that TCH2 is a very reflective teacher committed to her own growth as well as to her students’ growth. In addition to her own weekly observations with her dean, she makes it a practice to observe other teachers as she is trying new techniques and strategies to reach her students. Doing so has helped her to move from feeling like it is all about compliance to “this is why the I Cans are so important…in the beginning it was learning, understanding what does this mean, what is the purpose, and once things started coming together and I’m learning…I see the relevance of it now.” Now the whole process of this observation/feedback model makes so much more sense to her as she acknowledges that she is growing toward her goals as opposed to merely crossing skills of a list.

**One-on-One Conversations and Receiving Feedback**

When TCH2 describes her initial experiences participating in weekly one-on-one conversations she recalls feeling like there were a lot of things that she needed to check off of her list, such as “did you get this done or this done? The dean says they like it so this must be the practice…this must be what I need to do.” She described one of her first meetings with her dean when she was told not to do something that she had been doing.

I was new…I would just take the feedback and not ask many questions. Why?

Because maybe I felt like I needed to be compliant and needed to do what
they’re saying, and I do think that’s something that I have learned that I need to ask more questions and I do do that more now, but back then, I’m like, okay.

Another notable example she describes occurred as she was recently being observed. She thought that her dean was gathering data to help her with a child who was struggling behaviorally when in reality the dean was tracking how many students were engaged or participating during carpet time. When she went to her one-on-one expecting to discuss her struggling student, she was surprised to find out differently.

I thought we were going to be discussing that one child but instead it ended up turning around on me about how I could get more students engaged at my carpet time, and I was like wow! I didn’t see that coming. So then that’s when I remember thinking we need to have more clear communication…like, hey, we need to work on your classroom management and then I’d be like, okay, let’s do it, but that was more hidden…I felt defeated because I thought we were focusing on just that one child.

Despite her frustration with this conversation, TCH2 used it to reflect and improve her practice, realizing based on the dean’s data and documentation that she needed to take another look at her classroom management. Through her considerations of the feedback she received, TCH2 believes that she was able to use the feedback to change her practices “through these conversations, whether they were positive or negative, they either affirmed that what I was doing was on the right track or made me reflect and think okay, I can do better at this.” Rather than getting defensive or not owning the feedback, she used it to improve. She strongly believes in the value of reflecting as the “key to learning and growing.”
Throughout our conversations together, TCH2 frequently stated that feedback from her dean matters to her and that she works hard to use it to grow. She often pointed out that she does not make changes or improvements for the dean but rather for the benefit of the students she serves – “it’s about the child’s learning.” She realizes that her dean is not always going to see everything she is working on as a teacher in her classroom and makes a practice of sharing with her when possible:

Hey, I know you weren’t in my classroom today but we did this cooperative learning lesson and it went really great, let me tell you about it, so then they can hear that even though they didn’t observe it, it was something that we said we were working on it let’s them know that their feedback matters to me and this is what the result is…I’m trying to work toward it.

TCH2 describes the feedback she receives from her new dean this year as being primarily in the form of questioning strategies designed to help her get to a realization or understanding that the dean is leading her to. Conversations are free and open with a good deal of collaboration. Often the conversations are about the new curricular tools. She states that her dean gives her autonomy in the classroom. “She sees where I am coming from and affirms that is where we should be going.” Often in her one-on-one conversations with her dean, TCH2 will share what she has been working on or talk about how her previous dean might have done something. In their time together they will discuss what the dean saw during an observation, but TCH2 feels that she has not received much feedback this year on how to make things better. While the feedback is affirming, she wonders “when I go to the meeting and there is not the feedback, how much is it benefitting me at this point?”
One suggestion she has for making feedback sessions with her dean more meaningful is to begin a practice of bringing a pad of paper or list of things to talk about to her meeting along with the dean having an agenda and something they want to address. She remarked that when they sit down now to talk, “it’s almost like a blank paper and we just start talking. Sometimes nothing is prepared.” If she does not have anything to meet with her about her dean will cancel the meeting.

**Setting Goals**

When it comes to setting professional development goals with her dean, TCH2 states that it is all done in collaboration. While some goals are based on dean observation, in her case, more often they are based on a discussion where the dean poses a question or the teacher says, I am really interested in learning this and would like this to be my goal. For TCH2, her dean asks her, “what are some of the goals you want to have this year? What is something you want to work on?” She described the process that she and her dean go through as she determines new goals.

Based on my past goals, based on my prior knowledge and experiences that helped me to continue to push new goals to try to do new things on the TOPS skills, so you look at the TOPS skills and read through them and now just cross them off and say, I do this, I got this, I feel confident, and then I’ll narrow it down to what I think would be best for me to develop on and they usually let me just decide what it is…they don’t say I think this would be a really good goal for you.

After goals are set, TCH2 and her dean typically go over those goals at least once a month. Typically it is she, not the dean, who brings up progress toward her goals. “I would bring it up, I would say, this lesson went really well when we were
working with cooperative learning, so it was kind of my way of letting her know that I’m continuing to work on it. To help her reach her growth goals, her dean will often suggest ideas, books, and resources. As a school community, TCH2 shares that there are school-wide goals around initiatives such as Visible Thinking and differentiated learning. By reflecting on trainings that she has taken on her own and has determined as focus areas for the year, TCH2 takes a lot of initiative to read about and apply new techniques into her classroom, whether or not her dean has made suggestions or given feedback to her on these topics.

A self-directed learner, TCH2 uses a number of outside resources along with those provided to her by her dean to move her toward her goals so that she can become more effective in the classroom. She shared a survey that her dean recently put in place at the end of the year that TCH2 found very useful.

She put together a growth survey that asked what are the goals that we selected at the beginning of the year (we all selected two or three goals) and then she wanted to know what we have done to work on these goals…so if she’s come in and observed us, she doesn’t always see everything that we might be doing to work toward those goals, and then, just to remember all of that when you’re sitting in a one-on-one conversation sometimes can be challenging. I just typed up all the things that I’ve done to work toward those goals…to remind her of that and that I’m doing some additional masters level course, so now I have more assurance to know that she’s more aware of my work toward the goals that we created at the beginning of the year now toward the end of the year.

Growing as a Professional
TCH2 is very clear that her growth as a professional comes from her own hard work. She shares that an area of growth for her was to go from a mindset of “I have to do all these things” to understanding the purpose or the “why” of what she was being asked to do. In her work in her Master’s program or in professional development sessions, she hears common areas of focus that give validity to the work she is doing with her dean and co-workers at her school. She spent some time this past year participating with a group of professionals who are interested in moving into leadership roles. In fact, one of her major professional goals is to become a dean herself. She finds opportunities both at her school as a mentor teacher and outside of school as a graduate student to work toward her future goals.

Just yesterday I took a personal day to go observe Dean X at [school] just to see other deans in action and to see what they do to have the best results…like how do you drive results and build relationships. These are a lot of the things that I’m running through my mind and trying to learn and understand so I can be prepared.

She also spoke frequently of trying to stay aware of the bigger picture of the school, rather than just what is happening in her own classroom as she is “learning as much as I can while still developing as a professional as a teacher to learn how a school runs and how the coaching and feedback model can be effective.” This goal of trying to think of the bigger picture has given her a broader perspective of why certain decisions and changes have been made at the school level. She is clearly motivated and excited about her growth and her future and enjoys the work she is doing as she serves as a mentor and collaborates with other teacher. She shared that she has grown from this work as she is “learning and getting into the world of a
teacher and doing these short observations. You can have such amazing conversations when you just observe for 12 minutes. It’s really cool to be in that role.”

In her work in her classroom, she has been working toward incorporating more cooperative learning and higher order thinking skills into her lessons and because of her success has been given an opportunity to present her work in an upcoming professional development session at the school. She firmly believes that “it’s all kind of helping me grow as a leader and pulling what my goals are toward deeper discussions.”

While she acknowledges that the feedback and support she has received from her dean has been positive and that she appreciates the positive notes her dean leaves her after her observations, TCH2 feels her real growth comes from the reflection that continually happens from the work she does with her students and from her own studying and personal professional development projects.

**Thoughts about Effectiveness**

As a teacher who clearly is open to growing, reflecting, and improving her practices, in thinking about her own effectiveness as a teacher, TCH2 shares that she measures her impact and progress by student performance.

So if I’m challenging them I want it to be within their range of proximity where it’s not too easy, it’s not too hard, it’s right within their development area. That’s what tells me they’re getting it, they’re moving along, they’re pushing themselves…one thing I love when I give students goals, they’ll go to the very highest goal. So when I see them getting closer to their goals and reaching their goals, then I know that the practices that I’m putting in place in
the class are impacting their development. I think that’s what we all want to see is seeing the students be successful.

Her belief in her ability to reach her students is evident. Despite some ongoing challenges with some difficult parents, she does everything she can to assure her students that she believes in them. Because of her belief in them and her ability to have them set and reach their goals, she views her students as self-motivated learners.

I have a huge impact on their value of themselves and their education…I try to help them associate what they’re doing every day when they’re working on workshop, it’s all helping them work toward their goals and I do see that they believe in themselves and that they are learning and understanding that education is important to them, especially with what they deal with outside of school.

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

Throughout our interview, TCH2 frequently spoke of appreciating her dean’s knowledge and collaboration with teachers. More than anything, she values the honesty and level of comfort in their relationship. She described how as they have worked together she has become much more confident, particularly when people come into her classroom. “I’m just like whatever…come on in…we have so many people coming in…it’s just part of the routine.”

She also values how flexible her dean is and appreciates her ability to listen first whenever an issue comes up and how she then shares her advice. She sees her as a successful presenter of professional development and appreciates working with her as her coach. The questioning techniques her dean uses in their one-on-one conversations have helped this teacher to consider the big picture beyond her
classroom and become more confident in sharing her growing knowledge with the entire staff.

When considering suggestions for a dean new in the role, TCH2 stated the importance of valuing how much teachers really do in class and all the efforts that they put toward becoming effective classroom teachers.

**Teacher 3 - TCH3**

**Setting the Stage**

TCH3 began his career in education as a long-term substitute teacher and a para-professional in a public charter academy prior to coming to his current school four years ago. Holding an undergraduate degree in Kinesiology with a minor in History, he currently serves as a physical education teacher in his K-8 school. His school has been open for four years and has grown from a school serving students in grades K-5 to serving approximately 700 students in grades K-8. This urban school is located in the city center of a large Midwestern city; 99% of the students attending this Public Charter Academy are African American with close to 99% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Student achievement has been a challenge throughout its short history due to the transient nature and high poverty level of the families served at this school. Additionally, TCH3 states that “behavior is a very big issue at our school and it always has been and we’re still fighting how to exactly alleviate that problem.” He describes how the greatest challenge with behavior in his classroom occurred the year the school opened, with students coming in “off the hook.” Since then the culture has steadily improved for him as he works with his students.
Teacher and student turnover in the building is high, with as many as 35% of the staff being new to the school each year. TCH3 has had four different deans since the school opened, three different ones within his most recent school year. He questions with all of this turnover in leadership, whether there is truly any accountability for him in the school as he senses that “no one’s really watching.”

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

As he interviewed for his position, TCH3 recalls being told by his principal that this model of observation and feedback was one that was “going to try and make you a better teacher” and that he would “never be alone at [school]. He described the purpose of this model as growing teachers and giving feedback on teaching as you work with your dean to grow as an educator.

I just always understood it as mainly like a mentor teacher type thing with feedback and it almost was like I viewed it as it made it more personal for you in your teaching so you didn’t feel alone and it was almost there to build accountability and hold you accountable.

Prior to the beginning of his first year, his dean pulled him aside and told him about the weekly one-on-one meetings describing them as “the first ten minutes you and me just talk about anything you want…then I’m going to give you some feedback and then we’re going to go into needs and concerns last.” He recalls that during their first few meetings together that they began to get comfortable with each other and mainly talked about football.

TCH3 reflects on his first experiences being observed by his dean. The first few times his observations lasted about 15 minutes. When his dean came in TCH3 would ignore him and would just continue teaching his lesson. He described that
though there was definitely anxiety the first couple of times he was observed, it was his dean’s personality that made it simple for him. His dean told him, “Listen, I’m going to come in, none of this scores against you” so he taught his lessons and recalls that they went well. He remembers that his dean “just sat on the bleachers and kind of watched, didn’t say anything. He kinda just let me do my thing and he was kind of like a bug on the wall.” He also recalls that it was more of an issue of explaining to the students why this visitor was in the classroom than it was him being worried about the observation. Though TCH3 frequently states throughout our interview that he believes it to be difficult to get valuable feedback from a dean unless that dean has background knowledge in physical education, he notes that his first dean did a great job trying to find feedback that would improve his practices in the classroom, something that he appreciated very much.

I remember [Dean] would be like, when you’re explaining this, try to use the students as demonstrators more and use that as a management tool where you pick a student that’s being a role model. He helped me with my warm up a little bit…tweak this or tweak that a little bit. Get helpers to put things away, and I think that today I still use that a lot…The procedures that [Dean] gave me worked with me or I should say, worked with me on the kids so that they know the routine. Every year teaching has become 10 times easier just because of that. The procedures are where he helped me the most.

TCH3 talks about the presence his first dean had when walking into his gym for an observation or when TCH3 needed support with student behavior.

He would walk into the room, just the way he held himself and I think to this day, I mean I’m not going to give him all the credit in the world, but I think
every day when the students see me, I hold myself a certain way because of the way I saw [Dean]. He would come into the room and he’d say, I need the attention right now and he would wait and everyone knew, okay, let me give this guy the respect he deserves.

Relationship with Dean

As TCH3 and his first dean began to build a relationship he recalls conversations where they would just talk about his personal life, sports, and their common interests. He remembers that he did not really have a lot of feedback for him, mostly that he was doing great “maybe tweak this, tweak that, what are your needs and concerns?” If he ever had a need or a concern, the dean would show up to that class the next week, watch the student/teacher interactions, and give him feedback on that class. Observations and one-on-one meetings were consistent, occurring every week, which helped TCH3 feel supported and valued. It is clear from his reflections about that this dean made a big impact on him. Beyond giving him feedback that “reassured me that I’m doing the right thing, that I’m a good teacher,” his dean helped him to learn about the importance of having a firm but fair attitude with students and how to manage the challenges of student behaviors. Following his dean’s example, he came to realize how important it was for these young people to have a “good role model for life.” Additionally, he values how his dean had an understanding of the struggles that teachers face in an urban environment. “He knew that when you sat down in the chair across from him that you were spent, and when you just needed a break.” He spoke of his first dean as a “godsend” for him and someone who was a real loss to both himself and the school when he moved to a new position in a different school.
Changing and Maintaining Relationships

Throughout the past four years, TCH3 has had four different deans, three of them in the past year. When talking about building, changing, and maintaining relationships with deans, he has a strong belief that “it’s all about personality.” He describes how awkward it was to go into one dean’s office every week and talk about his personal life as a 24 year old male, wondering “what do you know about anything I know or want to talk about?” Other deans with completely different personalities he states “could’ve led me down a different road.” He reiterates that his first dean would be there if he needed leadership for anything. He “made the teachers feel bigger.”

TCH3 talks about the struggles he has had this year building relationships with different deans. After his first dean moved away from the school, he believes that his relationships with subsequent deans has led him to just closing his door and avoiding bringing any problems to his dean. He shares his belief that “if you can do your job and not cause any problems to the dean, they love it, but you don’t get any feedback or support.” Consequently, he states that much of this year he has felt as if he is not really valued at all and is moved from dean to dean based on who has the lightest caseload. He shares that this lack of perceived value is not due to his specialty area of teaching but rather “it just has to do with who needs help with classroom management” and admits that not having the same level of accountability and support he enjoyed from his first dean makes him not want to work as hard.

He talks about this year as being “just a tumultuous year…I’ve had three different bosses. It hasn’t been smooth, and I think that has been a big cause of it. In the past I was getting some guidance, this year it just so happened that the wheels fell off the bus.”
Despite his frustrations with the turn over of deans, he shares that as the year has gone on he has begun to form a positive relationship with his third and latest dean, but that he strives to avoid adding to his dean’s stress level, choosing instead to take care of student issues himself, “I guess I’m trying to save my favor for when I really need it.” He enjoys a friendly, mostly social relationship with his dean where they occasionally get together outside of school. TCH3 describes it as more of a “stay out of his way type of thing…whenever he comes to me and asks me to do something, I stay calm and say, yes, I’ll do it.” He describes their relationship as being one about “camaraderie” and says that, “on a scale of 0 to 10 our relationship has gone from a 2 to an 8 because I’ve helped him more than he’s helped me.” He feels his dean respects him, gives him emotional support, and values him more than before. TCH3 admits that he likes him but feels that his dean does not have time for him.

**Weekly Observations**

When TCH3 started at this school four years ago, his principal and dean shared with him how he would be observed every week and how he would receive feedback from those observations. He talks about his understanding that he expected his dean would be in the gym with him on a weekly basis and in fact that did happen as long as his first dean remained in the school. He knew he could count on him. If he needed him for anything at all his dean would be there. Since that dean left, observations have been mostly absent for this teacher. TCH3 believes that the lack of observations and involvement with the dean is due largely to the fact that he is not a general education classroom teacher and that deans are very busy helping new
teachers learn to manage their classrooms, “trying to make them into sound enough teachers to get some growth out of the students, and with me, I don’t have numbers so I don’t count against their scores.” THC3 remarked that that this adds to his feeling of being undervalued.

It doesn’t make me want to work as hard. After being through this for four years, I’m not as nervous any more if I don’t change my bulletin board right away at the end of the month. I’m not as nervous any more if I have the lesson plan in the red folder on my desk. I’m like, you’re never coming in.”

He shared how he wonders how if in a different environment, that maybe in fact this model, in particular observations with TOPs skills, could help a teacher to become more effective. It is his belief that at his school the whole process is very rushed and that not enough time or real feedback comes from it. He believes that many teachers only use the skills that their deans are looking for when they are being observed, and questions whether or not the goal is for teachers to grow or to get points on a sheet of skills.

**One-on-One Conversations and Receiving Feedback**

The feedback that TCH3 received from his first dean helped him to grow in his ability to manage classes in this challenging urban environment. He learned how to be firm but fair, as well as how to manage his own anxiety about creating an environment where students would listen and follow his routines. He frequently stated how much he appreciated how this dean would work to find feedback to grow him and that that feedback helped him understand what he needed to do and reassured him that he was “doing the right thing.”
As he began working with another dean and found himself going through an especially rough time with his students, he states “I got so fed up with him, I was like you’re doing nothing for me. You’ve given me zero feedback at all, you’re not helping me professionally at anything.”

This year, he says that his one-on-one conversations are generally conducted “on the run” with the dean stopping into the gym. Feedback has been really positive. He has been told that he does good work but has not received feedback that is challenging or feels like he is being critiqued. He did recall one incident of feedback that made him reflect and think about things in a different way.

The only time he’s ever done that is when he told me you have to go in the classroom with the middle schoolers. That made me think about it in a different way, think about it as a classroom teacher rather than being in my regular environment, so I think that was the biggest challenge I’ve recently faced.

According to TCH3 the majority of feedback he does receive from deans is always based on behavior management. Mostly his feedback is “keep doing what you’re doing.” He imagines that it is hard for people to give him feedback because “most people don’t know the intricacies of what I do.”

As his relationship with his current dean has developed into a more positive experience, TCH3 shares that they have conversations about how he can modulate the tone of his voice to protect it as he loses his voice easily. Additionally, he states [Dean] talks to me more about the future and stuff like down the road, things that could be beneficial because he’s seen it, so he’ll talk to me about things like later on if you ever move in your career, just keep in mind that this might
happen at a public school, or this might happen at another school. And he keeps my eyes open to the flexibility of my job and what needs to happen.

**Setting Goals**

When TCH3 shares how he sets his goals he notes that his dean gave him the paper with various skills listed on it and asked him to pick three goals. He simply went in the booklet and picked out three, “I actually don’t even know if I picked them out this year.” He admits, “I have no clue what they are.” TOPs skills have never been effective for him, according to TCH3. He recalls that his first dean would pick three skills designed to help mold him into a teacher that fit in the system. “Every year they’re like, you pick three…do I make a cognizant effort to work on them? No, cause I do them already. It’s what I do.”

He does have some of his own professional goals aside from these TOPs teaching skills and practices. He is working on incorporating more technology into his lessons, trying to find new ideas and lessons to engage his students, and trying to figure out how to motivate students to listen.

**Growing as a Professional**

TCH3 described how he has grown and changed as a teacher over the past several years. He is more relaxed, in control, and less anxious in the classroom. A major growth area for him has been in the pacing of his lessons. He shared how I’ve come to understand that the pace that I am at is the pace that the kids are at, so in year one and two, I felt like I was really frantic, wanted to get everything done, wanted to get this lesson in. And this year I’m kind of understanding that every class has a different pace to go at…my routine’s gotten to the point where I can pick and choose which lesson I want to take
out, because certain classes can only take four lessons of work a week…I think I’m going into it a lot more relaxed than I used to. I’m feeling like I am in control and I have nothing to worry about, whereas back in the day there was anxiety or what the lesson’s going to be, am I doing it perfectly…

He shares that he does a “really good job working with the inner city child, understanding their plight and seeing what they need at a certain time” and sees himself as a better manager with the kids than most teachers in his current school.

**Thoughts about Effectiveness**

TCH3 clearly sees that he has made significant gains in effectiveness in the classroom over the past several years. He shares his belief that “there is a big difference between my first year self compared to my fourth year self.” He also states “I’m not going to attribute that to anyone beside myself growing and understanding the situation better and becoming more comfortable myself as a teacher.

When reflecting on his beliefs regarding his ability to motivate his students, and to get them to value and be interested in what he has to offer them, he is much less confident in his abilities.

I’m not confident at all. I don’t think there’s anything you can do about kids that come from terrible families, that see their moms doing drugs, who have no motivation in life, and have never met a positive male role model in their life. There’s nothing you can do for those kids. You can do your best, you can give them a hug, you can try to motivate them, but when you are so depressed and hurt by your home life, there’s no way I can just come in with some Martin Luther King speech…
He acknowledges that he continues to do his best to support and motivate his students, and strives to come in every day with a positive attitude. He believes that 95% of the kids in the school love him. He credits his success with the students to the fact that he provides a physical release for them when they come into the gym. They want to do what I’m doing just because they love running, we play music, and I’m super positive even when they have a bad day. Whenever the teacher comes in, if they had a pretty rough day but we did this, this, and this right, and the kids look at you like, thank you, you didn’t yell at us on our way out the door.

If he ever has a problem with a student he will rarely seek support from a dean and hardly ever calls their parents as he believes, “the reason your child is acting out is because you’re not doing anything at home.”

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

Despite his frustrations with lack of observations and feedback he has received from his deans over the last few years, TCH3 still values the emotional support his current dean provides for him. He remarks that when [Dean] sees that he is having a rough day that they will get together after work. His dean is more than willing to spend time with him if it helps him to feel emotionally better about his job. He feels his dean values him more than he used to, respects him as a professional, and believes he is more than willing to help him out because he has proven himself to be a dependable employee. TCH3 also values the direct and honest personality of his dean. He’s very candid. He’ll give you the insight about this child or that child and try to give me some scope of what’s going on, but generally it’s the same for
each…mom’s a crack head, no support at home, raises his sister on his own, that kind of stuff. They’re all acting out for the same reason.

When considering the value he places on the model, TCH notes that with a different dean he would not value the time spent in a one-on-one meeting sharing good news or personal things with his dean as most deans would not have anything in common with him and that he considers the time sharing personal “good news” to be wasted time.

He states that he was surprised when he learned more about this observation/feedback model that deans do not have much more experience in teaching than he does. He questions their knowledge and expertise in being able to lead him.

When considering how the model could be improved, he shares,

I really believe that in inner city schools they need to have a different scaffold of deans, like two behavior deans, and then if you really care about teachers, you have two behavior deans and then you have deans that really come around and their job is to watch you all day, do their observations and actually do a write up on what they saw in your classroom.

He has some ideas on how the system in his school could be improved, including more communication and more understanding of each teacher as an individual with individual needs…and “kids need to see you every single day!”

Teacher 4 – TCH 4

Setting the Stage

TCH4 has been a teacher for 12 years. He came to teaching after working in various other industries. As a volunteer for a community organization working with
young people, he made the decision to go back to school and pursue a career in teaching. He taught middle school for many years in an urban public school district in a large Midwestern city, becoming a special education teacher after his first year in the district. He spent one year teaching high school in an affluent, high achieving school district, but decided that he wanted to “work with the underdogs again” and moved back into an urban school and once again taught middle school special education. Unfortunately, the climate of this school was a challenge to work in so he left that school and has been in his current building for the past two years working with middle school students in the resource room.

TCH4 describes his current school as “a pretty good match” though he is quick to point out that there are several challenges including teacher turnover and changes in leadership.

It’s rough around the edges. We’ve got approximately 650 students. We’re extremely strong at the lower elementary, the kindergarten. Our para-pros are fantastic. We do a lot of the small group pull outs which I think is one of our strengths. I don’t think we do a good job at the middle school level. Behavior seems to be the number one detriment in the school population. We don’t have a lot of the extras, the bells and whistles, in terms of art and music, in vocational, home ec, etc. In terms of the school itself, it’s a beautiful environment, brand new carpeting everywhere, the walls are beautiful colors, posters are first class, but our administration is in a state of flux.

His school, located in the urban center of a major Midwestern city opened four years ago. The K-8 public charter academy is a Title I school-wide building with 99% of the students in the school qualifying for free or reduced lunch and breakfast;
99% of the students are African-American and math and reading proficiency levels overall are quite low. Lack of consistent student attendance and parent involvement are just some of the barriers that hinder student growth. The school experiences significant student and staff turnover and due to its location and the challenges of the community it serves. Staff and students are frequently faced with crises involving violence and crime from the surrounding areas. This past year has been especially challenging for this young school community. Additionally, this year a change in leadership has resulted in a new principal. Throughout the year two deans have resigned and at the time of our interviews, three deans were fulfilling the dean role at TCH4’s school instead of four.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

TCH4 has had the same dean since he began teaching at the school and recalls that the observation/feedback model was initially explained to him as “the dean’s role was like a mentor and a chain of command from principal, to dean, to teacher.” He sees the deans as being focused on discipline more than anything. He adds that he thinks one dean handles most of the discipline for his students, while his dean, the special education dean, does not. In his opinion, the school is “top heavy with management” and that there is no need for six supervisors.

TCH4 explains that he is not clear on the reason or purpose for having this model in the school stating, “I don’t understand it...I don’t know what the purpose of the deans are to be quite honest, except to push papers. I have a one-on-one conversation with my dean every week for thirty minutes.”

When TCH4 talks about the first few times he was observed he remembers that his years of experience helped him to be confident rather than stressed. He states
that for new teachers it might be nerve wracking, but for him, he’s “not overconfident but I know what I can do.” Also, knowing that his dean is new to special education leads him to believe that “she wasn’t sure what she was supposed to be doing so she didn’t give me that feeling that she was smarter than I was.”

He describes the first observations as not very stressful.

They were gone in 10-15 minutes and she was pre-occupied which I understand. It’s hard to block off 30 minutes and not have a fire to put out.

Our deans are constantly on the earphones to one another and the walkie talkies even during our one-on-ones.

TCH4 comments that he is not sure what his dean does all day, saying that it is “a mystery.” He acknowledges and appreciates that she is never in her office. Instead the deans at his school are very visible. “I give them credit for that. They’re in the hallways, they’re in the lunch room, before and after school they have posts. I just don’t know what they do all day.”

The weekly one-on-one conversations between TCH4 and his dean are very informal.

They’re very casual, in our meetings we sit like this…most of my one-on-one’s are about family, what did you do this weekend? There’s open ended questions. Are there supply needs? How’s it going? Most cases…no…I don’t have any needs. My deans are always available. There is an open door policy. I feel confident. I feel comfortable coming to them at 9:30, 10:00 in the morning, whatever time it is, and saying listen…this child is a problem, or I don’t know what’s going on over here.

**Relationship with Dean**
TCH4 reports that his relationship with his dean is very casual. They share conversations about their family, his dean asks open ended questions, and he enjoys an open door policy. His views their relationship as being very friendly, extremely personal and more social than academic based. TCH4 states that he typically does not talk to his dean about instructional practices, share the progress that his students are making, or ask for ideas on how to move them further along. To TCH4, his dean is a friend, what he calls “buddy, buddy.” He knows that he can call his dean or other deans in the building if he has problems with a parent, another teacher, or if he simply needs ten minutes to just “go in the office and vent.” He describes the dean as “running interference, the middle man” serving as a “buffer between the teacher and the principal. Throughout his description of the teacher dean relationship TCH4 often refers to the military chain of command, stating that “the dean doesn’t want the principal to be disturbed by petty things, so they handle the day-to-day and that allows the principal to do the overview.

**Changing and Maintaining Relationships**

TCH4 believes that his dean trusts his judgment and that he feels sometimes he guides her more than she guides him. Throughout their work together over the past two years, their relationship has been one where he thinks of his dean as “a partner, definitely not a boss although I have to go through her to get things done.” As he describes their relationship he notes that he is happy with the hands off approach he feels from her, “I don’t like micro-managed.” He reflects, “I think if I was micromanaged, I’d go to another job at another school. But there’s a difference between being hands off and just a sink or swim.”
Their relationship is comfortable, “just easy going…not vital.” He admits to seeing the dean/teacher relationship as a luxury and does not believe that she improves his teaching aside from some simple suggestions. However, he reiterates that he values her availability and presence, “she makes time for me…I can go to her with any small thing and she will…I’ve approached her when she’s been on the keyboard and she’s stopped and turned and faced me, not just what do you gotta say.”

His dean’s ability to be present is important to him, her friendship and warmth is appreciated, yet TCH4 seems to be seeking something more.

When I see her in the hallways or in the parking lot it’s always a high five, it’s always a fist bump or let me show you a video of my kids, so it’s not just a professional relationship, there’s a social relationship. I would never go to lunch with her or have dinner with her. I don’t want a professional relationship. I don’t want a social relationship. I want something a little in between.

Weekly Observations

As a special education teacher, TCH4 expects to receive weekly observations by his dean but this does not always happen. He states that last year he was observed three times, two short observations and one longer observation. He recalls that he would be observed but would not receive any immediate feedback. When he thinks about these observations and the impact they have on his instruction he states

It’s called teaching to the standardized test. On my whiteboard I’m supposed to have an I Can statement, and my CHAMPs statement, things like that. So, I’ll put them on the board…especially if I know that they’re going to come in.
They tell you ahead of time when they’re going to come it and observe which is good for me.

Knowing ahead of time when an observation is going to occur, whether it is a short 10-15 minute observation or a longer 30-40 minute full observation helps him to set the lesson up for success, “by having the observation pre-arranged I can pick my students too, I can pick which ones I know will be verbal, which ones will be enthused.”

TCH4 believes that observations would be more helpful to him and to other teachers if they were not pre-arranged in order to “keep teachers on their toes.” He would prefer what he calls “surprise drop – ins” where he walks in the room and finds the dean there ready for his lesson. While he works to remember all of the expectations his dean has for him as far as agreed upon practices in his classroom, he admits that he does not always use them. To him it is “kind of like being audited by the higher ups” and only follows those practices when he knows deans are going to come in.

TCH4 suggests that his dean could be more helpful to him in observations if she would come into my classroom more than once, sit there without a laptop, without whatever, and just watch my kids, not just one time, make time…come in and see what children I’m dealing with. See what the curriculum is. See what hand I’m dealt. Then we can talk about what you can help me with.

One-on-One Conversations and Receiving Feedback

When preparing for his one-on-one conversation, TCH4 is not asked to prepare anything ahead of time. He typically goes to her office at the agreed upon day
and time and they chat about how things are going for him in the classroom. Often, according to TCH4, these meetings are cancelled due to unexpected challenges and crises that his dean must deal with, but he knows that she will make herself available when she can and that she is there for him, “I see her in the hallway 50 times a day. There’s no reluctance to pull her into a room and say, listen this is what I have going on.

TCH4 feels that holding these one-on-one conversations every week is too often and that holding them in a teacher’s classroom rather than the dean’s office would create more of a give and take relationship.

When you go the dean’s office, or the principal’s office, it’s your office. That’s your power domain. There’s a desk between you but I think some people are intimidated by it. I think if you have a one-on-one conversation it should be at a desk in your office that doesn’t have that power behind it.

He also suggests that rather than having “random conversation,” that the dean creates an agenda for this meeting, including items such as “your lesson plans from the week before…bring in a problem you had…definitive questions or just an agenda to talk about instead of just…how are things going?”

Feedback from observations for TCH4 has been “minimal.” He states that the feedback he does receive typically contains several affirmations and occasionally some suggestions that he will try to put into place. While he receives feedback in his one-on-one conversation, TCH4 admits that he usually does not refer back to the feedback.

Feedback that he has received this year that he has found helpful has been to tighten up on practices and accountability in his classroom. He also now makes it a
practice to increase his use of visuals by doing more things on the board and to
display student work more frequently, something that he states his students really
enjoy. He has also been encouraged by his dean to work with his students to increase
student-to-student affirmations, a change he has recently tried to put in place. TCH4
believes that the feedback from his dean is accurate and that he tries to do what they
want, he is clear that “it’s not as if he or she pulls it out of thin air…but I also
understand that when I go in my classroom and I shut the door, it’s my domain.”

**Setting Goals**

When TCH4 reflects on how he and his dean set his goals, he recalls that he
was not sure what type of goals she was looking for. He recalls thinking that his goals
should be like “greet your children at the door, improve their reading level by one
grade…goals that are measurable. He and his dean set his goals together at the
beginning of the year, placed them in a binder that he keeps in his room, and have
never talked about them since. He seems embarrassed by this. These goals are his
TOPs goals that are research-based best practices, behaviors, and strategies designed
to improved classroom management and instruction. TCH4 admits that he does not
remember what those goals are and states that “I’m all for the children…I got these
12 years of experience.”

When it comes to setting his own professional growth goals, TCH4 responds
that it is an intrinsic process for him. “I know what I’m weak at…classroom
management.” He believes that he often lets things slide in his classroom and then
gets taken advantage of. His primary goal is to

Establish a relationship with my students as a confidante, as a mentor to the
boys especially that are coming from a one person household, maybe there’s
no father figure, no male figure. I think teaching’s more than just x’s and o’s and addition and subtraction and so I try to instill in them, for my goal, please, thank you, hygiene, get their trust, you know it’s a safe environment so when they come in they can tell me not only that they’re confused about a math concept but I’m having problems with a student or they’re having problems at the house, scared walking home.

He also states that he needs to grow more with technology.

**Growing as a Professional**

TCH4 describes his growth as a professional as being an “intuitive” process in which he sits down with students and sees what they need. He states that he is typically still using the “same strategies I learned five-six years ago, talk to the text, going through the highlighting, writing on the edge, things like that.” He wonders if perhaps he is falling down as a professional. He will ask his dean if there are any professional development opportunities coming up through the nearby ISDs and talks about one training he recently went to in which he learned more about creating transition plans for students as they move into high school.

As a teacher, TCH4 feels he has grown in terms of his tolerance and patience with his students, commenting that he may have been a little too “harsh” with students, “I’ve got to be more parental, more motherly.” He also believes that he is better able to differentiate between the levels of students he has in classroom.

TCH4 states that the growth he is making cannot be attributed to any of the deans in his building. Rather he sees himself growing through the work he does with his co-workers. He describes a few of the teachers at his school that he will approach if he needs talk about a child or growth or technique, stating he feels more confident
with their knowledge. He loves short, one to three day professional development opportunities and views them as helpful.

**Thoughts about Effectiveness**

As he reflects on his effectiveness as a teacher to impact a child’s level of motivation and getting through to his most difficult students, he shares his belief that building a safe environment where students come in and “know that they can make mistakes and they won’t be ridiculed” is key. He questions whether or not he may be too much of a friend but believes that “academics is almost secondary at times because these children have such hard lives.” He focuses on building self-esteem prior to building academics. TCH4 also knows that “I need to hold my students more accountable.” He is trying to get approval for an additional daily “check-in” with all of his students where he count see them for an extra half hour each day to set them up for a successful day of learning. He believes that as a special education teacher he has to 110% advocate for his students, “they will fall through the cracks in they’re not a discipline problem.”

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

Throughout our conversations it was evident that TCH4 knows that his dean is always there for him. He places a high level of value on the fact that she maintains an open door policy and makes time for him. As much as he sees her as being too friendly, he loves hearing about her family and appreciates her kindness toward him. He states that he is “100%” comfortable going to his dean if there are any challenging behavior, parent, or relationship issues. He talks at length about a recent event in which she provided a great deal of emotional support to him in which she provided
reassurance and a listening ear. He also trusts and values that she is reasonable when it comes to being flexible about lesson plans and other paperwork.

At the same time however, he senses that by his dean not holding him more accountable that his own effectiveness in the classroom has been impacted.

I think we need to set more of the ground rules, more control. I see how the dean interacts with this department and I think that has impacted the effectiveness of it. She is a wonderful person but she needs to hold us accountable, and I need to hold my students accountable, so by her not holding the department accountable, I’ve taken that approach with my students.

When considering advice he would give to a new teacher entering into this teacher/dean relationship, TCH4 states that he would tell that teacher that he, as a co-worker is more valuable than a dean, in a peer mentor role, “what the dean tells you you’re going to have to do…whether you agree with it or not, you’re going to have to do it, but I can show you a shortcut or show you how the school is actually run!”

Teacher 5 – TCH 5

Setting the Stage

TCH5 came to teaching as a second career. She became a teacher because of the impact her own third grade teacher had on her. She recalls how this teacher “had the nerve to hold me accountable for being a better reader…so I became a teacher…it is through her that it inspired me to be a reading teacher.” After raising her own children and working in a variety of positions in the business world, she spent two years focused on completing a Masters degree in education. Despite her fear that she would not be able to get a full time job, after serving as a substitute teacher at her
current school, she was offered a full time teaching position. At the same time she was teaching as an adjunct professor at a local college.

She has been at her current school for eight years, where she initially taught English Language Arts to sixth graders, then moved to social studies and science in fourth grade. She now teaches fifth grade, all subjects. As a teacher, she is thankful every day for making the decision to go for her dream. She has a great interest in discovering why so many new teachers leave the profession after only a short time teaching and shares a belief that “I’m not sure we’re giving them the culture that they need…schools don’t prepare our teachers for urban or really any classroom, they really don’t.”

TCH5 describes her school as an “external family, it is a professional family as well as a personal family.” This school has been open for 16 years and over the years has experienced significant leadership changes, with seven different principals, multiple assistant principals, and now deans. This urban K-8 public school academy is located near a major Midwestern city. The school currently serves almost 800 students with approximately 88% of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch; 38% of the students are African American, 44% Hispanic, 15% Caucasian, with 4% other. 25% of the students are English Language Learners.

TCH5 describes the staff at her school as “all willing to acknowledge that we can learn from each other” and notes that “it’s not perfect…every school has kinks to work out and you find them everyday, try to work around them…at [school] you can be an autonomous person…you can lead in many, many ways.” One of the biggest challenges from her point of view is the turnover of teachers. When considering why there is so much teacher turn over she states,
This was a job to get out of school and they got it and went, oh this isn’t working…these kids don’t know how to read coming in the door and I think they are anticipating that Johnny can tie his shoes and do all of these things and know the letter sounds…not here.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

When she considers the primary purpose for the observation/feedback model she expects that there should be “coaching, serious coaching going on.” She views it as a powerful learning tool as long as a teacher is open to change.

Eight years ago when she first began her career at her school, the dean model was not in place. The leadership team consisted of a principal and an assistant principal. About three years later, three staff members who were serving as instructional coaches became the first deans.

She recalls remembering that at first she was not sure where or how the dean model fit and just what this change was going to mean for her and for other teachers. She struggled with understanding what the model was supposed to do and thought, “I know you’re my leader… you’re observing me and I know that that’s going to be on my evaluation but there wasn’t any direction of this is where you should grow…it was just an evaluative tool.” She remembers that the concept was not well respected by the staff at first and states that “I’m not sure anybody saw the value at the time.”

Thinking back to her first experiences being observed she reiterates the uncertainty about how this process was supposed to work.

I would be observed and have a [one-on-one meeting] whatever day that might be, but I found that to be completely unproductive and I’m not sure what this is about, because we would often go that was a great observation on
whatever…and then talk about something that had nothing to do with anything. So much of the on-on-one was stuff, it wasn’t anything to say…here’s a book you might want to read, kind of leadership skills or whatever it was you were doing, and so I didn’t have a great deal of what the meaning was…there wasn’t any meaning.

The process left her feeling as if it was a waste of valuable planning time. Meetings lasted ten to fifteen minutes with very little conversation focused on growth. TCH5 believes this experience was common for the majority of teachers in her hallway.

When she recalls her first few observations she describes them as “unnerving” and questions the qualifications of the dean who was observing her. Despite trying very hard to find the value in it, she was never able to see how those initial observations benefitted her. She wonders, “I don’t know who was learning from me or was I learning from him? She believes that if she had been able to establish a relationship with this dean she would probably have had more buy-in and it would have meant much more to her.

**Relationship with Dean**

After a few years and with a different dean, she began to see the value in being observed and receiving feedback. Her new dean was very open to her asking questions and the two of them had a lot more in common which she believes led to the development of a positive working relationship. They had many conversations about classroom management and student achievement. She would receive constructive adjusting feedback and coaching during her one-on-one conversations. She talks about how she and her new dean built a relationship.
I’m not uncomfortable with who I had before but the door was more open for conversation, just to get to know me or listen, do you have anything that I could read on whatever it is that we were doing, and he was always very open to sharing…coming to this dean was completely different, night and day. I don’t mind criticisms, but with those criticisms came not just positive things, but let’s move in this direction and see what happens…I really believe that is coaching. You have to coach yourself as well, and I grab on to that and that’s, I think, where I am today.

TCH5 states that the while her relationship with this second dean was so different from her first, she believes she also began to see the value of the dean model which helped her to stay open to the coaching she was receiving. “I believe my thinking shifted into a different gear, I was there. I value anyone’s information if you value me…and if you value me, I will value you and I don’t know that that relationship prior to that was there.”

**Changing and Maintaining Relationships**

Now in her eighth year of teaching, TCH5 has been working to develop a relationship with a different dean, one in which she has struggled with this year. She describes this relationship as “I wouldn’t call it an overly personal relationship…I don’t know that I would say friends. We have a work relationship” She is not confident that the relationship will go much further than it already has and is trying to keep the relationship as professional as she can. She has known her dean for a long time. This is her dean’s first year in the position and TCH5 herself had hoped to become a dean but did not.
TCH is surprised by the difference in the deans she has worked with. Just as all teachers are different, she believes the same can be said for deans and feels that, “you are as good a dean as you want to be.” She reflects on the struggle she has had adjusting to a new dean and though she works hard to not let personal feelings or personal events get in the way, she senses that perhaps she might be someone who simply has a hard time adjusting to change “we have come from a dean at one end of the spectrum to one that’s kind of in the middle and then, it’s just very, very hard to adjust to.”

**Weekly Observations**

As TCH5 reflects on the weekly observations she has had over the past several years she shares several examples. One example was a project in which she was teaching her students about the Iditarod, something that they had been reading about in their textbook. She recalls that this was an important observation to her, “the kids liked it, the observation was large, larger because it encompassed so much, but it was a positive feedback which made me want to do more with other stories.”

This year, all of TCH5’s observations are in the area of math and she is very curious about how that will impact her in the future, “I have not ever been observed reading…how will you use my structure of teaching to improve my results if no one is watching my reading?” She shares a recent observation that she found to be extremely helpful.

My dean had come in and it was hot and heavy workshop, direct group instruction type thing and I was recorded word for word, which I found to be very helpful because not only did she give me every word I was saying; was it
the economy of words, was I throwing out superfluous information that didn’t mean anything, or was I staying on task and able to keep the kids focused?

This scripted observation clearly made a big impact on TCH5’s practices. She states that the feedback she received from this observation changed many of her routines and how she differentiates instruction in her math lessons. TCH5 did not know at the time that everything she said and did was being scripted and was anxious to hear the results once she found out that her dean had observed her that way. She viewed the entire process as “very productive.”

It is powerful. It’s information. Good, bad or ugly, it’s information. You can freeze up on it or you can figure out what to do with it. So I have found myself questioning my time. I feel like I’m making better utilization of my time.

One-on-One Conversations and Receiving Feedback

When TCH5 prepares to go to her one-on-one meeting with her dean she typically gets supplies ready. She also takes a look at the weekly focus areas that her dean has sent to her via email so she can be prepared to discuss her progress. She will sometimes bring along an agenda or list of things that she wants to discuss.

TCH5 usually receives feedback in a written form from her dean after being observed but does not receive it until her one-on-one. She diligently saves every one of these forms and will take the time to pull out former one-on-one notes to review them and refer back to them. It is important to her that whatever she and her dean discuss in their meeting is recorded on these notes.

Reflecting on feedback is an important part of TCH5’s professional growth. She describes how she will “pick key bits of information that I can use and try to put
in perspective of professional development.” She continually remarks that when a teacher stops growing that it is time to leave the profession. Any feedback she receives is a growth opportunity for her.

I’m a big reviewer at the end of the day on my way home. I don’t mind, I don’t care what feedback it is, but I can say to myself…how can I make that twist into what I need it to be. I don’t often blow off feedback. There’s times when I do if I’m not in the mood, but when I get feedback and it’s growth feedback, I’m all about it. I really don’t take it negative. I don’t take it as a weakness on my part at all. I just say, okay…I can squeeze that into me. I remember this when I went to school. If we can throw off your center of balance, your center of learning, that’s when you’re learning, and that’s okay…and sometimes it throws me off and then I have to say hold on, stop with the self-destructive words and such, okay I can do this…I can make it fit into a puzzle better.

When she receives feedback that she does not understand or might not agree with, TCH5 admits that she has a tendency to internalize it but is working hard to give her self time in order to think about her responses. “I just need to see if, in fact, they might be right. Maybe they are. Maybe I see myself a little too much, so I really do try to wait before I respond.”

**Setting Goals**

When it comes to setting professional growth goals, TCH5 shares some frustrations and disappointment, as well as the areas in which she is proud of her growth. In the past she has served as a grade level lead teacher and a mentor teacher.
Her goal at this time is to become a dean, a position that she has applied for over the past few years. She is beginning to believe that there will not be an opportunity for her in a leadership role. Instead she states that she will continue to be a self-reflector and to strive to be the best model possible for other teachers.

TCH5 stays on top of her own need to be continually improving by reading a lot of professional books and resources. Her current goal is to instill confidence in her students so that they can grow into good readers.

I can breed a reader but I need to breed the confidence that they can read…there’s a lot of kids in that class that know that they’re not a good reader. They know that’s why they’re in my class, and I’m trying to get that stigma out.

She is also working to improve the level of engagement in her classroom and her time management when working with small groups so that everyone can get the attention and instruction they need to grow.

While TCH5 has TOPs goals that she has set with her dean, she sees these goals as mostly “obligatory.” She states that she is not sure that her current TOPs goals are “professional enough” for her, and wishes that she could have a one-on-one conversation in which she could set more demanding goals.

**Growing as a Professional**

TCH5 is very clear that she impacts her own growth more than anybody. She is very self-motivated and comments that she has “never had anybody have to pull me along.” While she acknowledges that she knows she is needed and valued at her school, lately she has been finding it very difficult as she does not see any growth opportunities in a leadership position at this time. She speaks of being very frustrated,
and believes that she has “reached a pinnacle of leadership opportunities.” She tries to remind herself that she is successful as a teacher.

I look at myself and go…wait a minute. You’re in it to teach. Stop. I just have to pull myself away from that. I’m in it to teach and I’m thrilled that my kids are being so darn successful right now. So that’s what I’m working on right now to see what it is that makes this job, what will make this job more functional next year.

This is the first year in her experience as a teacher that she has been responsible for teaching a self-contained classroom in which she plans for and teaches all subjects. Areas of growth for TCH5 include being more conscious about increasing student engagement. She focuses much more now on being more aware of how her students are engaged with lessons rather than what she is teaching on the whiteboard, especially in the area of math. To make this even more challenging, the school has adopted a new math program this year. She states that previously she was “more worried about concepts, teaching concepts, versus who’s getting it. Now it’s the other way around.”

Another area of growth for TCH5 has been in increasing her amount of student feedback, one of her personal goals.

I just knew I wasn’t giving them enough, so rather than wait for math to correct math, I do it within the first 45 minutes of the day…I’m eating into my reading time, but they have the feedback immediately and they know what they’re doing.

She also reflects on areas where the observation/feedback model has helped to make a difference in her practices.
Being more aware of my teaching practices and some of the newer things they are learning, they are looking for at TOPs. Those kinds of things have kept my attention. My attention to that detail, from engagement to focus to student relationships…I’m now aware of it and I think that’s a helpful tool to be honest with you…I think it is a great way for myself and all teachers to keep in mind that no one is that good that you can’t continue to improve.

**Thoughts about Effectiveness**

As TCH5 thinks about how much she, as a teacher, believes that she can get students to care about school, to do their best, and to show interest in their growth as students, she states that she wonders how much she can get the parents of her students to do the same. Aside from parent participation, she acknowledges, “how can I get them to love it? They’ll love it as long as I’m loving it and they know I do, but once they leave my doors, I can’t respond to it. She believes that she has 100% control over helping her students value learning.

When reflecting on how her beliefs about her effectiveness in the classroom are connected to her work with her dean, TCH5 states that she received more guidance and coaching from her former dean. Most of her growth and effectiveness as a teacher have come about because of her own efforts rather than the feedback and interaction she has had with her dean.

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

TCH5 credits the professional rather than personal relationship with her dean as instrumental in helping to make her one-on-one conversations more meaningful this year.
I don’t have to talk about family, not that I have to or don’t have to, but I don’t. We talk about what’s going on in class, what we’re working towards, engagement, or what I am doing and how our curriculum is working. It’s really very professional. There is nothing personal and I’m okay with that.

When considering the relationship she has with her dean, and her dean’s impact on her at this time, she states that she views her dean as her manager rather than her coach. She values most the second pair of hands when she needs help. She feels that the support is there and she will use it when she feels the need. TCH5 states that this support is what makes the whole dean/teacher relationship and observation feedback model work for her, “student support…the continued process of keeping student engagement, those TOPs things going. I think that is valuable for me. The support is valuable…it’s there when I need it. If I don’t need it, I don’t need it.” She describes their current relationship as “burgeoning” and admits that in order for it to grow further “it’s key for me that my growth mindset has got to change.”

Learning from her dean’s feedback is very important to TCH5 but she is not sure at all that her dean realizes how reflective she is as a teacher or how she learns from feedback. She states that her dean has “not taken the time to find out.” She believes her dean is doing her job but that they have not taken the time to really talk “I mean you have 30 minutes tops, and by the time you get in and say a few niceties, how the kids are doing, whatever, we’re done.”

TCH5 expressed concerns that there is inconsistency in expectations of how deans should be working with teachers and believes that there is some information missing from deans to teachers as to what the expectations are for teachers from year to year. She shares that it would be helpful to have more transparency into what a
dean does in comparison to what is expected of a teacher and more transparency about the consistency of teacher evaluations.

Teacher 6 – TCH 6

Setting the Stage

TCH6 eagerly shares that she was very excited to be hired for her first year teaching as a kindergarten teacher at a public charter academy. Her school is located in a suburb of a major Midwestern city. She was one of several first through third year teachers in this school that was also in its first year of operation. Opening as a school serving approximately 500 students in grades K-5, this school serves two very distinct groups of students. Approximately half of the student body is made up of high performing youngsters from upper middle class homes, while the other half of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches and more typically have not met grade level proficiency standards upon enrolling in the school. When describing her school environment, TCH6 notes that there is a significant difference in the level of parental support and involvement between the two groups of students. She describes her own class as being a very high performing group of kindergartners.

This school opened up with three deans and one principal, with two of the three deans having experience either as a dean in another building, or as a former administrator. TCH6 describes how she “loved the idea of opening a school and setting the climate…I really wanted to learn what that looks like.”

Like most every new school in its first year, the first year at this school was not without its struggles. TCH6 shares how as a staff they were not prepared for some of the challenging behavior issues that came up in the first few weeks and months of the school year. During its first year of operation, TCH6 reports that there was quite a
a bit of teacher turnover, especially in the beginning of the year primarily due to these behavior challenges and a lack of set processes and procedures. Things have since settled down and improved. She describes the staff as a “hard working, very committed group of people.”

Prior to her new position, TCH6 had student field placements in both a charter school and a Christian school. As she approached her first year of teaching she had three different job offers to consider. She was somewhat surprised to find herself teaching kindergarten during her first year, as her original plan was not to teach kindergarten but to work in the special education department. She holds certification in special education, experience and knowledge she has found extremely valuable in her work with her students, especially when dealing with some challenging socio-emotional issues. She loves teaching kindergarten and explains,

I don’t think I could teach it forever, cause I’m exhausted, but it’s great!

They’re such good kids and they try so hard and it’s so much fun to set them up for school…to get them excited about learning, because if they aren’t here, they never will. I love it!

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

When reflecting on her initial thoughts and expectations about the observation/feedback model, TCH6 recalls that she thought that her relationship with her new dean was supposed to be “sort of like a mentorship.” She was excited about the idea of having a one-on-one meeting with her dean once a week and comments that this model was a large part of why she wanted to work at the school. Once the school year got underway, however, she reports that she often “struggles with it in practicality.” She describes coming in thinking that “this is good for me, this is to
grow me,” but soon began to experience a “feeling like just check it off and get it over with.”

Her biggest challenge, according to TCH6, was the anxiety and confusion she experienced over bringing in struggles and growth areas, which she considers negativity, versus saying “it’s going to be great” when meeting with her dean. Frequently, in our conversations together, she shares that she finds herself trying to figure out a balance between needing and wanting support and presenting herself as a professional in a professional relationship. She reiterates that she “should have had more tact” instead of telling her dean about some of the problems she was facing in her classroom.

**Relationship with Dean**

For much of the year, TCH6 reports that trying to build a relationship with her dean was challenging. She reflects that “getting to know someone who’s your boss just takes time. They don’t know what you’re trying to say and you don’t always know what they’re trying to convey until you’ve gotten to know them better.” Though she has experience as an administrator in another district, her dean is in her first year as a dean and is new to this organization. As she adjusted to her new role in a new school, TCH6 describes that much of the time her dean was in her room, or any other teacher’s room during the first semester, was to help manage student behavior. She reflects that it was not until the school was able to hire para-professional support for these special needs children that her dean was actually able to observe her as a teacher.

TCH6 remembers hearing at her initial orientation “when you come in my door and close it, if you need to cry we’re here for you, it’s tough, especially being a
new school, and I totally did.” She describes how she truly felt like she could talk to her dean about anything in the beginning but now strongly believes that that is was not the case,

I think I shared my struggles too much in that time and really she saw me as a struggling teacher, whereas my room is great…I think by only bringing up my struggles in one-on-one conversations, it didn’t come across that my kids were actually doing well.

While she admits that she likes her dean a lot and feels like she has gotten to know her better, her focus is more on “getting to know how to handle having a supervisor and how to have tact when you speak to them.” After a disappointing first evaluation when she shared her frustration with a co-worker, she remembers this fellow teacher giving her advice that she took to heart about not telling her dean as much about what is not going well for her or talking to her like she is her friend. She recommended that she “put on a little bit of a show and just get through it...treat her like a hard professor. The system isn’t working this way so you’ve got to adapt.”

TCH6 took that advice and feels better now about their relationship, no longer seeing her as a potential mentor but still appreciating their work together. She recalls a conversation she had with her dean about the level of support she was receiving.

You’re a first year teacher and I should be in your room all the time, and she’s very, very rarely in here because I don’t have the behavior issues and down the hall, a poor kid is throwing chairs and she’s got to be there. So I think she’s not doing what she wants the position to do.

Changing and Maintaining Relationships
As the year has gone by TCH6 describes her relationship with her dean as one in which she has gotten to know her reasonably well. They can now joke around together and when her dean asks her how things are going, she brings up things that are happening in her room that are going well. TCH6 shares her beliefs that when she initially began this relationship with her dean, thinking that she was her mentor, she often thought about her mentor in college and was ready to be open and trusting with her dean, something TCH6 judges something that

You shouldn’t do that with somebody you don’t know, so I think I probably came off as young. You don’t behave that way necessarily in a meeting, like I said before, coming in and only talking about the bad things…and not in a negative way, just in teach me, teach me, teach me.

As their relationship has developed she can now see several ways in which she and her dean are similar, how they are both “always seeking something true.” Their relationship has grown to a place where “we are both in a place that we can respect each other and work together more effectively than we did in the beginning.”

Weekly Observations

TCH6 recalls that in the first few months of school, any time that her dean came to observe her, the observation turned to the dean helping to manage student behavior. Once there was regular adult support in the form of a para-professional for a special needs child, her dean was better able to observe her delivering instruction. Typically her dean would send her an email indicating that she would be coming in to observe and more than likely, these observations happened during TCH6’s workshop time. When TCH6 has workshop time in her classroom, several of her students leave
to go into another classroom and she receives a number of students from the other kindergarten rooms.

She reflects on a time when her dean came in to observe and she had several students who ordinarily are not in her room for workshop participating that day due to an issue with the interventionists’ schedule. She remembers having “26 extremely low level behavioral issues kids, many of them who had never really stayed in here before…[Dean’s] in here for that day of course…it was just crazy!” While TCH6 tried to quickly rearrange her room and her lesson on the spot to accommodate the additional children, she remembers that “it was a mess…it was awful” and recalls her dean questioning her planning and structure. She recalls feeling embarrassed and discouraged.

As TCH6 describes how she learned to manage weekly observations from her dean, she shares how sometimes she would intentionally do a skill or a practice just so her dean could write down that she did it. This clearly did not set well with her as a teacher and remembers thinking that it was “ridiculous to stage behaviors.” She made a decision to just teach the lesson the way she normally would and trust that her dean would let her know if that was okay or not, but she believes that that was not a good idea.

I think [Dean] thought I was ignoring what she was in here for. I think she felt like I wasn’t taking her feedback or something…I think it ended up coming across as I didn’t care that she was in here. I didn’t care what she had to think or what she had to say…

TCH6 made a conscious decision from that point to make sure that she demonstrated the TOPs behaviors she knew her dean was looking for. She feels that
observations go much better now, especially when she says “everybody, say it with me…I Can whatever…and we ham it up and then I turn back to [Dean] and give her thumbs up, she laughs and marks it off her chart.”

**One-on-One Conversations and Receiving Feedback**

As she prepares for her one-on-one conversations with her dean, TCH6 laughs that her first goal is to get her students out of her room and off to their electives. Sometimes she will bring some notes with her to help her remember topics she wants to discuss, but mostly she just drops by her dean’s office. She takes comfort in knowing that if her dean is not able to meet with her during their scheduled time that she is able to stop by her office if there is a pressing matter that she would like to discuss as they are both often working late. She will try to think back over when she was last observed and prepare herself by remembering how the observation went and consider whether or not anything needs to be clarified. She does not receive written feedback prior to going into her meeting but does receive it during the one-on-one. As a first year teacher, TCH6 states that having a meeting entirely centered around her has been awkward, something that took her quite a while to get used to.

When she thinks about receiving feedback, it is clear that she values and appreciates it, finding it “of interesting to hear other people’s perspective. I like to hear how I should grow, it feels like meeting with a professor sometimes.” Getting to this point of appreciation did not happen right away for this teacher. She shares that it was a big struggle in the beginning of the year because it was difficult for her dean to actually do an observation in her room due to behavior challenges. TCH6 remembers that it seems that “literally she maybe came in three times over two months and she came on the worst days.” When she would explain to her dean why things happened
the way they did, whether it was unexpected students in the classroom, or unexpected schedule changes she remembers her dean saying “you seem to have an excuse for everything,” feedback that was very difficult for TCH6 to hear as she knows that “I’m not that kind of person.” She questions whether her dean’s initial reflections and feedback given to her were accurate because “it just wasn’t happening enough for me to feel that anything she was saying was a true reflection.”

Throughout our conversations together TCH6 often reflects that she questioned whether or not her dean liked her or really knew her and what was really going on in her classroom. Often she mentions thinking that her dean believed she did not take feedback well or act on the suggestions made to her. She remembers feeling attacked by the feedback she was receiving and needing to “hear that I was doing something right.” Still she remains determined to grow into an effective teacher.

The few times she did see, and just that fact that she didn’t know me and she didn’t really take what I was saying, that definitely shattered me, like I’m awful. I don’t know what I’m doing…what am I doing here? And then coming back from that I was just determined to prove it all wrong and say, alright…well whatever, who cares what somebody else thinks of you, go walk in and then work for kids, and since then, I think it’s helped me improve for sure and in my confidence I guess as you improve you feel better.

She is relieved however that her relationship with her dean has grown and that they have come a long way since then. She feels comfortable having open discussions with her about what did or what did not go well. Since mid-year, TCH6 feels that the combination of her growing stronger a teacher, her dean coming in at better moments and getting to know her better has made their relationship much better. She feels that
her dean gives her better feedback now and that she, as a teacher is “more well-rounded.” She expresses that now when she leaves her one-on-one conversation,

I feel more confident walking back to my classroom, whereas there were many meetings where I’d walk back and be like, I don’t know what to do better, I’m working so hard, but not achieving what I want to.

She is appreciative of the feedback she receives on everything but specific TOPs skills and feels she can actually use the feedback effectively as the “scope is wider and more useful.”

**Setting Goals**

Early in the school year, TCH6 remembers receiving an email from her dean in which she was asked to pick two goals from a list of TOPs skills. As she was busy trying to adjust to all of the demands of her new job, she set them aside and forgot about them. Later at a meeting, her dean handed her the form and asked her to just choose two skills that she would work on. She picked I Can statements and Social Contract but does not remember why she chose these skills. Throughout the course of her first year she has worked through four TOPs skills, three of which she has chosen herself with her dean choosing only one, called Back Pocket, stating “I think you’re really good at it, but I think I want to see it more often.”

Other than TOPs goals, TCH6 has set her own goals that are all based on her students. She describes her reasons and her primary goal,

I am here because I want these little kids to grow up and be awesome human beings. I don’t super care if any of them win a Nobel Prize or a McArthur Genius grant or whatever. I want them to care about people and be kind and know how to treat other people. So we focus on that a ton in my room and
that’s my goal…when I see a student treating another student that I know they
don’t like, I feel like I’ve reached a goal.

Growing as a Professional

TCH6 definitely sees this year as one in which she has made significant
growth. She talks a lot about the increase in confidence that she has experienced. She
is excited for next year as she shares that she knows now “exactly what I’m going to
do. I just feel more prepared.” She is more confident in knowing how to handle
difficult parents, hurt children, and many other things that have come her way this
first year in the classroom. She sees herself as much more organized and feels she has
discovered how to make time to reflect and breathe, helping her to start her day “from
a calmer place.” She reflects on what it has been like to be a new teacher in the first
year,

I was thinking about it a lot because my husband [and I] both graduated in
May, and we’ve got all these other friends who just graduated who are not
teachers…it’s very much like, I’m the junior man on the account, like the one
kind of doing the gophering…any other job when you come in your first year,
you’re not at the same level as everybody else…it’s just not logical. Teaching,
you walk in and you’re doing the exact same thing that the 12 year veteran is
doing and you’re just thrown into it…that’s the nature of teaching. I’ve kind
of looked at it like, okay, it’s alright that I was struggling because any other
kind of career and I would have had somebody constantly on top of me telling
me what to do for the first couple of weeks. I’m just more comfortable with
who I am…this isn’t going to be perfect and that’s okay.

Thoughts about Effectiveness
In addition to her increased confidence level, TCH6 describes her own personal beliefs in her ability to get through to the most challenging kids as what she is best at, stating, “I get more excited about my kids who have no clue about what’s going on than my kids who are high performing. I love the challenge of it.” She firmly believes that she is going to reach her students and help them to learn, “I’m going to reach you…I care if you’re reached. There’s no reason I can’t reach them.”

TCH6 sees herself as growing into a much more effective teacher this year but is not sure of how much of that growth can be attributed to her relationship with her dean, though she states that “she definitely was a part of it. It’s hard to measure, this is because of my dean or not.” While she never questions her ability to actually teach and reach her students, she recalls that the lack of any positive feedback the first half of the year along with learning to effectively manage all of the “extra stuff” that a teacher needs to take care of such as paperwork, attendance, grading papers, etc. may have caused her to question her effectiveness early in the year.

Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model

TCH6 clearly values the work that she and her dean do together much more at the end of her first year than she did the first half of the year. Much of this is due to the more positive feedback that she now receives from her dean. She acknowledges that she has been “constantly adapting from her feedback” something that she deems as positive for her growth as an educator. She shares again that she was surprised in the beginning of the year to discover that the teacher-dean relationship was not like the mentor relationship she had hoped for, again stating that perhaps she was naïve in coming in when she recalls,
I guess I did think of it more as a mentor relationship, and it’s not really that way, at least not with us. I feel like you can’t have a true mentor that you don’t know. You can’t just walk in and be like, I’m going to be your mentor, I’m going to be your mentee, and get off on that personal relationship.

She values her dean’s background and experience. She places a high level of value on honesty between her dean and herself. Sharing challenges and frustrating moments together when “we were both at our wit’s end” seems to have built a closer relationship between them. TCH6 describes this as a “a nice moment as two people, because I saw her heart.”

While earlier in the year she viewed her dean primarily as a supervisor, because she believed that her dean did not have the time to be the mentor she desired, she now views her as someone closer than a superior. She shares again, her initial desire to have a mentor but realizing that,

Walking in not knowing someone, you can’t start off a relationship that way. You need to build some trust first. I think if I were to stay and if she were to stay next year, it would look a little bit more like a mentor-mentee relationship.

If TCH6 could give advice to a new dean who is entering into this teacher-dean relationship she would wish that that dean would walk in her classroom and take notice of students doing something well and then tell her, as the teacher about it. She makes the analogy of feeling “almost like a single mom…if you like my kids, I like you!” In addition to acknowledging the positive aspects of her students, TCH6 also shares her feelings of the importance of consistency in conducting regular observations and holding agreed upon one-on-one conversations, “I know that it’s
hard, but you’ve got to be there or else how can someone rely on you? It’s just not possible."

The next section of this chapter focuses on the profiles of all six dean who were participants in this study.

**Dean 1 – DN1**

**Setting the Stage**

DN1 has been in the education field for almost two decades. Over the last 20 years she has served as a para-professional, classroom teacher, Title I coordinator, school board member, and most recently, four years as Dean of Intervention at an urban school in the heart of a major Midwestern city. She has worked in both public schools and in charter schools for several different management companies. All of her experience as an educator has been in urban education.

As a Title I coordinator working in a charter school management organization prior to her current school, she traveled around the country servicing over 50 different schools and helping them to establish Response to Intervention programs in their buildings. This work clearly prepared her well for her position as dean overseeing various intervention programs for students who are at-risk for not meeting grade level objectives.

DN1 came to the school she is currently working in four years ago as the school was opening its doors for its first year. From the beginning, she has served as the dean overseeing all intervention programs. More recently, due to the resignation of another dean, she has taken on the additional responsibility of being the dean for teachers in grades K-1.
The school in which DN1 works opened up with students in grades K-5 and then over the past four years, added a grade every year until this last year when the first class of eighth graders enrolled. DN1 reports that her school is home to approximately 780 students, 99% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. The student body is 99% African American and the majority of students are below grade level in both math and reading. DN1 estimates that “we do have a semi-proficient in each grade level, so that’s about 15 kids per grade level that are partially where they need to be.”

Behavior problems are a significant issue for the school, according to DN1, especially in the upper elementary and middle school grades. Additionally, the school experiences an unusually high level of both teacher and student turnover. Changes in administration have left the school with three deans instead of four and an interim principal.

DN2 describes a typical day for her beginning with looking for substitutes, as several teaching positions were vacant much of this year, making sure breakfast is going well, and “finding clothes or washing clothes that parents have dropped off, or in my back office combing young girls’ hair, who for whatever reason didn’t get their hair combed.” She speaks frequently throughout our conversations together of her need and desire to “remove the barriers” that get in the way of both students and teachers in this challenging environment.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

DN1 recalls that the observation/feedback model and the dean position were initially explained to her by a co-worker as “they’re like mini-principals and you manage your own house.” When she questioned why the organization had so many
deans, she was told that deans manage payroll, take care of staff, and are responsible for teacher coaching. When she considers what she believes the main purpose or goal of this model to be she states,

We don’t wait to fail…you know if you’re supporting, not watching, if you’re supporting, coaching, providing resources to staff and students real time, it’s not…I didn’t know what was happening, or I didn’t know they didn’t understand, or I didn’t think their scores…no…I’m in there…so it’s a not waiting to fail model for me.

DN1 has adapted this observation/feedback model to fit her own style of supporting and coaching. She very rarely observes with paper, usually choosing instead to model, co-teach, or try out different strategies. She recalls the first few times that she observed teachers when the school first opened up that much of the observation was completing a check list of skills known as the Teacher Observation Protocol (TOPs) which she is happy to note has been in the process of changing. For her teachers who were brand new to the organization, which were about half of the staff, her practice of coming into their classrooms and modeling or co-teaching was easy and readily accepted. For the other half, made up of teachers who had already been a part of the organization and used to the model of a dean coming in, observing, and writing up observation notes, it was more difficult. DN1 was clear that she needed to help all of her teachers, even those with years of experience, to find areas in which they need to grow, understanding that “the purpose is strategies, tools in the tool belt, effective instruction.”

She remembers the first few one-on-one conversations with teachers as being kind of awkward. She laughs as she states, “I love to talk about me! I have a hard
time listening to people talk about themselves.” The expected 15 minutes of teachers
talking about what ever they wanted to talk about was difficult for her and after about
six months she dropped that practice saying “forget the 15…we’ve gotta move on!”
She recalls that she tried to follow the one-on-one conversation process for about a
year because she wanted to trust the process and wanted to get to know her staff.

**Becoming an Instructional Leader**

DN1 chose to become an instructional leader because she has definite goals in
mind as an educator. While she would like to be a building principal, her ultimate
goal is to start her own charter school company or work with a charter school
organization in the area of professional development. She believes that gaining
experience in a wide variety of leadership positions within a school system will help
her to reach her goal of starting her own school. She became a leader because she has
a desire to become a “turn around specialist and go into the inner city and look at the
barriers from incarceration, death, low income, to see what is stopping students from
learning and growing.” Her desire to understand and remove all barriers is her reason
for approaching this model by team-teaching and modeling with teachers to see if her
expertise can in fact make a difference.

**Developing, Changing, and Maintaining Relationships**

A great deal of time spent team building with teachers is key for DN1 to
building relationships. She reports that she has spent hours creating “amazing
professional development sessions.” Additionally, she takes her team through
exercises that are designed to help them get to know each other and to build a strong
team that works together as a unit, focused on the same goals.
Recently we did a collage together. My team was just starting to get in a rut, we were going a billion different directions and we forgot what our purpose was, why do we get up and come to work today? It was either what I’m doing, or what he’s not doing or what she’s doing, but our purpose…why we are here…so I took our team and we did a mural together just redefining our purpose as to why we teach or why we’re here.

She challenges her team members to take the time to reflect on their relationships, and to continually re-evaluate and build on the level of trust and support they feel with each other.

**Weekly Observations and One-on-One Conversations**

DN1 conducts regular weekly observations with her interventionists and teachers. Her observations are generally a drop in, without advance warning, unless there is something specific that she wants to see. In this case she lets the teacher know that she will be observing and what she will be looking for. Her hope is that drop-in visits will help minimize a teacher’s tendency to “be artificial where you’re just trying to squeeze it in because I’m there.”

As she prepares to observe, she describes a process of making a conscious decision of what type of observation she is going to do based on the individual needs of the teacher and the students in the classroom. The observation might be one in which she is a “silent observer” or one in which she is in the middle of the lesson, what she labels as “teaming up with the observer.” Throughout our conversations together, DN1 gave her reasons for becoming actively engaged in the lessons she observes.
At the end of the day, I know I have the skills to help move some of our new teachers forward. It’s one thing to talk about it, to say try this…you have to try this. Time is of the essence in my community. So for the most part, I’m in there getting my hands dirty so they can see the strategy, how well it works or see that it doesn’t work, but it allows me to help quickly make that adjustment opposed to just talking about it…let me show you how this is done, in a non-threatening way.

She typically prepares for her one-on-one conversations by reviewing a teacher’s lesson plans. She thinks about the standard the lesson is covering, and what TOPs skills or goals the teacher is currently working on. She will also look back at previous one-on-one conversation notes to make sure she has addressed any previously discussed needs.

**Delivering and Receiving Feedback**

After DN1 has conducted an observation, she typically does not give observation notes or written feedback to her teachers. Her belief is that her time is better spent working to increase student proficiency. Occasionally, if she has taken a picture in the classroom she may send that to the teacher, but as far as observation notes go,

It’s really for me, not about me giving them something, because I’ve given you a visual or we’ve walked through it, and we can talk about that afterwards. I don’t have time to sit there and clean them up, that’s not important to me to do.

While she may not give a lot of written feedback, DN1 is clear in her work as a dean that “feedback grows us and so do questions.” She reflects that her style of
delivering feedback is very direct. She often gives feedback right on the spot because
doesn’t want to wait to deliver it for another week as her interventionists may see
individual students just a few times a week. She did share that she will follow her
own 24 hour rule if “there’s things that make you boil when you see it…I have to
wait 24 hours for myself to make sure I was giving it [feedback] appropriately, not
being passive, but being direct.” DN1 reports that she can come off “really hard” and
that she has had to work hard over the past ten years to “understand people have
things they’re going through in their lives, they’re stressed, everybody has their story.
If I snap like I want to, it does not get us anywhere. It doesn’t move us forward.” At
the same time, she reflects that if something is going on that could potentially hurt the
building or hurt the students, she has to give the feedback, or has to help her
teammate deliver the hard feedback in question.

As a dean with a style of communication that is direct and to the point, DN1
also receives feedback from her teachers. She reflects that she has never received
feedback that has been hard for her to accept because her “attitude about it is, I’m
human and I do things wrong.” She willingly accepts the feedback but admits that she
has received feedback where “the way they’ve presented it has kind of ticked me off.”
She encourages her team to be honest and direct with her, knowing that she does
make mistakes and notes that “if they tell me it’s not a big deal, I’m like okay…I
didn’t think of it that way and we keep moving…I really work with my team …no you
come in here, close that door, put your hands on your hips and really let me have it.”

Dealing with Resistance

As a dean, DN1 will sometimes experience resistance from her teachers,
either in regards to the feedback she gives or to the expectations for instructional
delivery that she and the school administrative team have put in place. One of the
more frequent types of resistance comes from teachers who are resistant to using the
curricular tools that the school has adopted. An expectation at this school is that the
tools be implemented with fidelity, something that may present a challenge to
teachers who have always had to find their own curriculum or in some cases, where
they have never been expected to deliver an intervention program with fidelity. DN1
states that this can become “an ongoing battle, so I have to say, I need you to do it
this way. You’re wasting your time, you’re going in circles when everything is right
here for you.”

As the dean of intervention, DN1 is always aware of a sense of urgency. This
becomes even more critical when a teacher is resistant to delivering curriculum the
way it is designed to be delivered.

I know as dean of intervention that if core instruction isn’t in place, nothing I
do works. If core instruction is not in place, our interventions will not work.
So that was great for me to really get out on the teacher’s side to say, I need
you guys to make sure that you’re getting through all this content. I can’t have
them rainbow writing words. Busy work wastes time. Every day they’re
rainbowing words gets us nowhere. Just because a cute girl off of Teachers
Pay Teachers decided to do that doesn’t mean that’s what we need to do.

If she gives feedback and a teacher is resistant to that feedback or disagrees,
or does not think that the feedback is what is best for students, DN1 reports that she
will try and find a compromise so that the teachers feels comfortable with their
delivery of the program.

Setting Professional Goals
DN1 has several goals as a professional, including becoming a principal, starting her own charter school, and being part of a professional development team for charter schools. She also is very much interested in becoming an educational lawyer who would work with school boards, or open an educational consulting firm. She shares the importance of setting sub-goals, such as finishing her leadership degree, prior to seeing these larger goals to fruition. Her primary goal however, is to find out and break down the barriers that inner city schools and children face. After a particularly challenging school year, she has engaged in a lot of reflection about the progress she is making toward that primary goal.

I’m in that phase of deciding how to meet those goals, or which ones are important…in order to reach my goals, there’s some student goals. So in order for me to move forward and to be successful for next year, I have to keep it student centered. Any goal that leads towards students making the growth they need to be proficient. So for my professional development for the summer and moving forward, what I need is just really looking at the data, really sorting through our practices to see what worked this year, what worked the previous year, what we need to change…whatever shakes out about me personally from that is going to be what it’s going to be. But I can’t reach my personal goals if I don’t get kids to where they need to be.

**Growing as a Professional**

DN1 shares that one of her greatest challenges in being a dean is keeping up with the paperwork that comes her way, especially entering the TOPs data into the computer. She finds this challenging because other than just not liking to do it, it gets in the way of her having the time she needs to work effectively in a high intervention
school. She prides herself on improving in this area and states that she is on top of her game in getting compliance items in on time. Another major growth area or goal she has worked on since becoming a dean is in understanding that teachers also have barriers that interfere with their ability to be effective in the classroom. She reflects that she has come to an understanding that she has “human beings sitting in front of me” and that part of her role is to help her teachers deal with personal issues so that students are not affected. She uses the term “put your big girl pants on” with her teachers as she helps them process these barriers.

I get it, wipe the tears, you can take 30, I’ll get you coverage, we’ll cry together, but you gotta go back…or not…you can go home, one of the two, you know I’ll support whatever you need, but if you’re here, take 15, I’ll go in, I can continue the lesson. So I try to be supportive but the no excuse model. If you’re going to be here, I need 100. If you can’t give me 100 then take 5.

Over the course of our interviews together, DN1 questioned whether or not she was making the growth as a professional that she had first shared. The challenges present in her school and in her job have taken their toll and wonders if in fact she has grown at all stating that “my growth this year has been minimal because I’m just trying to make it, just trying to make sure the little piece I have left in me went toward students.”

**Thoughts about Effectiveness and Measuring Impact**

When considering her effectiveness as a leader, especially in dealing with or helping her teacher deal with difficult challenges with parents, students, and staff, DN1 states that she very comfortable. She deals with situations directly or helps the
staff member who brought a situation to her attention deal with it, “I don’t sugar coat it. It is what it is, and we have to react to that.”

When she is not sure how to help resolve an issue she will reach out to co-workers or to the building principal. While she is comfortable seeking advice from others for difficult situations, she acknowledges that she does not know everything. She works to find the answers and get back with the person needing support.

DN1 measures the impact that her leadership is having on her teachers’ growth by analyzing the progress that students are making. By looking at student learning plans and reviewing student data, she can see if teacher effectiveness is transferring into student knowledge. If little student growth is evident, then she gives feedback to teachers that they are not asking higher level questions, keeping lessons engaging, maintaining an effective pace, or whatever instructional skill or strategy seems to be lacking.

**On Building Trust**

Building trust with her teachers is critically important for DN1, something she describes as a challenge given the upheaval her school has experienced this year. As she has taken over two grade levels mid-year due to the resignation of another dean, DN1 has faced roadblocks to trust along the way. She states “when teachers don’t trust…it’s a slow go… We gotta keep chipping at it, keep trying to build trust.” Making sure that her team trusts her even when times are hard or when support is scarce is vital. She does so by going to her team members regularly and taking the time to take that “extra moment to connect, and provide mental support so they understand things are the way they are, here’s what you can expect,” as she strives to rebuild any trust that has been damaged. She reminds her teachers that she is still
going to support them, even when a teacher might get angry with her. Her goal is to “trust the process, try it, and get to know my staff” something that she acknowledges could take six months to a year. While focusing on trust, she also strives to help her team understand that they also have to trust that they can give her feedback and “in the moment, I’ll accept it so that we can move on.”

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

DN1 places great value in the honesty that she and her team have developed together. The team that she built from the beginning of the year has moved forward. She sees them as a family that has developed trust and knows how to give each other feedback. She states that they have all learned from each and that they are “really learning how to pick up pieces to support each other to get students to grade level.”

When she considers the observation/feedback model and the value it provides for teachers and deans, she believes that it can be artificial at times or even forced, if deans “just go through the motions or do things just because it’s on the list to get it done. It just takes away from students.” She shares her concerns about the parts of the model she does not find particularly helpful.

Sometimes the logistical stuff gets in the way, it’s really good for data purposes, but it gets in the way. Entering TOPS sometimes is just unnecessary for me, gets in the way. Discussing best practices, that doesn’t get in the way, but just to sit and say, how many did you get in this week? that gets in my way.

DN1’s recommendation to new deans is to take the time to get to know your staff and what “makes them tick.” She also encourages them to learn the components of their job and to understand what they are going to be working on. Finally, she
advises that they get some confidence and get as much knowledge as they can so that they will be prepared. She reminds deans that they are there to support the teachers.

**Dean 2 – DN2**

**Setting the Stage**

An educator with 14 years of experience, DN2 moved into administrative roles after three years of classroom teaching. She holds both a masters’ degree in curriculum and supervision and certification in administration. The majority of her experience has been in urban education. After spending one year as an assistant principal, she decided that the focus on behavior, which is a common role for an assistant principal, was not for her and that her real passion was in curriculum and instruction.

After serving as an assistant principal, DN2 began leading a new curriculum initiative in which she took the role of literacy coordinator. In this position she was responsible for providing professional development and coaching for teachers in the area of delivering curricular tools and program and disaggregating student reading data in order to monitor the impact of the literacy program. As this role expanded she was given the flexibility of hiring her own team and designing and monitoring a response to intervention curriculum for her team of specialists and instructional coaches. Throughout this time, and despite having had only three years in the classroom, DN2 is quick to recall that she never stopped teaching or working with students as she trained new teachers, modeled comprehension and instructional strategies, and did whatever it took to provide teachers with the necessary support to be successful. She remained with this school for ten years before deciding to move on to her current organization.
DN2 has been serving as a dean with the current charter school organization for three years. This is her first year in her current school where she works with teachers in grades 3-5. Among her nine direct reports or team members she has a teacher experience range from one year to 15 years with the majority of teachers having three or more years of experience.

The school in which DN2 serves as dean has been open for 11 years and currently serves over 700 students in grades K-8. Approximately 65% of the students attending this school qualify for free or reduced lunches. The school has a diverse population of 42% African American, 27% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, 11% multi-racial, 8% Asian, and the remainder Native American or other. The English Language Learner population is growing and is approaching 10%. Over the course of the school’s history, there has been significant turn over in teachers and in administration, although over the past two years this seems to have become more stable. DN2 transitioned to this school from a high performing suburban school seeking an opportunity to learn more about developing culture, managing behaviors, and dealing with a more diverse student body.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

When DN2 was first introduced to the observation/feedback model she was surprised to learn that deans meet with teachers for 30 minutes every week. The thought of meeting weekly with teachers seemed overwhelming at first. In her previous position she had regularly observed teachers and written up comprehensive narratives about those observations, but had not been expected to meet personally with those educators for face-to-face feedback.
She remembers looking at the TOPs handbook that outlines all of the skills she would be observing in the classrooms thinking, “man we’re trying to write down every behavior or every strategy that you could ever do as a teacher.” She admits that this was a lot to take in and that “it felt a little wrong.” Her concern was that she might see teachers do the skill she was looking for but deliver a lesson that was not at all effective or well delivered.

DN2 sought clarification from her co-workers as to what exactly she was looking for in her 12-minute observations, was it the behavior as outlined in the handbook, the overall instruction or both?

One said, just looking for the behavior, they get their point and I’m like okay, You should be looking for both, because if I just gave you your point maybe your lesson was terrible.

After a few initial observations, she did specifically tell her team of teachers, “don’t do good news when I walk in, it if doesn’t fit, then don’t do it.”

**Becoming an Instructional Leader**

Prior to becoming a dean, DN2 began to feel that her position at her former school was not providing her with enough opportunities for growth. As her feelings of having outgrown the position increased, she also realized that the school itself was heading in a different direction and was no longer a good fit for her. She knew that change was needed, but she wanted to avoid a position as an assistant principal who deals primarily with discipline. Moving to her current organization as a dean, gave her an opportunity to do what she does best, working with curriculum and instruction and growing teachers.
She has a desire to become a principal and is aware of a need to gain a “broader scope” and experience in schools with a variety of demographics and academic achievement levels. She moved to her current school from her first school with the organization in order to work with a more diverse student body, a different leadership style, different cultures, and greater academic need than she experienced in her previous building. Ultimately, she wanted to become an instructional leader because she wants to make a bigger impact, and knew that having an experience working in an urban setting would provide her with many opportunities to grow as that leader.

Developing, Changing, and Maintaining Relationships

Although she was used to completing regular observations, providing written feedback, and supporting teachers through instructional coaching at her previous organization, entering into the dean position with this organization has stretched her in an area that she feels she is a growth area for her. The idea of having to actually talk to a teacher for 30 minutes every week was daunting to her.

I’m like 30 minutes? You steal 30 minutes of a teacher’s life every single week? I couldn’t wrap my mind around it. What am I going to talk about? Every week for 30 minutes I have to talk to this person?

DN2 admits that building relationships with the teachers who report to her has been a struggle for her. She reflects, “I guess I’m just not that social…I’m actually very shy.” She has worked hard to learn to be more relationship and “more conversational” with the staff. She shares that prior to coming to this school that she was not used to working with teachers who wanted everyone to be friends and that this has been a major shift for her.
In order to begin building relationships at her current school, she set up times to meet with each teacher individually to introduce herself and talk to them a bit. Her goal was to learn more about the individual teachers so that when they sat down for a one-on-one conversation it would not feel so awkward. She recalls her first few one-on-one conversations and the challenge to build those relationships.

It was tough…I’m sitting with her…so the first 15 minutes, hey how are you? How was your weekend and I’m trying to remember…okay, they said to ask about their kids, okay how are your kids? How was this? And I’m going through my mind with all these things I gotta talk about…

Learning to be take the time to develop relationships with teachers has been a major focus area for this dean. She is very proud of the effort she has put out and the impact it has had on the teachers she with whom she works.

I usually don’t sit around and talk to people. I’ll say hi and I’ll smile and then it’s like okay, that’s enough…I make a conscious effort to build those relationships…My relationships haven’t gotten any smarter. Everything I did at [school] I’m doing here, but it’s going so much further because I’ve connected with the teachers. What I wasn’t able to do in two years over there, I’ve been able to do in three quarters of a year here.

Finding the balance between taking the time to engage in a friendly conversation versus getting down to the task at hand has been a result of feedback DN2 received from others. She admits knowing that she is reserved, but was surprised to learn that at times others saw her as “insincere or authentic.” This feedback caused her to reflect,
Oh my gosh! I’m very sincere, I’m very authentic. Just because I don’t come and talk to you and say good morning? Maybe it does feel very cold if I come to your classroom in the morning and talk to you about a spreadsheet and I haven’t asked about your weekend.

After receiving this feedback, she remembers making a concerted effort to take the time to engage in conversation or listen to a teacher’s concerns before giving feedback. Additionally, she reflects that she has had to slow down and encourage teachers to be more reflective as opposed to giving them direct adjusting feedback.

**Weekly Observations and One-on-One Conversations**

As DN2 prepares for her weekly observations of teachers she first reflects on what subject she wants to see. She will often observe the same subject several weeks in a row in order to gain a better picture of how a unit of study is unfolding. She tries to observe primarily whole group instruction because she wants to see the differentiated components of the lesson, the pacing, and the extensions and connections to other subject areas. As she is observing she will use a common template, adding notes and affirming feedback for the teacher. During the observations, DN2 will script what the teachers and students are doing and saying. These feedback forms or observation notes are completed as she is observing and emailed to the teacher immediately following the observation.

**Delivering and Receiving Feedback**

When she first began her work as a dean and learned about the structure of one-on-one conversations and preferred model for delivering feedback, she recalls being told that she should not give any feedback for the first six weeks as she would not yet have an established relationship with her teachers. She sought guidance from
her fellow deans asking, “is this feedback okay? Am I phrasing it right” noting that she did not want it to come off the wrong way. She was used to giving feedback in a much more direct rather than reflective style. “I might say…you know what? Your kids were doing this…you need to be doing, this…I mean it would be very direct because I think I’m just pretty direct.”

According to DN2, her initial attempts to give feedback following the model were awkward for her. She remembers that it did not feel natural or genuine to her when she delivered it in the suggested format. Consequently DN2 states that she makes a conscious effort to craft her written feedback in her observation notes in a style where she could easily deliver it face to face. Her goal is to make it sound “warm, relational, and affirming.”

As she delivers the feedback during a one-on-one conversation, her comments and questions are based directly on the lesson. She works to be sure to have at least two affirmations or positive feedback to each adjusting feedback. When she does give adjusting or corrective feedback she states, “I always try to do it in a question, but I make it based on what I think the priority is in the classroom.” During these conversations, she feels her teachers have been quite receptive to the feedback and has not had many teachers becoming upset with the feedback she has for them. She states that they usually thank her for the feedback. In the event that she has given feedback before and there is not evidence of change or follow through, then she will “give that same feedback instead of adding another issue to the pot.

DN2’s feedback to her teachers is focused on common assessment data and individual teachers strengths and growth areas, regardless of the amount of experience a teacher may have. Occasionally, especially for a first year teacher, she
will spend time talking about classroom management, but in general she is primarily delivering coaching on effective instruction during her one-on-one conversations.

**Dealing with Resistance**

At times in her work with teachers, DN2 may experience pushback or resistance from a teacher who is unwilling or unable to accept her feedback. While DN2 states that this is rare for her, she will occasionally come across a situation where she needs to have her principal present while observing or giving feedback in order to ensure that there are no miscommunications.

Sometimes the resistance comes from a teacher not using the feedback to change practices in the classroom to the point where student learning begins to suffer. When this happens, DN2 will remind the teacher “when it gets down to the business of kids, I’m not mincing words with you. The kids are first.” She would much rather deliver direct feedback that says “well you know when you did this, maybe you should have tried this” or “here’s an idea, something I’ve tried before, what do you think?” DN2 reflects that an approach like this when there is resistance helps her to get to the point faster and “some teachers just need that!”

**Setting Professional Goals**

This talented educator has set several goals for herself and a plan for her professional life for many years. One major goal is to become a building principal. She is clear that she does not want to be a “life time principal” but rather wants experience as a principal in order to learn the role and to “build a credible testimony to the principals or college students that I teach at the professional level.” She also wants to finish the Education Specialist program that she is currently enrolled in and then move into a doctoral cohort. One she receives her doctoral degree she would like
to teach at the college level as an adjunct professor. She plans to write a book on the effects of early interventions, using the knowledge she gained in her work developing Response to Intervention programs in her previous position. Over the past few years she has had the opportunity to lead some professional development sessions for other school districts. Consequently, she also has a goal of leading professional development as an educational consultant. Her ultimate goal is to “groom adults in order to turn out better teachers. I want to turn out better administrators.”

**Growing as a Professional**

When DN2 considers her own growth as a professional, much of that growth centers on the relationships she has been able to develop. She has intentionally focused on being very reflective as she strives to create a better culture with her teammates and consequently her relationships have become more authentic. She continually turns to the teachers she serves as dean seeking feedback about areas of her own professional growth. She welcomes the feedback stating, “I don’t even have to ask for it…it’s always, here’s some feedback for you, and I love to hear it… we’ve got the kind of relationship where teachers just walk up to me and start talking.”

The observation feedback model has also helped DN2 to grow professionally toward her goal of becoming a strong leader of curriculum and instruction,

It allows me to better understand the curriculum by observing every single week. I see these units play out and I’m getting to the point in my third year…I know the electricity unit, I know the sound unit, or I know the human body systems unit, I feel like I know more curriculum because I’m observing every week.
Thoughts about Effectiveness and Measuring Impact

When DN2 reflects on her own effectiveness as a leader and the impact that her work with her teachers is making on both their growth and student growth, she states that she looks for evidence directly from teacher and student work. One example she shares is a template that she created for language arts lessons. She shared it with her teachers and then asked for their feedback. She requests that teachers let her know when or if they have used this tool or if they would like her to come in and demonstrate how to use it in a lesson. She knows “it’s working if I get evidence, if I get feedback from them.”

When it comes to helping teachers dealing with challenges such as difficult parents, behavioral or motivational issues, or conflict between teachers, DN2 admits that she has not had a lot of these types of situations come up these past three years. If she is not sure how to help or how to support she will go to a colleague or her principal for advice. One difficult situation she described resulted in the need for an apology to a parent from the teacher. She handled this situation by going about it “really gingerly…trying to help them understand why they were wrong and why what they did was not okay…why they need to apologize.”

If there are conflicts between teachers that come up and are brought to her attention, she prefers to deal with them directly. Her approach is to bring the involved parties together and to have them talk about it. If someone does not want to do this her response is, “then don’t bring it up.”

On Building Trust

Trust is critical to building strong relationships, something that DN2 reflects takes continual conscious effort. She believes it is important to use adjusting feedback
sparingly in the beginning of her work with a teacher in order to build trust and that it is equally important for her to keep her commitments to that teacher.

Despite working hard to develop a culture of trust, sometimes that trust level is challenged when there is a need to give adjusting feedback. While the majority of her teachers understand and accept her feedback, even when it is more of a corrective nature, she has had the experience where this was not the case. She describes how she has to work with the teacher to “understand the place that the feedback is coming from, it’s not malicious, it’s not an attempt to throw you, this is just what I saw.” It is at this point, where she has might have to thank the teacher for his or her honesty about their lack of trust, and tell them “if we have a relationship where we are not able to trust each other, then I have to move to bringing another person into the room.”

Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model

DN2 challenges herself in her current position to build strong relationships with the teachers on her team. Throughout our conversations together she talked about the importance of taking the time to be reflective with teachers, to learn more about them, and to develop a strong foundation of trust. When she reflects on these relationships she comments that more than anything, she values the genuineness of these relationships.

I really love the idea…the fact that they will come to me if they have a concern. I love the fact that there is no gossiping in pockets at least that I know of…I stay visible enough and I stay vocal enough. I have enough conversations where I feel that there isn’t much of that going on.
She holds a belief that in many ways the dean/teacher relationship in this model is more impactful than the teacher/principal relationship, a discovery that was a “really tough mind shift for me.” When she thinks about becoming a principal in the near future she wonders about how she will continue to connect with her teachers, and feels a “little sad, just a little bit, that I know that my deans are going to be closer to their teachers than I am.”

While she finds the observation/feedback model to be effective in improving teaching practices and student achievement, she has some thoughts about ways it could be improved. One way is to hold one-on-one conversations less frequently. “I don’t feel the need to meet with veteran teachers every week. I think that I’m giving feedback during every observation…in the form of an email, and maybe we don’t have to meet every week.” She also thinks that perhaps not observing every teacher every week, with perhaps some teachers being observed even more frequently would be beneficial.

**Dean 3 – DN3**

**Setting the Stage**

DN3 has a total of 17 years of experience in education. Initially she wanted to be a high school teacher but after two years of working with high school students in a major Midwestern urban city, she decided she was better suited for younger students. Her goal was to make an impact on students earlier in their lives in order to increase the chances of them graduating from high school and attending college. After receiving an additional certification in elementary education along with a reading specialist degree, she began working with her current organization.
Her first experiences in elementary education were in a K-8 charter school in its first year of operation. During her nine plus years at this school she taught various grades ranging from fourth to eighth grade and eventually transitioned into a position as an instructional coach. During this time she completed a masters degree in educational leadership, did a short stint as interim assistant principal, and eventually became a dean when this school began to use this observation/feedback model.

After one year as dean over grades 3-5, she moved to another school as it was opening and served as middle school dean over special education. When the principal of this school moved on to another role within the organization, DN3 became interim principal. After that year, with the experiences she has in helping to open new schools, she took a new position serving two grade levels, specials, and special education in a school that was opening its doors for the first time. In this role, she has served as dean over 14 teachers. Out of the 14 people who report to her, 10 of them are in either their first or second year of teaching.

With previous experience being part of the opening staff of two new schools, DN3 approached this next opportunity as one in which she knew a few items were critically important right from the start.

We’ve got to make sure we do this, this, and this…some of the process and some of those pieces that I didn’t know going into the other two, especially going into leadership…I felt like I was more helpful and able to say, let’s get this stuff done because I know we need this going in here.

DN3 describes her new school as having an “interesting combination of people.” She reports that it is a very young staff, with the majority being mostly first and second year teachers, a few with experience at other schools within the
organization, and a couple with experience outside of the system. The student body is made of up approximately 50% of the students coming from a suburban, Asian community, and 50% coming from an urban African American culture. She describes it as “two big cultures, together with a very tiny sprinkling of Hispanic and Caucasian kids.” The proficiency levels of the students falls right along the cultural lines, with about one half of the school being well above grade level and the other half falling generally in the bottom quartile. Just over 45% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

DN3 describes the main purpose of the Observation/Feedback model as one “designed to help teachers grow in whatever aspects of teaching they need to grow in.” She sees the function of observations as opportunities to have good conversations about instruction and to give teachers feedback on their instruction, and as a dean is “always looking for ways to help them see their strengths first and then use those strengths to gain leverage in the areas of growth for them.”

As DN3 made the transition from instructional coach to dean, she now found herself as “a boss.” She reports that having experience with instructional coaching did help make her initial one-on-one conversations easier, especially when working with new teachers, most of whom wanted her support. As her school moved into the dean model, she remembers that it was much more challenging to work with teachers who had many years of experience, in some cases even more than she had. “I remember a lot of tense conversations. They really didn’t want deans in their rooms. They didn’t really want to have these observations. What’s the reason? Why are we meeting every week? It doesn’t make sense to them.” Rather than using the suggested format for
giving feedback that she had learned in dean training, she shares that she went back and relied on her previous coaching strategies which were not as rigid or scripted. Eventually her teachers began to relax and realize that she was not telling them what to do but rather trying to help them figure it out themselves. This realization on the part of the teachers took quite a while.

DN3 recalls an interaction she had with a veteran teacher during her early days as a dean. She clearly saw that there were problems in this teacher’s classroom and had feedback for her on how she could improve. Delivering that feedback in a direct manner such as “you need to…” backfired. The teacher did not want to hear it at all, responding to DN3 that “this is the way I do it, this is the way I’ve always done it and my kids have been successful.” DN3 remembers this teacher as being very direct and making it very clear that she did not want her in her room. As a dean, she had to refrain from sharing her opinions, and focus instead on asking her questions about the teacher’s own thoughts regarding the lesson. In addition, she learned to share facts from the observation, such as information about how many students were answering questions or doing certain behaviors.

She responded differently when it was just concrete…this is exactly what happened, how many times you did this, versus sharing my thoughts, so I think I changed how I approached the feedback piece after having experienced her, because it was a tough relationship.

**Becoming an Instructional Leader**

DN3, like many other educators who find themself moving toward a dean position within this organization, originally wanted to complete a graduate degree in curriculum and instruction. She was not able to find a program that was a good fit for
her so she decided to complete a degree in Educational Leadership instead, with the hopes of still being able to find a position working with curriculum and instruction. When her organization began seeking educators for a new instructional coaching position, DN3 decided this would be a great opportunity for her. The job description called for an educator who had the skills to be a coach and a mentor for classroom teachers. Since her co-workers had been coming to her for a number of years for help and advice on instructional practices, and because she loved the idea of being a mentor for other teachers, she easily filled this role. DN3 had had previous experience working with and training new teachers at professional development sessions as well as serving as a mentor to a few teachers. She explains her reason for moving out of the classroom as, “I felt like I was making a bigger difference, because instead of just my own class, I could help effect multiple classes.” Though teaching is still her passion, she strongly believes that she can help more kids by helping their teachers as they grow and develop the same kind of passion.

As an instructional coach she worked with teachers across all grade levels, some new teachers and some veteran teachers who found they were struggling in the classroom. She received extensive training designed to develop her coaching skills and “learned how to use questioning to get people to reflect,” a skill she believes is crucial to her success as a dean.

DN3 describes the major differences between this role of instructional coach and dean. One of the primary differences is that in a dean role she is responsible for handling discipline as well as instruction, something she reports “can take a huge chunk of your day and time and that’s probably my least favorite part of all of it.” Another difference is that as an instructional coach she was not in a position where
she was evaluating teachers. As a dean, she completes mid-year and end of year evaluations for all employees who report to her, a role that can cause some challenges to her work coaching teachers, “even as much as we try to say that coaching and evaluation are separate, I think people still see you a lot of times as that evaluator.”

**Developing, Changing, and Maintaining Relationships**

DN3 shares that when it comes to developing relationships, especially with many brand new teachers, that the idea that the dean is actually evaluating them and is responsible for giving them scores on their observations scares them. To get them past this fear takes her some time. To help them to relax she focuses first on giving a lot of affirming feedback on things they do well as well as working to learn more about them personally so she can connect or at least try to connect to them. In her experience, bringing up corrective or adjusting feedback in the beginning often causes people to become defensive.

As a new school with many teachers in the early years of their careers, DN3 notes that many do not know how to deal with basic classroom management. One way she works to use this need to development management skills to help build relationships with her teachers is to help them learn through modeling and active support.

Just going in and being in their room and having them see you deal with a situation or how you do it, I think lets them know that you’re there to support. Before school, I was in their rooms helping them put up stuff in their classrooms, talking about, how are you going to set your room up? Helping them move furniture, helping them count curriculum, those types of things
where you’re just there I think are some of the biggest ways to do that and then just continue to be that person that they can go to if they need something.

As she gets to know her teachers and they begin to grow more comfortable with her, DN3 shares that relationships begin to change and evolve. Early on it is a process of “trying to figure them out, how people take feedback, or how people can have that conversation.” She notes that for some of her quieter teachers that getting them to talk often requires her to give them feedback and then giving them an opportunity to respond to it a little bit because they will not bring anything up in their one-on-one conversations.

Within the first month and a half of the school year, DN3 reports that she will generally have a sense of where the majority of her teachers are in terms of their relationship with her, and knowing them personally a bit, but to get to the point where she knows the best way to give each individual feedback, takes quite a bit longer. She reiterates again, “if they can see you as a coach, they get so much further. If they can’t separate it, it’s harder and harder to get them to really invest in the coaching relationship.” She advises that deans need to focus on “building relationships and not get so overwhelmed by everything else that’s going on.” She stresses the need to spend the time upfront getting to know teachers as people including their needs, and knowing “where they’re at as much as possible even before school starts.”

**Weekly Observations and One-on-One Conversations**

Preparing for weekly observations and one-on-one conversations is an ongoing practice for DN3. She shares that she spends more time preparing for her one-on-one conversations than she does for observations because she has conducted so many observations at this point in her career as a dean that she typically knows
what she is looking for. In preparation for her observations, she uses a form in which she indicates the teachers’ TOPs skills she will be looking for as well as any school-wide initiatives that she and her fellow deans are focusing on. If there is anything else she observes or is focused on that is not on these two areas, she will jot down some reminder notes.

Preparation for one-one-one conversations requires DN3 to spend time thinking about both the feedback she is preparing for teachers as well as how she will deliver it, especially in terms of difficult adjusting feedback. DN3 reports that preparing for these conversations requires a great deal of reflection on her part. She admits that she thinks about how to deliver feedback in her car while driving to or from work, in bed, and that sometimes, she’ll wake up at night thinking about how best to get her message across. She states that she is always seeking positive feedback to give to her teachers, generally framing her one-on-one conversations by starting with good news.

When she first began leading one-one-one conversations with her teachers she initially stayed with the recommended structure because it easier for her to get through the conversations, “okay, I’m going to give one adjusting and at least one positive and I’m going to keep it really simple!” Over time she realized that it was more effective to consider the individual styles and needs of her teachers when delivering feedback, differentiating it much the same way she would if she were in a classroom teaching students. While she used to need to write every word of her adjusting feedback down, word for word, she now needs to just jot down a couple of bullet points that she wants to remember, “I do more thinking about it I think, but less structured writing out.”
Delivering and Receiving Feedback

DN3 shares her belief that delivering and receiving feedback has helped both her teachers and herself grow. In terms of delivering feedback to her teachers she shares that “not everyone is going to appreciate the feedback that you’re giving them, not everybody wants to grow.” As a dean, one of her goals is to help teachers to improve their practices through feedback. While many teachers are receptive to her feedback, she states that “there is that sort of idea of the fixed mindset and there are people that you can try to move, but change is hard, and as an adult, it’s even harder.” For this dean, determining how best to deliver feedback requires a great deal of reflection.

Working in a school with so many first year teachers, many of whom she describes as having “skittish personalities,” DN3 shares that she must be very careful delivering feedback initially as the “first few times she gave adjusting feedback the teachers get very worried, almost defensive and scared that they did something wrong.” Much thought and mental preparation must occur in which she considers how to deliver feedback so a teacher will not become defensive or breakdown. She describes situations where a teacher has “a look on their face like you’re telling me I’m doing a horrible job.” At this point, DN3 must find a supportive way to finish the conversation by asking the teacher to think about it more and end the conversation. She shares that she will return to the conversation later after she has had time to think and consider whether or not she delivered the feedback wrong.

She has learned that people will not always react to feedback in the manner in which she originally hopes that they will. She has worked hard to learn to not take these situations personally, especially when the feedback is not well received, “it’s
not about knowing necessarily, it’s about where they are at with their practice and that’s probably the biggest change from the beginning.” As a self-reported rule follower, she has learned to focus less on the process of how to follow the prescribed format for delivering feedback, instead internalizing the process and is able to “really focus on the person…at the beginning I was very strict. I have to do it this way, where now I have found that it’s different for some people, it’s different for every person. I go with the flow more.”

DN3 shares that there are times when people may not agree or understand the feedback she is giving. In these cases, she will attempt to “come at it from a different angle, and tend to go more to reflective coaching.” Sometimes she will have teachers who simply will not buy into what she is saying and she will have to become much more direct, “we’ve already had this conversation but you’re obviously not grasping it so this is what I need you to do to change something.”

When people give her feedback, she feels she is much more reflective on her own practice, much more confident.

I’m not as afraid of the conflict side of things. I feel much more able to go and say, this is not working. We have to fix this. Whereas in the past I would’ve let things go way too long…growth has come from having different experiences, growing as a person, getting feedback. Over the years, I’ve toughened up too in not taking things as personally.

**Dealing with Resistance**

Occasionally, DN3 will have teachers who will have difficulty accepting the feedback and coaching she is giving them. She believes that in order to have them more accepting of her coaching, she must work hard in the first few weeks of school
to help them see her primary role is as their coach, not their boss. She has learned that when teachers cannot separate the coaching role from the evaluating role they are much less likely to bring up areas in which they need help and are much less likely to have a real conversation with her. She shares that if she can “get them away from that side of things as much as possible and really focus on the coaching and they can accept it, you get further with student achievement because those conversations will happen.”

When teachers do not understand the feedback she offers them, she tries to craft the feedback in a different way, coming at it from a different angle. It is important to her that she continues to work to get them to buy in and understand.

Sometimes I tend to go more toward the reflective coaching…occasionally I have people that don’t get it and after awhile, I have to go more to the direct side of things like, this is the way it is. We’ve already this conversation but you’re obviously not grasping it so this is what I need you to do to change something.

If a teacher simply does not agree with her feedback, and can explain their reasoning, she views it as an opportunity to have a conversation with the teacher in which she says, “okay then, explain to me how this is going to help your students the way that this is going.” She reflects that she has had very few instances where she and the teacher have not been able to come to an understanding or agreement.

Setting Professional Goals

When DN3 considers her own process for setting professional goals, she shares a desire to be able to find more time in the busy schedule of her day “to think about and reflect back on where we have come so far and what could push the school
further, what could push me to get better…I’m always looking for new opportunities.”

Currently DN3’s primary professional goals are focused on learning more about special education processes so that she “can feel like I have a handle on it and really be able to lead that team.” As special education is not her background she shares that she reads a lot of professional literature to increase her understanding and knowledge as well as taking the time recently to attend a professional development session on special education law. She shares that she was pleasantly surprised to discover that she actually knows more than she thought she did! As her work with her teachers and teams continues to unfold in this new school, she continually asks herself, “what can I do differently? What’s been working? What hasn’t been working?”

Her previous position as interim principal has helped her to set a goal of someday returning to the role of leading a building. As a dean, and as part of a team with deans who are new to leadership or to the organization, DN3 has served as an unofficial mentor to these leaders and has a desire to put herself into more situations where she can mentor these and other leaders more.

Growing as a Professional

Finding herself in her third new school, DN3 has had many opportunities to grow as a professional. Learning how to balance the need to support a new team of leaders along with new teachers while they all work together to develop a school culture has been work that has been rewarding for her but has required a great deal of prioritizing on her part. She reflects that she is “just one to rise to everything,” something she remembers as she began working with a new leadership team over the
summer. She recalls that she “spent a lot of time talking with the two deans and building that relationship” while they completed all the necessary tasks to open a school, but once the school year began, her biggest priority was building those relationships with her teachers. Much of her growth comes from understanding this need to balance the different responsibilities she has with her own desire to be as supportive as possible to those she leads.

Everything is about balance because I still have the issue…I have classroom teachers, specials, and Special Ed, and how do I balance that the way and make sure…sometimes I feel guilty when I’m spending way to much time in one classroom and I’m not enough with specials ed or I’m with specials and I’m not with the others…

As she looks back over her last few years as a leader and considers how she has grown, she reiterates “personally I’m not as defensive…when people give me feedback, I’m much more reflective on my own practice.” Having been a principal before has also impacted her perspective on being a leader.

I think it makes me more aware of the whole picture that I have. I think when you’re a dean it can be all consuming with your direct reports, the responsibility, and you can get like in a silo almost…you don’t always see the big picture or how one decision we make is going to affect the culture of the school and all of those types of things and I see that more.

In addition, coming into a school with a great deal of diversity has helped her to grow professionally in her ability to develop a school culture, deal with challenging behaviors, and communicate effectively with parents who come from a different cultural background.
Thoughts about Effectiveness and Measuring Impact

DN3 measures the impact she is making on the growth of her teachers when she sees them making simple changes in their practices that make a difference in terms of student achievement. When she notes these changes that come about in an observation or “see them asking different kinds of questions about their own practice or about the data that they’re looking at.”

She measures her own effectiveness as a leader based on these changes along with the knowledge that the teachers she works with comment that they feel well supported and that they “appreciate the coaching that I give them. She believes she has grown in her own confidence of her abilities to support them and that she has the necessary knowledge to lead them.

When it comes to supporting teachers through difficult encounters with parents, students, or co-workers, DN3 shares that she is pretty confident helping them handle parent and student issues, but that when it is a situation involving another staff member it is much more difficult for her to respond.

Sometimes I know that what they’re not telling me is really deep, like how they’re feeling. To know what to say, just like how do you bring this up and be delicate enough to not destroy whatever relationship they do have, but I need to know…making decisions when it comes to them working together…those were harder conversations for me than to say, how are we going to work with through this with this parent.”

On Building Trust

As someone who has been in an assistant principal and principal role in addition to serving as a dean, DN3 notes that in the assistant principal and principal
role, she did not see the same level of relationship building with teachers that she has experienced as a dean.

People trust you more if you do it the right way if you know the relationship. They allow you to let them move, to coach them so much more than it is an AP or principal who has a little bit of relationship with you.”

She also states that consistently “being there” for her teachers has helped many of them to trust her more. “I’m there consistently, they’ve opened up more. I’ve encouraged them to do that over time.”

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

Having had several years experience as an instructional coach, dean, and principal, DN3 has grown to highly value the relationships she builds with her teachers and the impact that this observation/feedback model has on their growth as effective educators. She values most having the opportunity to see this growth in confidence and skill among the teachers she coaches as dean. She believes that the biggest value of the observation/feedback model and the resulting relationships is the fact that teachers know she is spending time with them and is focused on what they are doing and helping them to grow. Her ability to be consistent with observations and feedback as well as offering support in whatever way is needed has also added value to the relationships she has with her teams.

Her experiences have also helped her to step back and remind herself of her number one priority – supporting teachers, whereas deans who are new to the role may become “overwhelmed by the amount of deadlines and things that come up that take you out of some of your other responsibilities.” She has learned that in order for
her teachers to grow and for their relationships together to fully develop, that choosing her focus and priorities makes all the difference in her success.

DN3 advises new deans to try not to get overwhelmed by the to-do lists in front of them and to spend as much time as possible with their teachers. She recommends asking for advice on giving feedback as well as patience with themselves and the process as “building that confidence with giving good feedback takes time.” She also suggests that they determine the best method for organizing all of the duties and expectations placed upon them. Staying on top of deadlines is critical or “otherwise, they steamroll you.”

Dean 4 – DN 4

Setting the Stage

A first year dean in a first year school, DN4 brings with her six years of teaching experience, five of them teaching sixth grade and fourth grade in another urban school within her organization. After just one year of classroom teaching, DN4 was named grade level lead. She began working on her master’s degree in teaching and curriculum, but after becoming interested in possibly pursuing a position as a dean at the prompting of her principal, she switched her program to educational leadership.

DN4 is a first year dean of intervention in a school that also opened its doors for the first time the year that we completed our interviews together. She is part of a team of three deans, two of whom are both brand new to the role of dean and to the observation/feedback model. As dean of intervention, DN4 has seven educators who report directly to her. She is also responsible for developing, coordinating, and monitoring the intervention program at the school and for coordinating all state
testing. As is typical of schools in this organization that are in their first year, the staff, according to DN4, is very young and consists of mostly new teachers in their first or second year of teaching. The school serves students in grades K-5 this year and will eventually expand to serving K-8. It is located in an urban neighborhood near a major Midwestern city. When the school was first developed, it was expected to serve primarily urban, lower income families. DN4 shares however, that the families who enrolled in her school are evenly split 50/50 between suburban families of Asian ethnicity and urban African American families. She reports that the school has two large cultures with significantly different academic achievement levels. One of the challenges faced in this young school are dealing with the behaviors stemming from the socio-emotional needs of their students.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

When she experienced the observation feedback model as a teacher she was not at all sure that she cared for the process. She went from being a teacher who never got observed, who thought at the time “they thought I was fine so they didn’t need anybody in there.” Instead of deans, her school had instructional coaches. She remembers one who was assigned to her as being a “data guru person who observed a lot of my co-workers but just never came into my room.”

At the end of her second year, the school introduced the concept of deans and the observation/feedback model, and DN4 remembers feeling very nervous when she realized that she would now be observed every single week.

I’m like, oh my gosh…I’m going to have someone in here all the time, and again that confidence thing…what if they think I’m not doing a good job, what if this is all a joke, what if they didn’t come in my room because they
thought I was doing a good job but what if that’s not the case and then they come in and see that it’s like a farce.

Though she was a bit intimidated at first by her dean, she soon learned that her dean’s mission was to help her grow. All of her nervousness dissipated and once she had her first one-on-one conversation with her and they began bonding, she remembers feeling safe and okay. This experience has helped her to understand how important it is to build a safe relationship with the teachers she now leads.

DN4 describes her first experiences with the observation/feedback model as a dean as “exciting and fun!” She talks about the advantages that the deans in her school face as this building is a brand new school. None of the teachers knew her beforehand and all that these teachers have ever known since they joined this organization is this observation/feedback model. DN4 has a goal of modeling her practices with her team after the successful deans she had previously worked with in her prior school. Her goal early on was to do all of the things that she remembers she liked about having a dean. She describes that when she is considering anything with her teachers her practice is to stop and think.

I always try to put my teacher hat on, even making decisions now, okay…you’re a teacher, how do you feel about this? Because I think it’s important to never forget where you came from and never forget who you’re looking out for. Yes, you’re looking out for the students, but in my opinion, if you have happy successful teachers, your students will grow.

For DN4, her biggest job was to develop relationships with her teachers. She spent time during the summer getting to know her teachers and building the team only to have one team member moved from her, put on another team, and another new
person assigned to her as a direct report. This was her first challenge as a dean and she had to work through the disappointment of losing someone to whom she had already become close. She recalls that this new relationship was rocky at first but states that now it is okay.

DN4 believes that the ultimate goal of the model is that students are learning and feels that “if teachers are using the practices you give them feedback on, that’s going to be the end result.” She likes the coaching aspect this model provides and hopes that as the school grows she will have even more opportunity to provide coaching support to more teachers.

When she first began observing her teachers she focused on getting a feel for them individually and would come in at random times for about 12 minutes, other than when she completed her first round of full 40 minutes observations. She remembers feeling much more nervous initially about holding the one-on-one conversations with her teachers than she did the observations. She was committed to making sure that the feedback she was delivering was worded in a way that they would know she was supporting them.

**Becoming an Instructional Leader**

DN4’s path to becoming an instructional leader began early in her career as an educator when she was pursuing a master’s in teaching and curriculum. While her plan was to become a curriculum director, she was approached by the principal at her school asking her if she might think about applying for a dean position.

DN4 shares how she at first was a bit taken aback by her principal thinking that she would be a viable candidate for a leadership position given her lack of experience.
I don’t consider it a lack of confidence, but I’m just not one to be like, yeah! I can do that…I need someone in my corner who has observed me and who’s been around me professionally to say, I think you’d do a good job with that. I need just a little bit of that before making a bold move and so her saying that kind of got me going in that direction.

Although it would be a few more years before she did land a position as a dean, after her first round of interviews she made it “her mission” to become a dean. She spent the next few years shadowing her principal and her deans in order to learn some of the skills she would need once she moved into a leadership role. She recalls also that she was a mentor of three first year teachers and through this experience grew in her ability to find resources to help teachers increase rigor and improve instructional strategies. At this point she knew she was ready, “that’s what really solidified that I wanted to do this cause it’s like, here you are coaching somebody and what they need help with and it’s like when your student gets it…she (the teacher) did well and her success was all I cared about.”

She loves the idea of teaching teachers, eventually hopes to teach future educators at the university level, and believes that a dean position is good training and a helpful step toward reaching that goal. She talks openly about wanting to support and coach teachers, much the same way others did for her.

I got to see good coaching when I was a teacher and it’s nice having somebody in your corner and somebody who helps you grow, and I admire the job…I mean, they take teachers who are amazing already, and I mean that’s hard to do…to take somebody who is on their game but still grow them. They go from that to having teachers who are lackluster, but just because they don’t
know any better or don’t know enough or lack confidence or whatever it may be. I saw all of that through my years.

**Developing, Changing, and Maintaining Relationships**

Developing strong relationships was critically important for DN4 as she and her team began their work together. Frequently during our time together she talks about how the stronger her relationships are with her teachers, the better the outcomes will be for all. Her goal was for them to know that she “has their back and that there’s a support system, and a coach to help them grow, but that their success is what she is striving for.” She shares how the biggest challenge is how she is going to get them to know and believe that she really does care about them and that “it’s sincere, it’s not fake, it’s not a gimmick, it’s not a business type thing.” She understands that being genuine is critical and “proving yourself” is necessary for some people to believe that this dean/teacher relationship is not just part of a process but that she truly does care about them and wants them to know that.

In order to begin developing relationships with her team, she did several things over the summer before school began. As a team they went to a week long training together, went to a baseball game, had fun with a photo booth, and completed a survey to get to know each other better. She continually works on building a sense of camaraderie, often relying on finding things they have in common.

As they gain more experience working together, DN4 is careful to always involve them or “lean on them” anytime there is a decision to be made by asking them what they think and involving them so they know she trusts and wants their input. She is careful to be very reflective in all of her interactions with her teachers.
No matter how busy it is, no matter what, I think…how is this going to be perceived by the other person? It can’t be a quick think reaction, it’s got to be, how is this person going to perceive it?

She is also conscientious about letting them know that she thinks about them when they are not at work and will see opportunities to get them together outside of school. She strives to be disciplined about remembering personal things about them during their one-on-one conversations.

I feel like we are friends 90% of the time. The amount of talk about non-work things and their openness to talk about those things with me is so prevalent. I just like that kinship is there and I’m really happy about that. They know that I have their back and we’re a team and it’s been good, even though it didn’t start off easy.

**Weekly Observations and One-on-One Conversations**

DN4 prepares for her weekly observations by preparing her observation template. This document has TOPs skills that a teacher is currently working on listed on the bottom as well as a space for what the scores are so far, a definition of the skills and space for notes that she will take and how she will give feedback on it. She reports that she updates these forms weekly and lightly schedules her observations. As she goes into observations she will pull up these skills, look at her one-on-one notes and reflect on “okay what did we talk about before? What was missing from the last lesson?” When she is observing she types word for word what she is seeing in the classroom, writes up the feedback while still in the classroom, and puts the form in the teacher’s mailbox the same day.
As she prepares for one-on-one conversations she will look through the feedback and will make sure that there is a three to one ratio of positive to negative feedback. She will also look for anything else that needs to be discussed. During the one-on-one conversations, teachers bring a copy of this observation form with them. They are given the first 15 minutes of the meeting to talk about whatever topics are on their minds, and then she will deliver feedback.

**Delivering and Receiving Feedback**

Delivering feedback that is worded in a way that teachers will understand she is supporting them is one of DN4’s primary goals. With a clear understanding that “you’re giving someone feedback on what they do and even the most well intended feedback could still hurt someone’s feelings,” she consciously crafts her feedback so that each message can be delivered in a sincere and tactful manner. DN4 shares that during this first year of being a dean responsible for delivering feedback that she has learned to always ask the teacher for feedback on how they felt the lesson went before she shares her thoughts. She wants to see the lesson “from their eyes…what their concerns were, what they thought went really well, and then I can build off of that.”

Reflecting on her own style of giving feedback, she states that she can sometimes talk very quickly and while she has it in her own mind where she wants the conversation to go, that early on at times she would forget that there are steps to crafting and delivering feedback and “that’s a person you’re actually talking to.” Though she typically says things to her teachers in a very positive and supportive tone, she recalls a time when she feels that she was not as positive as she might have been. She believes that if she could have been in a bit more of a supportive role and had approached the conversation in a different way, she would have probably
achieved the same results but probably would have been able to leave the teacher feeling more supported.

DN4 comments that she can be very sensitive and does not want to be the type of leader who only gives directive or corrective feedback such as “here’s what you didn’t do.” She wants to coach teachers to see what changes need to be made through their own reflective process. She strongly believes that if her teachers become more reflective and use the practices and feedback that she gives them, that the end result will be students who are learning and growing.

In addition to giving feedback, she also receives feedback from both her teachers and her principal. She states that her principal is really good at providing feedback and that she uses this feedback to monitor her own progress as a new leader.

If I were to not hear praise or that I’m not doing a good job, I would know that I’m not growing. If I was getting a lot of adjusting feedback then I would know, okay, I need to make sure I’m doing this. For me, what makes me focus on things to grow in as a leader is the feedback I get from others…even just seeing reactions.

In order to grow from ongoing feedback, she has a practice of seeking feedback from her teachers. At the end of each month she brings her team together. She asks them each to write down something that they want her to know about, any concerns, what could have been different, what they need, and anything that she, as their dean, should know going forward. While she admits that she would rather her teachers tell her directly when something needs changing or someone feels upset, she understands that not everyone is comfortable doing so. Once she does know however that there is something needing to be fixed, she works hard to fix it.
Dealing with Resistance

This first year as a dean, DN4 did not have many instances where her teachers resisted her feedback or leadership. She did have some pushback when it was time for her to deliver final evaluations. One of her teachers felt that she should have rated her significantly higher than she did. After meeting with the teacher, and hearing her viewpoints and reasoning for disagreeing with her scores, DN4 came to the conclusion that her original evaluation was in fact accurate and that in the end, it was her call to make. No changes to scores were made though she did continually reassure the teacher that the evaluation she was receiving was actually a very strong, positive evaluation and quite high for a teacher so early in their career. DN4 reflects that “when someone doesn’t agree with you, understanding why they don’t agree and going back to that is helpful…saying, I understand what your concern is but you need to know that you do a fantastic job and this is reflecting that.”

Setting Professional Goals

DN4’s goals for work as an intervention dean include developing an intervention program that is so successful that at least three-quarters of the students in the intervention program reach or exceed their typical growth goals by the end of the year. Having these students grow the equivalent of 1.6 years in one year is the goal she has set for both them and for herself, “for me if 75% of them can do that then I can feel like we did what we were supposed to be doing this year.”

Her goals for herself professionally include teaching teachers to be teachers someday at the college level. She explains why teaching at the college level is so attractive to her,
I just think that education in general is exciting to me and I remember the excitement of being a student going to college to be a teacher and being surrounded by that I think would be rewarding but also I feel like we’re sending teachers…training teachers to teach kids that, in a forever changing world will never be the same…we’re throwing them into this crazy, ever changing world, and I think a lot of colleges do things how they’ve always been done and I want to be the change agent for that and that’s exciting for me.

**Growing as a Professional**

One of DN4’s biggest growth areas this year comes from the fact that as a first year dean, she is no longer a teacher. Rather, she is “in classrooms as an observer, someone who is depended on to give feedback to help someone grow.” Growing into this role as dean, she shares that she has become more aware of how she presents information to her teachers. Wanting always to “give my best self to teachers,” she has worked hard to change her messaging to them. She has learned a great deal of the importance of clear communication.

I learned that I should follow up with teachers, let them know what’s happening with behavior and discipline…whether they agree with it or not, but still letting them know. It can’t be a quick think reaction, It’s got to be, how is this person going to receive this? What’s the worst perception that can be seen? How can I make this a little different?

She has also learned the importance of making sure that if something is going to directly affect her team that they need to know about it and in enough time to
process it. She has learned to delegate more duties and responsibility to her team instead of feeling like she has to take in all on for them.

When I first started this position, I was creating everything and setting everything up and not giving too many tasks to them. Part of that was intentional because I had never done this intervention thing before. I can’t delegate what I don’t understand or have a picture of yet.

**Thoughts about Effectiveness and Measuring Impact**

DN4 is quick to point out that she has made many changes to her practices this year in order to become more effective as a leader. When she considers her ability to effectively handle challenging situations such as difficult parents, students, or situations between co-workers she feels very confident. She sees herself as a “people person” who has a good idea of how to approach things with people and feels like she can help others learn to do that as well. She has had more opportunities to help teachers learn to deal with challenging students but not as many instances where she can coach her team members through challenging co-worker issues.

She measures the impact she is making on teacher growth by the changes that she sees in their practices. After having one-on-one conversations, writing them notes, and giving them their observation form so that they can see what she is seeing, if she notices a pattern of the same things happening consistently or not changing, then she knows that they are not growing and that she is not making the impact she has set out to make. Secondly, she looks to see if the students are growing, both through student data and seeing a change in what they are doing in the classroom. “If their students are not growing then they’re not growing as well because they’re not changing what they’re doing to make sure students are learning.”
On Building Trust

DN4 notes that the relationship she builds with her teachers is going to be key to having them trust her. In order to earn their trust, she states, “I get that you have to prove yourself for them to feel like it’s not just part of a process and that you really care and you really want to know.” She also acknowledges that in order for teachers to accept the feedback she gives as their dean, and ultimately for them to grow that they need to trust her and they need to know she is there to coach and support them.

Building a culture of trust in her team requires DN4 to take the time to add personal touches for each of her teachers to let them know that she cares and is there for them. She acknowledges that it is also “crucial to maintain that throughout the year. You can’t just do this the first week and that’s it.”

Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model

There are many reasons why DN4 values the observation/feedback model and the relationships she has with her teachers. She states that she “feels a kinship and I’m happy about that. They know and they have each other’s backs and we’re a good team. It’s been good and it’s easy now.” DN4 shares that she feels like she and her teachers are friends. They share personal stories and events with each other and enjoy each other’s company outside of the school day. She believes that she and her teachers definitely have the relationship that she has set out to develop this year. She values the openness she has with them and that they have with her. She also values their flexibility, especially when working in a school with an intervention program that has going through many changes this first year, and attributes the team’s willingness to embrace change to the teachers’ trust that “they have a support system behind them and that they are continually focusing on why we’re doing it.”
DN4 believes that it is the consistency and the frequency of observations and one-on-one conversations that make this model work effectively. She describes the importance of giving teachers feedback after their observations.

You can’t have observations but then not talk about it shortly after. Having those two things together are what make the job easiest because that’s what your doing…coaching teachers, and those two things are fundamental for that to occur.

Throughout our conversations together about this observation/feedback model, DN4 frequently talked about how much she loves her job. She shares her reasons for loving her job:

Just the excitement of when they’re teaching and they know that they are rocking out a lesson and you can feel the energy of the kids with them and yourself…just being a part of that has been really rewarding...just the whole learning process…I think that’s been the biggest plus of this job, because that’s when all of those observations, all of those one-on-ones are being put into place…to me seeing that is like when a student passes an objective or a student gets their goal at the end of the year. It’s similar to that kind of feeling.

To sum it up, she shares that “Every day I never know what to expect. Every day I have fun. Even on the challenging days you always learn something new.”

Dean 5 – DN 5

Setting the Stage

DN5 came to education as a second career. She had originally intended to work in juvenile justice. After receiving a bachelor’s degree in sociology she decided to return to school to earn a master’s in education, starting out with elementary
education but eventually changing her focus to special education. She has also completed a second master’s degree in educational leadership.

Prior to coming to this organization she worked for 10 years at another charter school organization. DN5 has been an educator in her current organization for a total of seven years. For five of those years she served as a resource room teacher for special education students. She eventually became the special education building coordinator before transferring to her current school where she has served as a dean for the past four years. She has had experience as dean of second and third grade, special education, and Dean of Intervention. She is currently working as Dean of Intervention with 11 educators reporting directly to her.

DN5’s current school was one of the first schools to move into the observation/feedback model in which deans became responsible for coaching and evaluating teachers. During the first year with the model there were two deans. Now the school operates with four. This Title I school is located near a major Midwestern city and serves a very diverse population of over 700 students in grades K-8; 42% of students are African American, 27% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, 8% Asian, and 12% other. Both the Special Education and the English Language Learners population has been increasing over the past few years to 10% and 9% respectively. Approximately 65% of the student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch. The experience level of teachers varies greatly in the school ranging from less than one year to over 15 years of experience; 61% of the teaching staff has three or fewer years of experience. Staff turnover at the school is approximately 13%.

Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model
Overall, DN5 believes that the observation/feedback model is very helpful, though it started out more than a little challenging for her. In her experience being in her prior school, the transition from the traditional leadership model of principal and assistant principal to the observation/feedback model and the position of dean can be rough. Looking back, she reflects that she finished her first year not sure that she wanted to be a dean any longer. She found that some teachers found it difficult to relate to someone who had never taught a full classroom, as her experience had always been in teaching small groups in the resource room as a special education teacher. She experienced a lot of questions about her credibility and a lot of “who are you to tell me what to do?” types of conversations. She remembers needing to rely quite a bit on the other deans for support and during her first month of observing teachers, she did not do her observations alone but as peer observations with the dean team. Throughout her first year as a dean, the observations she conducted were much more teacher driven than they are now. Teachers chose what goals or growth areas they wanted to work on as opposed to the more collaborative approach that the model assumes now.

The system was completely different… when we pick our skills now, we use the long observation that we do in the beginning of the year and we use those skills. In previous years, it was just kind of, okay, what do you think you want to work on? There was not as much…I like the guidance we have now to say well if you want to do this, here’s what I saw when I did this long observation. Then being about to go within it and say, okay, what are your need to knows as opposed to your nice to knows. What do you need to work on as opposed to what would be nice to work on.
Her first one-on-one conversations were difficult as many teachers were hesitant to share with her. She remembers that she would still meet for the full 30 minutes even if the teachers refused to talk. She would share personal information, pictures of her dogs, anything she could think of to begin to build some sort of connection or relationship. “It was months of, if I’m going to slide that adjusting feedback in, it’s going to be covered with a whole lot of this is fabulous!”

**Becoming an Instructional Leader**

DN5 wanted to become a dean because she thought she could actually impact more students through helping their teachers become better teachers. Her previous principal and another dean approached her and asked her if she had ever thought about moving into a position of leadership. Although she was comfortable in the position she was in as a special education teacher, and initially had no desire to move into leadership, she began to reconsider.

I just got to a point where… I’m a perpetual student. I’m always in school … I kind of got to a point for me where I was in a very comfortable place teaching and there was nothing really challenging me anymore. I wanted that challenge and I wanted to be able to grow. I didn’t see within the teaching that I was in a place where I would be able to grow professionally as much as moving into something else. Now I love it. I wouldn’t go back.

Within that same year that she was approached by her principal, she moved into a leadership position. While she enjoys the position, she admits that she was surprised at how challenging and eye opening the role of a dean is.

**Developing, Changing, and Maintaining Relationships**
As DN5 transitioned into her new role in a school that was also new to her, she faced significant challenges in building relationships with her teachers. She had been with the organization for only three years while the staff she was responsible for coaching was for the most part a “very seasoned staff.” They struggled taking feedback from someone who had been teaching for fewer years than they had. The culture in the school was very different than the culture that she experiences now. “There was a lot of upheaval, and a lot of turnover and people just weren’t happy.” She worked to overcome this by trying to make connections with her teachers and staying open to learning from them. She understood their feelings and states that she knew where they were coming from as they had not previously had a lot of support.

Learning how to approach her direct reports has also paid off for DN5 as she works to improve and maintain relationships. She reflects that she has had to work hard over the past few years to learn a different style of communicating as she tends to be very direct. She admits that she can come across as harsh, “I know it’s harsh. It’s never intended to be harsh but when you approach somebody with I just got to get this done, I got to tell you this, it never comes out right.” She states that she had to teach herself to slow down, stop looking at everything that was wrong or needed to change, and begin noticing and focusing on what was going well. Her motto is to remember to focus on “people not process.”

As her relationships with her teachers continue to develop and change, DN5 notes that she is continually learning. Each new staff member causes her to stop and determine exactly how to approach and relate to this individual, knowing that what she can say or how she gives feedback to one teacher may not be the same way she can to another. She believes that becoming a dean has made her more open to
growing and realizing the need to understand the different personalities she is working with every day.

She reflects on how her relationships are different with different teachers. For some teachers she assumes much more of a mentor role. For others, they are more like friends, and for a few, the relationships are still a bit of a struggle. She considers herself to be an “outgoing introvert,” someone who needs a little time to be comfortable.

I can talk to anybody in the world about absolutely nothing, so when it comes time to really getting to know me, it’s a little more difficult… I have people on my team that are like that too. Some people I talk to in the summer and it’s very natural and there’s some people that it’s like, just still not as comfortable. If we weren’t in a school together, I don’t know that we would interact with each other.

**Weekly Observations and One-on-One Conversations**

DN5 views the observation/feedback model as an opportunity for teachers to have a “judgment free zone” or an opportunity for teachers to receive help and to be able to grow from the support their dean is providing. From her perspective, it is not, “I’m evaluating you and you get x amount of points for this and this is going on your permanent record forever. When we used to only do observations a couple of times a year, it was very scary.” She sees the model as a teaching tool for growing teachers.

She shares that in order to make the observations and one-on-one conversations as impactful on student achievement as possible, that the leadership team went through the list of TOPs skills and picked certain skills they judged would have the greatest impact on classroom instruction, based on what they’re noticing in
the curriculum, “we picked a pool of 12 skills and those are the ones we said to teachers, that we want to emphasize most of this year.” These are the skills she looks for when she completes her weekly observations.

To prepare for her weekly observations and one-on-one conversations, DN5 sets aside time at the end of every school week to prepare. Using an online notebook program she will schedule observations and weekly meetings with teachers. She uses a template that has been developed for the observation/feedback model that she has tweaked to fit her school. The template has the TOPs skills that each teacher is currently working on, notes from the previous week’s observations, what clubs the teacher is a part of, and any important details that a teacher may have mentioned or might have going on personally. She estimates that it takes about three hours for her to prepare for all 22 one-on-one conversations and observations each week.

When she completes the observations she records her notes on the template she has prepared and sends it to the teacher via email at the end of each observation. Typically the feedback she includes on the observation form is affirming feedback. If she has feedback that is more adjusting or that she thinks she may have trouble delivering, she will not include it on the form, but rather write it out for herself to be certain of her wording. Preparing for one-on-one conversations, especially if she has corrective or adjusting feedback to deliver sometimes requires her to practice her delivery. She will hold practice feedback sessions with a family member who knows nothing about the teacher or the situation in order to make sure that her message is clear.

**Delivering and Receiving Feedback**
One of the first things that DN5 learned as she became a dean was that she should avoid giving adjusting feedback to teachers who are new to her team until she has had an opportunity to develop a relationship with that person. She shares how early on in her relationship with teachers on her team how one teacher in particular was very resistant to receiving any feedback.

I would say to one teacher, can I give you some feedback? The answer was always no. Okay, what would be a good time to give you that feedback? [Principal] helped me the year before I was a dean. She went through all the manager tools with me so I had all of that. Don’t give them the feedback then but make sure you follow up and come back later. There was never a good time. With that particular teacher, I’m like, would you prefer that I write it down? Which I know we’re not supposed to do but I’m like, you won’t take it….she said no to that too. I just started giving it anyway. I stopped saying what’s a good time and I started saying, when we meet at 1:00 today, I’ll be giving you this feedback…it usually wasn’t even bad feedback!

DN5 acknowledges that she is personally the type of person who just wants to be told what a superior needs her to do. “If I’m doing it wrong, tell me what’s wrong and I’ll fix it.” She has discovered that not everybody embraces feedback the way she does and that some people need to be able to come to their own realization of what is wrong and cannot accept feedback where they are being told what to do.

Feedback for DN5’s teachers is now received much better than it was in her early days as a dean because they have developed a relationship where they have a positive rapport. She still strives to give two positive comments to every one that is adjusting or corrective. Additionally, she tries to keep her feedback as close to
possible to the skills that she and the teacher have been working on. For this dean, the hardest part of the feedback is the model of delivery that she is advised to use.

It’s not naturally flowing. It comes out very stiff and formal to me. I always thought the feedback is the foundation of what is going to help the teacher grow. It just doesn’t sound like me when I talk. When I talk I don’t start it with, when you…I think it gets taken in a better tone if the feedback is more, I really love it when you do this.

As she is continually seeking to grow and develop as a dean, DN5 frequently asks for feedback from her teachers. She acknowledges that she is much more comfortable receiving this feedback now than she was in the beginning. Throughout the past several years, she has intentionally sought out feedback from the people that she knew she was struggling to interact with. Through the use of a simple survey, she would use the feedback to improve. “Anything that was not green, I set a goal…I’m going to do this to make sure this doesn’t happen.” She also shares that to her, it does not matter if the feedback she receives does not match up to her perception of the situation. “It doesn’t matter if I meant it that way or not…I don’t want anybody to feel that way…it doesn’t matter whether it was what I intended to say or not… if people feel that way, then it mattered.”

DN5 counts on some of her teachers to continually give her feedback as they are very honest with her. She encourages all of her team members to be direct with her, even if they are not sure of how she might react to it. Consequently she receives a lot more feedback now than she used to. Most of the feedback is positive.

The people who I can trust to be brutally honest with me, one of them is one that I have to give a lot of adjusting feedback to, so I know she’s giving it
back, and one of them is somebody that knows me well enough to say
whatever she wants to me.

**Dealing with Resistance**

Throughout our conversations together, it was clear that DN5 has had multiple
experiences with resistant teachers. Much of the resistance, from her point of view,
came from their own unhappiness at the school and lack of trust for members of the
leadership team. With new leadership present, along with the most resistant teachers
moving on from the school, she experiences fewer instances where teachers do not
agree with or push back on her feedback for them. When it does happen, she
acknowledges that they do not have to agree with her feedback. Typically at this point
she will have other members of the leadership team observe with her. If other deans
or the principal are seeing the same things as she is, sometimes this helps that person
to be more receptive to the feedback. If they are not, DN5 responds directly.

All I can keep doing is saying I understand you don’t see it this way. But
here’s where we are at. If you don’t see it okay, I still have to talk to you
about it, because I see it, and if I’m seeing it here, you’re going to see it in
your evaluations. You’re going to see it in your kids’ scores and that means
we are not doing the best for these kids.

**Setting Professional Goals**

When DN5 sets professional goals for herself, she first looks at the growth
areas or possibilities that she knows are going to make her the most uncomfortable.
She has an inner drive that keeps her pushing forward. Currently, her professional
goal is to continue focusing on learning more about relating to and communicating
with people by making sure that she is hearing and listening more than she is talking.
Her end goal is to become a principal. She shares that when she accomplishes this goal that it will be very uncomfortable for her at first because “I like control. I like to control situations, and I know that in my little world of a dean, I know that you can’t control it. You shouldn’t even try. You should just be ready to handle whatever happens.”

**Growing as a Professional**

DN5 shares that as a professional, she has grown in many ways over the past several years. She is clearly much more comfortable both giving and receiving feedback and she no longer feels like there is a separation and a distance between herself and the teachers she coaches like there was when she first came to the school. “The personalities and the relationships are there enough that I just feel more comfortable, and I feel like they know where I am coming from and I know where they are coming from.”

She has learned how to handle challenging situations and how not to let it drag her down. She has also learned that she is much more open to growth now than she was when she was a teacher. She attributes this to learning how, as a leader, her personality might impact her relationships with others. She reads a lot of professional literature on leadership and shares that she has learned that people are not going to change simply by her telling them what to do.

If I tell you what to do, it’s not going to matter…because I’m just telling you… If you tell me what you want to do and then you tell me how you need me to support you to get it done, it’s going to happen. That’s probably my
biggest mind shift in the four years I’ve been doing this. I came into it as a
dean thinking my job was to tell people what to do and how to do it. I don’t
know why in the world I thought that.

Thoughts about Effectiveness and Measuring Impact

DN5 measures the impact she is making on the growth of the teachers she
supports when she completes their observations, “if we’ve talked about something in
a meeting and somebody says, I’m going to try this. I go in and do the observation
and they’re actually trying it. They’ve invested in it enough to try it.” She shares that
she has the same philosophy with adults using the feedback she gives them as she
does with students, saying “It’s up to you what you want to do with it.” She knows
that she has made an impact when teachers change or improve their practices because
they want to improve or have bought into the feedback.

When it comes to helping her teachers deal with challenging situations
involving parents, students, or co-workers, DN5 is much more comfortable coaching
them to deal with parents and students than she is with each other. She is confident
that she can help them learn to motivate students and deal with an upset parent, but
because co-workers have a different type of relationship, it is much more challenging
for her to give advice. She reflects on why this can be so difficult.

It’s a different type of relationship with parents. It’s easier to role play and put
yourself in their position, because you’re not in their position. It’s easier to
help somebody understand that when they don’t feel it themselves than if we
are talking about another co-worker, and they are saying, we’re doing the
exact same thing.
When a teacher comes to her for help or a question that she simply does not
know the answer for, she will be honest and say, “I don’t know. I don’t have an
answer for you right now. Let me talk to some friends and see if they might have
some suggestions or let me look into some strategies and get back to you.” In her role
as dean of intervention it is very likely that there will be students coming with
problems or struggles that they have not yet been able to reach. DN5 is clear that she
“can’t control the whole world.” Instead she holds herself and her teachers to their
personal best, “your best is going to be different than this person’s best, but I expect
your best.” She has also come to the realization that in this position, she cannot do it
all and she cannot do a teacher’s work for them. She recalls that when she first moved
into leadership she thought “I could develop good relationships with them if I took
stuff off their plates and made their jobs easier.” Now she know that it is not helpful
to anyone to solve or take care of problems for people rather than helping them to
develop the skills to try and figure out things on their own.

**On Building Trust**

When DN5 first came to her school as a dean four years ago, she had a
challenging time building trust with the teachers on her team. She states that there
was a lack of trust overall in the building due to a high turnover of teachers, deans,
and principals in the prior few years with as many as one-third of the teaching staff
having left the school the prior year. Her teachers let her know that they had difficulty
trusting administrators based on past experiences. The teachers she was working with
had not had a lot of support, were not happy and were not yet in a place where they
were going to hear or receive feedback from anyone, let alone someone new to their
school.
Building trust with her team has taken time. Those teachers who were unable or unwilling to work with the changes in leadership and in the school culture have left the school and the school now has an overall positive, supportive climate and culture. Teachers on her team trust her more and are clearly more open to feedback. DN5 shares that one of the reasons for this change is that she and her teammates have a stronger relationship where they have built a positive rapport. Teachers take feedback better because they sense “it’s coming from a place of, I just want to help you.” Knowing how powerful and important it is to have this understanding reminds DN5 that when she does encounter teachers who are not taking feedback or trusting to the level she would hope they be, that she, as their dean, needs to “take a step back and get them to a place where they understand it’s not an- I got you, it’s a- how can I help you?”

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

DN5 finds a great deal of personal value in growing as a leader through the observation/feedback model. She states that while teaching came very easily to her, her growth or learning curve in leadership has been significantly more challenging. Everyday she learns something new. She is much more aware of the need to look at the big picture of how a school operates rather than worrying about the small things. She places great value on the relationships she has worked so hard to develop with her teachers and proudly states, “I work with a bunch of people who do everything with these kids in mind, and that passion and that dedication has made me much more dedicated to my job. I like my job a lot!” This is a big improvement over how she felt at the beginning of her tenure as a dean. Now she is happy to report that she feels her
relationships with her teachers have developed to a place where if she was not at the school, that her teachers would notice and would care.

Her biggest surprise with the teacher/dean relationship has been how different the relationships are with every person and how different it is to be in a leadership than it was to be a teacher, in terms of relationships. She shares that while it does not happen as much anymore, initially “I hated walking into that teacher’s lounge and everybody would stop talking.”

If DN5 could make any changes or improvements to this model it would be to pair deans up with dean mentors who have the same role. She explains that her experiences as an intervention or special education dean are completely different from the middle school or K-2 dean and that there would be great value in being able to talk to somebody else who knows exactly what you are going through. She also wishes that the dean mentoring program lasted longer than one year for new deans. Her advice to new deans as they enter into the teacher-dean relationship is to not be afraid to ask for help and not to be afraid to tell teachers that you are learning too. It is important to her that deans understand that asking for help is not a weakness and in fact, in the long run it will be very helpful to their relationships and growth.

Despite a rough start for her as a dean, it is clear that this educator is committed to this role and to the relationships she has developed. She describes her joy of knowing that what she does matters.

How many places can you work where you literally can get up in the morning and come to work and know that at some point in your day, something you do or say is going to make a difference for somebody whether you realize it did
or not? Even on the worst day ever, there’s always one thing good that happens.

Dean 6 – DN 6

Setting the Stage

DN6 is an experienced educator with 16 years of experience, all of it at her current school. She began her career as a classroom teacher, teaching fifth and then seventh grade for five years. She has been a member of her school’s staff since it first opened its doors and has seen many changes in leadership, staffing, and instruction over the past 16 years. After five years of teaching, she was selected to train for a new position in the school where she would coach and mentor new teachers. She held this position of New Teacher Coach for three years before her school became one of the first schools in the organization to transition to the deans and the observation/feedback model. Her school has had the observation/feedback for six years. DN6 served as the K-2 dean for four years before becoming the Dean of Special Education. She currently has 16 direct reports including teachers, support staff, and para-professionals.

The school where DN6 serves as dean has been open for 16 years. It is located in a major urban Midwestern city and currently serves over 800 students in grades K-8. Since the school opened, it has had seven different principals and a significant turnover of teachers. Approximately 85% of the students attending the school qualify for free or reduced lunches and breakfasts. Demographics of the student body are
38% African American, 44% Hispanic, 15% Caucasian, 2% Asian, and 2% Multi-Race; 25% of the students are English Language Learners. The staff has a higher percentage of experienced teachers than many other schools within this organization. 14 of the teachers have been teaching for three or fewer years, 21 have between four and eight years of experience, and nine have between nine and 15 years of experience. Challenges in this school include a high number of single parent homes resulting in students living in poverty, as well as families where one parent or sibling is currently incarcerated.

**Initial Thoughts and Experiences with the Model**

Having spent several years as an instructional coach and receiving comprehensive training in delivering feedback as an instructional coach prepared DN6 well for the new position of dean. Her school was one of the first in the organization to pilot the observation/feedback model. For DN6, the only part that was different for her was the fact that she would now be evaluating her teachers as well as coaching them. When she first became dean of the K-2 teachers, she was working with teachers who had never known her as a teacher, which was different than when she first became an instructional coach in her building. DN6 feels that the teachers were comfortable with this new transition because they already had a relationship built with her.

When she reflects on some of the initial challenges she faced with the observation/feedback model, she comments that while new teachers who are very early in their career tend to be very eager to hear her feedback and receive coaching, they have so many areas that they need to work on that this model can feel very overwhelming for some. In her opinion, veteran teachers were the hardest to work
with in the beginning. Because these teachers had several years of experience, very few of them were on her previous instructional coaching caseload. All teachers were assigned a dean, not just those who were new or needed coaching. She remembers that many of these experienced teachers were in “a rut, didn’t want to change, and thought that they knew everything” so it took a while to convince them to embrace to this new model where they would be observed and receive feedback every week in a one-on-one conversation.

In the beginning, DN6’s primary goal was to build relationships with her team and get to know them as people. After conducting an observation, she wanted to know how they felt about the lesson and the resulting observation. She would ask them, “What worked? What would you change?” in an effort to elicit their reflections as opposed to simply sharing her impressions. She would make sure that they would see the observation notes she completed during the lesson so that they could see the growth they were making through her written feedback and their scores. She was also very careful not to give adjusting feedback for quite a while until a relationship was built. She stressed to her teachers that “adjusting feedback is not punitive” but rather thoughts and ideas on how instruction could be improved.

In the early days as a dean, she did not have the TOPS skills to help her and teachers decide what they wanted or needed to focus on in their work together. Instead she explains,

In the beginning I was just looking for how they built…their climate in their classrooms and how they worked with kids, but then through the [one-on-one-conversations] I would ask them what is it that you are interested in growing, where are you interested, and through observations what would you like me to
come in and observe? A lot of times it would be a simple thing like wait time. I would observe just a blanket observation and notice that they would go from one kid to another kid without giving time to process the question, to even give the answer before they were on to giving hints…I would ask them, how did you think your kids did in answering your questions? Did they have enough time? If they literally see it, they may choose wait time for me to come in and give observations on increasing that.

After being the K-2 for several years, she was asked to move to the special education dean in order to free herself up for some other duties she had on the leadership team, what her principal called “special duties or special projects.” DN6 admits that this change resulted in a very big learning curve for her.

**Becoming an Instructional Leader**

DN6’s experiences as a classroom teacher were very successful. Her classrooms were well managed and her students demonstrated significant academic growth. She thought that if she could figure out how to help other teachers be successful with student achievement that she could make an even bigger difference. According to DN6, her school was struggling under some very negative leadership. She explains how she made the decision to leave the classroom and move into the instructional coaching position.

I saw teachers hurting because of the leadership example we had…I thought if I can be a good leader, a successful leader like I was a successful teacher and show people, teachers, you can lead without being a bully then that’s the kind of leader I want to be and that’s what made me decide to pull out of the classroom and be the coach.
She served as an instructional coach for new teachers for three years before the observation/feedback model and deans were introduced at her school. She was responsible for coaching 21 teachers as an instructional coach and credits all of the organization she learned to be great training for the dean role. She slid right into the dean position because she was already working closely with teachers. The job was a natural fit.

**Developing, Changing, and Maintaining Relationships**

As she was moving from the role of instructional coach to that of dean, DN6 shares that the relationships she had already built with many of the teachers were solid. These teachers were comfortable coming to her and telling her everything, or asking for support, something she believes was to her advantage as a new dean. She had been building rapport with them for quite some time. DN6 shares that her biggest challenges were the “headstrong teachers that really weren’t very good teacher and yet they didn’t take coaching well.

Building relationships came naturally to DN6 because of her training in mentoring and coaching. She starts out by asking teachers to tell her about themselves, asking them, “What are your dreams? What are your plans?” Her goal is to try to get to know them as people.

I just want to hear them talk and then when they are done, if they have questions for me that may pertain to [school] they can, or if they want to ask me questions about me they can, but I want to know if they’re married, if they have kids, what their kids are up to…making those personal connections.

To maintain relationships, she has an open door policy where if teachers have concerns they can come to her. DN6 states that her teachers feel free to voice their
concerns. When she asks them if she can give them feedback, they are generally open to it. She considers their relationships to be strong and healthy.

**Weekly Observations and One-on-One Conversations**

DN6 is very clear that the main purpose for the weekly observations and one-on-one conversations that are present in this model is to “grow teachers regardless of what year they are.” She recalls how she felt when she was a teacher and was often skipped over when it came time for twice a year observations prior to evaluations.

I would get my evaluations and they would say…Oh [teacher], I know how you teach. They would never come and observe me and give me feedback and I would always want feedback so this model kind of puts that in there so that you do get that observation.

In the early days of being a dean, DN6 would typically have her observation notes in front of her during her one-on-one conversations as she gave feedback to teachers, but typically did not really prepare for what she was going to say until she was going over the observation with her teachers. Now, she carefully prepares ahead of time because she wants to make sure that the feedback is worded correctly so that it will make the biggest impact. She takes the time to prepare for her observations and one-on-one conversations after school when she knows that she will not be interrupted.

**Delivering and Receiving Feedback**

For the first year or so that DN6 was in this role of delivering feedback she would practice giving adjusting feedback by writing it down, seeing if the feedback
was measurable, and making sure that it sounded natural. She recalls, “I didn’t want it to sound punitive, but yet I wanted them to see that something’s got to change.”

When she delivers adjusting feedback she strives to promote it in a way that empowers teachers to know that their thoughts and opinions are a vital part of the change versus her telling them what to do.

When she delivers feedback to veteran teachers versus newer teachers, she is careful to present it in a different way, noting that “with veteran teachers you need to worry about their egos and they’re often set in their ways.” Prior to giving the feedback she wonders whether they will take the feedback and make the suggested changes. She is careful to ask these veteran teachers about their thoughts and ideas first with the goal of “leading them into coming up with a plan more so than me telling them.”

DN6 makes it a practice to pay attention to how many positive affirmations or feedbacks she has given her teachers before determining whether they can handle more adjusting feedback, noting that sometimes she will only give affirming feedback, and always being careful to also include an affirmation if she is giving adjusting or corrective feedback. She states that she has had to learn how to give feedback that is adjusting so that teachers were not feeling personally attacked. “By asking the question, how can we make it better, you’re asking them for advice, not telling them what to do.” Still, she notes that while her preference is to be reflective that at times she must take a different angle.

Telling means you’re being directive and there are times if they don’t take the reflection type of [feedback] that you’re going to have to be direct, but then you’ve got to back it up to say, okay, we’ve tried this, this, and this, and this is
still, this, this, this. Now I need you to get on the plan and we’re going to do it this way.

DN6 admits that telling rather than asking what was she tended to do most of the time in the beginning of her experiences as a dean, but now she has learned that she has to include teachers in the solution and only when it does not work, does she say, “this is what I need you to do.”

Despite asking for feedback from her teachers, DN6 shares that she does not receive feedback from them. She asks in emails, “I need your feedback, I need to hear from you.” She will also approach them face-to-face and say, “okay, I need your feedback.” She reports that her teachers typically tell her that they think that what she did or said is okay and very seldom do they come up with something different. She also asks her team for input on how to make things better for the team. She believes that perhaps she might not get much feedback because she lets the team be a part of decisions. “That’s the key, they feel like they’re a part so they’re not pushing, but rather helping to develop the team.” She does receive feedback on how to grow as a leader from her principal and the special education supervisor.

**Dealing with Resistance**

DN6 shared an example of a time when she was faced with resistance from a teacher when she asked if she could give her some feedback.

She said yes, but it wasn’t good feedback, so then she got upset and said, can I give you feedback? She said, next time you need to give me feedback can you wait until I’m not walking to get kids?
DN6 talks about how she took this teacher’s resistance as feedback for her and told her that she would be more cognizant of the timing of her feedback.

When a teacher does not understand or agree with her feedback she will use questioning techniques to ask them why they disagree, or seek clarification on their thinking and why they feel that way. Then she asks them, “can you look at it from this point of view? What would happen if you would try something like this, would the outcome have been different?” She shares that most of the time they will then “accept the feedback …and whether they agree with it or not, they seem to try it.”

**Setting Professional Goals**

Professionally, DN6 has set a goal of bringing more rigor into the lessons being presented in the resource rooms within her school. She wants her teachers to be successful with their student achievement and that is how she knows if she is reaching her goals. As she says, “That’s what’s fun for me!” She has some additional goals of becoming more consistent with some of her support staff who do not always get their one-on-one meetings with her every week. She believes that working more closely with them in these meetings will help them to become more effective with how they are working with students.

DN6 always thought that her ultimate goal was to become a building principal, but now she is not sure if she really wants to do that anymore because she is enjoying what she does now so much. She shares how proud she is of her team and the work they have done together.

I feel proud because the team is together now, I saw that their personalities would clash…now they come together, what do you think about this, what do you think about that? Our team is very close and we work and we put ideas
against each other so now as a goal…if I became a principal…I think it would take me away from all that and I wouldn’t see that, cause looking at [principal]…she’s doing a great job, but I see where it’s taking her away from some of the things she liked to do as a dean.

**Growing as a Professional**

One of the greatest growth areas for DN6 has been in learning more about special education processes and laws. When she first became the dean over special education she knew very little about this specialty. She recalls needing to rely heavily on her team and on the special education supervisor for support and information. She would admit to her team, “You guys have gone to special ed school, you guys know all of this…I don’t know everything, but I will.” She believed that coming in as an outsider brought a “fresh perspective” and that she “didn’t have to know everything, even though I was learning it as it was going on, but that helped me to bring togetherness to them.” Now she knows what needs to happen and is working to making her team’s work with students more rigorous and effective.

She shares that as she grew into her role as a dean that she “made sure that I stopped talking about me and what I would do and let them figure out what they would do.” She is happy to report that she is becoming more of a coach now and thinking how to encourage teachers in order to improve student achievement and the resulting data. She notes that she has not had to change so much in regard to her personal relationships with her teachers but rather on how she can lead the special team to improved functioning as a team. She is doing this by allowing and encouraging her teachers to come up with more answers themselves. She is also
working on “letting go of some things, giving them leadership opportunities, and letting them take control of something.”

**Thoughts about Effectiveness and Measuring Impact**

DN6 is very confident that she can help teachers deal with motivating students, deal with difficult parents, or challenging situations between co-workers. She shares an incident where she successfully led a potentially contentious meeting with a parent by being well prepared, setting clear boundaries and parameters, and not getting derailed by conflict. She modeled for her teachers by letting them know:

> This is how we’re going to handle it. I’m going to have an agenda. The agenda will keep us on time, and I’m tracking and we’re going to talk exactly about the items on there. If the conversation steers away from the agenda items I will return it back to the agenda items. Everything’s going to be fine. You do not have to worry about anything.

When she is not sure of a decision on how to handle something very difficult, she shares that she has to “have the time to reflect and think.” She will ask for time, saying, “I hear what you say. I would like to have some time to investigate…can I get back with you.” She’ll do this for difficult parents as well as for situations involving teachers. After years of experience she feels that this realization “comes from learning that so many other times that it can backfire if you make a decision [without time to think] that you should just reflect.

DN6 measures the impact she has had on her teachers’ growth by watching their increased ability to function independently as a team.

I feel like things can run without me. I put systems and procedures in place and work with the teachers and know that everything is routine and that
systems are there. I don’t have to be breathing down their necks. Things can operate and run appropriately without me there and I think knowing them and the trust in relationships that we have, that I give them that and that they know that expectation. I think they like that, because then I’m not breathing down their neck.

**On Building Trust**

Building trust requires DN6 to focus first on giving teachers positive, affirming feedback after observations and asking teachers “how they liked the lesson, what worked well and how comfortable they were with me so that I could set them at ease if I ever came back again.” She also makes it a practice to make sure that they see all of her observation notes in order to see their growth. She affirms them by saying “look at all the great stuff you put into those lessons.” She also asks them what skills or areas they are most interested in growing for themselves and asking the teacher what they would most like for her to come in and observe. This practice supports her belief that “if a teacher has buy in on what they want to grow in, it’s easier to grow.”

**Value of Relationship and Observation/Feedback Model**

Seeing herself much more as a coach than as a supervisor, DN6 shares that more than anything, she values the opportunity to get together with her teachers to talk about “how we can change to make it better for students.” She values that she can go to the teachers on her team and just ask them what they think they can or should do to make their work stronger or more effective. She notes a connection between her team’s strong relationships with her and with each other and her effectiveness as their leader.
I think it contributes a lot… If my people can agree to disagree, or work together to come up with a compromise to make the system work and they all work, then I feel like I’ve been an effective leader because it isn’t me coming down to them and telling them, It’s all about, it’s all about thinking what’s best for the student and I always remind them of that, think about the student, not about us, and so I feel like when I see how their effectiveness is, I think it does reflect me as a leader. I do think it reflects my beliefs that all students can learn.

DN6 reports that she likes the structure of the dean model, especially the one-on-one conversations. She believes in the value of having these meetings every week, believes strongly in the importance of following the model the way it was designed, and in asking teachers “how can we make it better.” She stresses the need to understand the “difference between telling them what to do and asking them to be a part of the solution.” She has learned from experience that when she forgot to be a coach and came from a more directive approach that “teachers were more emotional and I would put them in tears and I’m like, I didn’t mean to make you cry.” She realized that she needed to go back to what she learned as an instructional coach about helping teachers become reflective through careful questioning.

DN6 believes that this model could be improved through more structured training for deans in order to help them learn how to coach. In her opinion, these sessions would need to be held several times a year and might require someone from outside of the organization to lead them. Based on her experience, coaching is a skill that takes considerable time and training to develop.
Her advice to new deans would be to be sure to take the time to develop a relationship with teachers before you look at anything else. This might take the better part of the first year. She also recommends pointing out positive things and taking the time to talk about things that may not pertain to work by “just ask them questions to get to know them and to build trust…you have to have that. Otherwise when tough times come it’s going to be thrown back in your face”

More than anything, as DN6 reflects on the value she places on her work as a dean and the relationships she has with teachers she notes that she values, it’s seeing the teachers succeed…that’s what’s making me…that’s what I’ve always liked. I was a successful teacher so as a mentor coach, I wanted to help teachers be successful for student achievement and as a dean, I want my teachers to be successful with their student achievement.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 presents individual participant profiles of each teacher and dean. Chapter 5 will discuss the major themes and subthemes that were developed as a result of a careful analysis of all collected data.
CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

After each participant had completed three interviews over the course of several months, all data had been collected, and each interview had been transcribed, I began to analyze and interpret the data in order to make meaning from the experiences shared by the participants. Lichtman (2013) described this challenge of making meaning from qualitative data as a process that moves between questions, data, and meaning. Using an inductive analysis strategy, my goal was to move from raw data to developing categories, and then finally key concepts and themes.

Although in qualitative research there are no set or agreed upon means of analyzing data, according to Lichtman, this process of making meaning is an iterative one that typically proceeds through six steps resulting in coding, categorizing, and finally concepts or themes.

The first step in the analysis is initial coding, which is a process of reading, coding, and memoing the text. This initial process of coding is what Saldana (2009) labeled First Cycle coding. At this point the primary First Cycle coding methods I used were In Vivo coding, Attribute Coding, Process Coding, and Emotion Coding. Step two is a process of re-reading and revisiting the initial coding so that I could begin to notice trends among the responses from the participants. Next, I began to develop an initial list of categories to consider from the long list of codes that had come from the data. During this process I kept a running list of my own thoughts and questions about the emerging categories and themes, as well as beginning Second Cycle coding, described as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building (Saldana, 2009, p. 45). Step four of
this analysis process required me to modify my developing list of codes and categories based on a continual cyclical process of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. Next, I revisited the emerging categories and the subcategories, combining them whenever possible, and finally in step six, I moved from emerging categories to concepts and themes.

**Major Theme Narratives**

The major themes that emerged from the interviews with both the dean and teacher participants in my study fell into four categories. These categories are Growth, Structure and Effectiveness of the Model, Teacher/Dean Relationships and Feedback. Each of these four concepts are broken down into two or more themes and or subthemes that further examine the meaning that the participants shared of their lived experiences with the observation/feedback model. Table 2 identifies the participants for which specific data for a given them were found.

These major themes are coding categories in which six or more of the twelve teachers or deans participating in the study reported a similar experience. The major themes of this study are: (1.0) most teachers and deans describe the purpose of this observation/feedback model as growing and/or coaching teachers; (2.0) teachers and deans had varying views on the impact that the model has had on their growth as teachers or leaders; (3.0) the majority of teachers and deans report feeling confident that they can handle difficult situations such as challenging and motivating students, or dealing with challenging parents or co-workers; (4.0) while many teachers and deans report that consistency is key to the success of the observation/feedback model, they also report that consistency of observations and subsequent feedback sessions can be a problem; (5.0) in general, teachers and deans have experienced the model as
one in which they are often focused on checking things off of the list; (6.0) above all, trust matters to most participants in developing strong relationships between teachers and deans; (7.0) many teachers and deans state that teacher/dean relationships require authentic and genuine connections, yet several participants feel that these relationships can feel forced; (8.0) the majority of deans believe that reflective feedback is more impactful than directive feedback; (9.0) while both teachers and deans share that feedback is more valuable when it is consistent and meaningful, the majority of teachers feel that minimal meaningful feedback has been given to them by their dean; and (10.0) most deans and teachers share that their professional practices have changed because of the feedback that they have received. Table 1 shows these themes as broken down by participant.

**Themes About Growth**

The first concept or category centers around themes looking at growth. In this category, both teacher and dean participants share how they describe and experience the purpose of this model, their varying views on the perceived impact this model has had on their professional growth, both as teachers and as deans, and their thoughts on their confidence in handling challenging situations such as student motivation, parent involvement, and conflict among staff members.

**Theme 1.0: Most participants describe the purpose of this observation/feedback model as growing and/or coaching teachers.** All of the teachers and deans who participated in this study talk about their understanding of the role of the dean and the
Table 1

*Teacher and Dean Experiences of the Observation/Feedback Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>TCH1</th>
<th>THC2</th>
<th>TCH3</th>
<th>TCH4</th>
<th>TCH5</th>
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<td><strong>Category 1: Themes</strong></td>
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<td>1.1 Majority of teachers view their dean more as an evaluator or</td>
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<td>1.2 All deans view their role more as a coach than an evaluator.</td>
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<td>2.0 Teachers and deans had varying views on impact model had on their</td>
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<td>2.1 While some teachers reported their dean has had an impact on their</td>
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<td>growth, the majority see their growth as something they take</td>
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<td>responsibility for rather than giving credit to their dean.</td>
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<td>2.2 Many teachers rely on co-workers for growth.</td>
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<td>3.0 Majority of teachers and deans report confidence they can handle</td>
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<td>difficult situations such as challenging and motivating students or</td>
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<td>dealing with challenging parents or co-workers.</td>
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<td>**Category 2: Themes About the Structure and Effectiveness of the</td>
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Table 1 (continued)

*Teacher and Dean Experiences of the Observation/Feedback Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme#</th>
<th>TCH1</th>
<th>THC2</th>
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<td>5.0 In general, teachers and deans have experienced the model as one where they often focus on checking things off of the list</td>
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<td><strong>Category 3: Themes About Teacher/Dean Relationships</strong></td>
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<td>6.0 Above all, trust matters to most participants in developing strong relationships between teachers and deans.</td>
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<td>7.0 Many teachers and deans state teacher/dean relationships require authentic and genuine connections, yet several participants feel those relationships can feel forced.</td>
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<td><strong>Category 4: Themes about Feedback</strong></td>
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<td>8.0 Majority of deans believe reflective feedback is more impactful than directive feedback.</td>
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<td>9.0 While both teachers and deans share feedback is more valuable when it is consistent and meaningful, the majority of teachers feel minimal meaningful feedback has been given to them by their dean.</td>
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<td>10.0 Most deans and teachers share their professional practices have changed because of the feedback that they have received.</td>
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purpose for the observation/feedback model. While their actual experiences with the model differ, most of them share that their initial understanding of the model was to grow and coach teachers. For teachers, many of them share that they looked forward to having the opportunity to be coached in their work by their dean. For example, TCH1 shares that in her experience she has definitely felt that her dean fit this role:

I really feel like she’s my coach, because she’s trying to get me to be better. She’s pushing me towards things that I wouldn’t necessarily do. She doesn’t just tell me to do something and then not give me some suggestions on how to implement it, so I would definitely say she is a coach.

Other teachers share how they viewed or understood the role as one in which growth as educators would be their number one goal. They looked forward to having the feedback and mentoring that would help them to grow into highly effective teachers. As TCH3 explains:

I always thought that the point of the dean model was to grow the teacher and give feedback on your teaching and try to make you grow as an educator. It almost was there to build accountability and hold you accountable. That’s my idea about it. But when they told me about it, it was mainly feedback and growth is the reason we do this.

TCH5 shares her feelings that she really desires the coaching that a model such as this could bring to teachers. To her, the possibilities of continual growth and improvement regardless of years of experience, is what makes the observation/feedback model worthwhile. She clearly states that if a teacher is not willing to grow that they need to move on when she states:
Well it would be my hope that there would be coaching, serious coaching going on…I don’t know that that is where it’s at, and so I think feedback, the observation/feedback model is a wonderful learning tool, it is my attitude that if you think you aren’t learning as a teacher, then you gotta get out. I call them the crusties…then you gotta go, because as a teacher you have to be open to change…you have to be open to the acceptance that what you’re doing is working or not working and coach and accepting that…so I think the dean model to me is a really valuable tool when it’s used in that coaching sense, and even, I’ve got 8 years, please coach me…I’m willing to have somebody come in and say we have something new.

For the deans who participated in this study, the focus of the observation/feedback model is clearly on growing and coaching teachers. Deans however, also tend to comment on the benefit to student growth as well. Clearly, if teachers are growing and improving in their practices, students are the ones who have the most to gain. All six deans share their understanding that their primary function is to coach teachers, though clearly they have several other responsibilities such as dealing with discipline, attendance, and other administrative duties. DN2 describes her initial apprehension in moving back into a role in which she feared that she may not be able to focus on what she does best – growing teachers:

[Dean] told me about the dean role. She said, it’s like an assistant principal. I don’t want to be an assistant principal, I don’t want to deal with discipline. I want to do curriculum and instruction. I love coaching teachers. I love teaching…and so…she was, it’s kind of like that position. When I came in, how I
looked at the dean model then and how I look at it now, it’s a way to grow teachers, coach teachers, and ultimately grow students.

The idea that students are the primary beneficiaries of having highly effective teachers as a primary goal of the observation/feedback model was shared by several deans. This understanding that everything teachers and deans do in their work together is truly centered around student achievement was shared by DN4 when she states:

I think the ultimate goal is that students are learning, cause if the teachers are using the practices that you give them feedback on that’s going to be the end result that the students are learning. So I think that in the beginning, it’s observing and growing teachers which ultimately then grows students. That’s the main goal.

For some deans, the focus on coaching and growing teachers rather than evaluating teachers is important to the success of their role as dean. DN 5 shares:

I think it’s an opportunity to be able to help somebody grow without the- I’m evaluating you and you get X amounts of points for this and this is going to be on your permanent record forever… It feels more like it’s a teaching tool as opposed to an evaluation.

DN6 shares the importance of deans helping teachers to understand that their role as dean is to support and not judge teachers and how this model is so different from her experience receiving observations and feedback as a teacher and from the traditional leadership model of principal and assistant principal:

It’s not punitive, but it’s all to help grow you. And if you have that kind of attitude about it, the dean model makes that happen. I don’t know how we ever
did it with the principal and assistant principal cause that’s the way it was and I was always looked over for an observation, from the first year on

**Subtheme 1.1: The majority of teachers view their dean more as an evaluator or boss than a coach.** While most teachers share that they understand that the purpose of this observation/feedback model is to grow and coach teachers, four of the six teacher participants state that they see their relationship with their dean more as one in which their dean serves as an evaluator or boss rather than a coach. TCH3 describes his interactions with his dean:

I’d say he’s my boss. He’s very friendly with me, we’ll do stuff every once in a while. It’s more like stay out of his way type thing, so I’ve come to the realization that whenever he comes to me and asks me to do something, just stay really calm and say, “yes I’ll do it, and it’s worked out for me professionally the way we work. [Dean] gives it to me strictly, “blah, blah, blah, blah, have a good day, and walks away. And that’s how it goes.

Despite having several years of teaching experience, TCH5 states frequently through our conversations together that she really wants to receive coaching and feedback that would help her grow even more as a teacher. She shares that a few years ago, her work with her dean had much more of a coaching aspect to it and that indeed her teaching did improve while working with this dean. Now that she reports to a new dean, her relationship and experiences are quite different as she describes how she currently views her dean:

Manager…again, I’m giving credit where credit is due…first year dean I’m not sure that I would label her as a coach. I speak of the new teachers in the hallway,
the one across the hall from me who’s had very little coaching this year and I say this out of my own observations. She’s struggled this entire year. I say this to you because she’s coming across the hall to me and I actually had to ask her to go to her mentor because that’s what she’s supposed to be doing.

As a first year teacher, TCH6 came into her new position hoping that her dean would be able to mentor and coach her. After her first few observations and feedback sessions, she began to believe that this might not be the case, especially when she realized that her dean would also be evaluating her:

I feel like I could talk to her about anything, although I don’t think that’s a wise space to be in with a superior. You can’t talk to your dean about anything no matter what is said or how you feel. That’s just not wise anytime to talk to someone who’s superior to you about anything. My co-worker said, TCH6, I’ve seen you teach and this isn’t true, you’re an effective teacher, but she’s not like your friend. I think the dean model still works, it just doesn’t…you know they’re not supposed to be your friend…I do think of her more as a supervisor. I think she doesn’t have time to be the kind of mentor she would want to be and I remember her talking about it. I don’t think it’s so much as a mentor job, as far as her and my relationship goes. … I came in probably incredibly naïve so I would walk into my one-on-ones and be like, oh you know what, I want to work on this can you help me? I don’t know what to do, and I thought that was what they were for. That’s not what they’re for…now I think they’re to go over what she saw in an observation and then they’re to you know, you kind of have to stand up for yourself…that’s kind of what it’s turned into. It’s a struggle for her
too I think. It’s different when a relationship is built around a final year
evaluation that can’t be true… But I still think the model is very effective. I still
think it’s good to have her in here as frequently as I do

DN3 spoke about this difficulty that many teachers experience in separating the
coefficient aspect from the evaluation part of this teacher/dean relationship. It is her belief
that in many cases, the need for deans to evaluate their teachers makes the coaching
relationship much more difficult to establish than if deans were focusing solely on being instructional coaches:

I think that it’s harder to develop the relationship in the beginning for them to
really trust you. I get there, but in the very beginning, especially with the brand
new teachers, that idea that this person is actually evaluating me and they’re
giving me these scores on my observations… that scares them … a lot of them for
some reason and to get them past that takes a little bit of time. When you add the
evaluation side to it, I think it just naturally stresses some people out.

Subtheme 1.2: All deans view their role more as a coach than an evaluator.

Several of the deans in this study have previous experience serving as teacher mentors
or instructional coaches in one form or another prior to becoming deans. Some gained
their coaching experiences outside of the organization while others first filled the role of
instructional coach, a position in the organization that eventually transitioned into the
dean role. While they are responsible for completing evaluations for the teachers on
their teams, all deans see their role as more of a coach than an evaluator or boss. DN1
who held a position as a response-to-intervention coach prior to becoming a dean at her
school shares her thoughts on instructional coaching:
I would say 99% of this model is good, is a best practice...keeping it about instruction, really being available to help with instruction for teachers, being that instructional coach, breaking it down for the teachers.

DN1 goes on to describe her practice of being an active participant during her observations, sometimes giving on the spot coaching and modeling for teachers and sometimes just observing while she looks for ways that she can better support and help them grow:

I spend a lot of time being a silent partner in classes, if at all possible, when I know there are behavior issues just to see how I can coach the teacher. You know if you’re supporting, not watching, if you’re supporting, coaching, providing resources to staff and students real time.

Several of these deans originally had plans to complete masters programs in curriculum and instruction prior to their decision to become administrators. For most deans, it is that desire to truly grow a teacher’s ability to effectively deliver curriculum and improve instructional delivery that is their focus in coaching. For DN2, teaching is her first love and as a coach she seeks to grow others into master teachers with the focus always on student achievement:

I love coaching teachers, I love teaching, When I go in, I’m still talking about your observation data, I’m still talking about your common assessment data and where your struggle is and what our next steps are for the fifteen year teacher as well as that first year teacher, because I don’t need to talk to her about management. It’s mostly instructional coaching when I’m going into these one-on-one conversations.
She goes on to describe how this observation/feedback model is all about growth:

The dean is here to look at your instruction, to walk with you during instruction because we’re all hoping that we’re growing into the best whatever we’re going to be, the best teacher, the best dean, the best principal and feedback is part of our model. So when you are observed by your dean, this is an opportunity for you to see an objective set of eyes giving feedback on what’s going well and ways to grow, because the goal is to grow all of our kids, but we can’t grow our kids if we don’t grow ourselves. So it’s never personal, it’s always about instruction and growing kids.

DN3 and DN6 both had experience as instructional coaches prior to becoming deans. As an instructional coach, they were each trained in the use of Cognitive Coaching (Costa & Garmston, 2002) which both report has been an extremely valuable tool for them as deans. For both of these deans it was the ability to serve as a coach and to support teachers that prompted them to go into leadership in the first place.

DN3 describes her initial thoughts on becoming a dean and her challenge of keeping coaching at the center of what she does as a dean:

I had already been a mentor and loved that aspect. I loved helping others do the same thing and get excited about teaching and work style. Instructional coaching sounds like it’s a great fit for me… I went through Cognitive Coaching training, and learned just how to use questioning to get people to reflect on their own stuff. That was my favorite role. I saw in the dean model some of the same elements of what I was doing with instructional coaching.

She goes on to add:
The coaching and mentoring, that piece of it is so important to me and doing well with that part of it when other things get in the way that are part of that model also. I have a very hard time with that because I really want my focus to be on the teachers and my goal is always to make sure I do a good job spending the time in the classrooms and spending the time with the coaching… I’ve always tried to put it out there for them that my main role is their coach. I’m their boss secondary to that.

As a new teacher coach, and later as an instructional coach, DN6 had an opportunity to develop her coaching skills with many new and struggling teachers before becoming a dean. She reports that transitioning into the dean model was much easier for her because she had had these experiences but that not all teachers easily bought into the idea that she would now be evaluating them as well. This evaluation piece was the biggest adjustment for both her and the teachers stating that:

The only part that has been different is the evaluative part, having to do the teacher evaluations…otherwise, the coaching part is the same, you know, you keep things confidential; it’s an unsaid deal that things are confidential. But it’s just an open front…we have weekly meetings, that was always the same…observations, you go into observe, and so I’ve been basically (doing the same thing) really the only thing different is the evaluations.

For her, the rapport and relationships she already had with many of her teachers helped in both the coaching and the feedback aspects of this dean role, as she shares:

I think they were comfortable with it because we already had a relationship, so for them to come to me and tell me everything that was all right and good so it
came to my advantage so I had that built up, where the others, I was building the rapport with them from the get go. So it made things a whole lot easier.

**Theme 2.0: Participants had varying views on the impact that the model has had on their growth as teachers or leaders.** The primary goal of this observation/feedback model is to contribute to the professional growth of teachers through coaching and feedback. Through the process of observing, coaching, and giving feedback, deans as leaders will also improve their skills as instructional leaders. The teachers and deans in this study share a variety of experiences and views regarding their beliefs about how they have grown as a direct result of this model. Three of the six teachers who participated in the study feel that their dean has had a direct impact on their growth as teachers. For example, TCH1 came to her school after being in an environment where she was never observed or given feedback, except for a final evaluation from an administrator who had never actually been in her classroom. She shares how her dean has directly made a difference in her practices and growth as an educator:

Yes…oh yes…cause it made a difference in what I was doing. I saw, like almost in some cases it was immediate and then also like a lot of it had to do with me rethinking how I focused my instruction and how I was teaching before versus what they wanted, what they wanted me to do in the sense of the goal for the end of the day, what did I teach my kids…I just knew there was something better out there but I didn’t know how to find it on my own, so I think that it made a difference too cause I was looking for some kind of change…I wanted
somebody to come in and grab me and say, hey you should try this because it will work better for you.

As a first year teacher, TCH6 attributes some, but not all of her growth as an educator to her work with her dean:

I’m much more organized, thank goodness. I think I have more time in my day to reflect as I’m going. As far as my dean affecting that, I think just with TOPS and everything making me pause and think about…my pacing. How’s that working here? Do I have activities for them to do when they’re done that’s appropriate for the different needs in my classroom? Yeah, I think I’ve grown a lot, not necessarily that I didn’t know what I was supposed to do. It’s just I know how to do it…I think it’s a lot of things. I think she definitely was a part of it. It’s hard to measure, okay, this is because of my dean or not. A lot in the last couple of months have been based on conversations with her.

For TCH5, one particular observation stands out this year as a time where she believes the feedback from her dean impacted her overall growth and effectiveness as a teacher:

What I liked about it was, I could see and hear myself, I could see what I was doing, she recorded everywhere I went, if I was working individually with one student to make sure they could understand, or keeping someone on task… I liked it cause I don’t think I’ve ever seen myself. It was scripted all the way through and I really found value in it. I thought, oh alright, well now I see where I can change something about what I do or how I can dig even deeper into how I
ask my students questions. I did enjoy that. Good, bad, or ugly…I could see where I could spend more time.

**Subtheme 2.1: While some teachers report that their dean has had an impact on their growth, the majority of teachers see their growth as something that they take responsibility for rather than giving credit to their dean.** Four of the six teachers note that while they may use the feedback from their deans to try new skills or change certain practices, their own professional growth is an intrinsic process that they take ownership of. Most of these teachers talk about a mindset where growth is an “inside job” not something to be attributed to someone else. TCH2 talks about how even though her dean may be contributing to her professional development, most of her growth as an educator comes from her own efforts:

I reflect all the time on what’s going on in my class, but in terms of what she’s providing me, like when she comes in she usually writes a sticky note on what’s going good in the class so that will tell me that she sees that something is aligning with my goals, but honestly I feel like any learning that’s going on in terms of enhancing instruction are things that I’m reading on my own.

Similarly TCH3 states:

Overall, do I think any of them would truly change the way I teach today? No, I don’t think so…I had a plan in my head where I was going and the only thing…I do do one transitional thing that I learned via PD before school started one year…we watched this video of master teachers or something and I do this thing where every time we move from A to B, we go 123 just like me and the kids go,1,2, just like you, and then they move, so that’s really the only thing that I
took that wasn’t already in my mind that this is the day, this is how it’s going to look.

TCH4 is quite clear that for him, growth as a teacher is a result of his own actions or from working with other teachers as opposed to his dean:

Any growth I have is not, cannot be attributed to her or to the other deans. It’s intrinsic. It’s from working with my co-workers, the middle school teachers.

She’s not provided me tools to grow. If I want to become a better teacher, it’s up to me to do the leg work.

**Subtheme 2.2: Many teachers and deans rely on their co-workers for growth.**

Half of the teachers and deans who participated in the study stated that they rely more on their peers for advice and feedback about their teaching than they do their deans or principals. Asking for help or support from someone who is currently experiencing similar challenges or who has successfully managed to handle a difficult student or teaching practice seems to build confidence and trust that their suggestions and feedback are meaningful and realistic. TCH4 frequently shared that he finds much value in going to other teachers for advice:

I think I’d rather work with my co-workers as opposed to deans. I think I’d rather have another special ed teacher come in for observation or group observations than a dean coming in because they’re not in the trenches…they’re detached from what goes on in the classroom.

He goes on to say this about mastering new teaching practices or strategies or dealing with a particularly difficult situation:
It won’t come out of a book. I think it’s talking to another teacher who has used that strategy or visually seeing it myself. If I had a problem with a child or growth or technique, I would go to a teacher.

In some cases, it seems that seeing another teacher successfully try a new practice is a more powerful motivator for change than feedback or suggestions from a dean, as TCH5 shares:

I am looking at also, my peers. My peers began the student led thing and having always been a control freak kind of method, it was hard for me to let that go, but the minute I did and saw the result almost immediately, boom, gone, let’s do it. I was a little hesitant to do it and I will be fair to say to myself, because I was afraid they wouldn’t do it or couldn’t do it.

Still others look to their more experienced co-workers for validation and reassurance that everything will be okay, even when it appears to be overwhelming for a first year teacher like TCH6:

I had a really awesome teacher next door who was …I think it was her sixth year teaching. She was a very relaxed person and when I was freaking out, I was like, I don’t have everything done. I don’t have all my bulletin boards up right. I can’t do it. You’re freaking out, she would say, Eh, do the bulletin board tomorrow. Nobody cares. You need that. You need to hear somebody say, relax and just do the best you can because this is all you can do.

**Theme 3.0: The majority of teachers and deans report feeling confident that they can handle difficult situations such as challenging and motivating students, or dealing with challenging parents or co-workers.** Studies focusing on teacher and
leader efficacy report that teachers and leaders with high levels of efficacy generally believe that they possess the necessary skills, attitudes, and means to achieve their personal and professional goals (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Paglis & Green, 2001). They also believe that they have the ability to overcome common obstacles such as low student motivation, limited resources, and lack of parental support. The educators in my study believe that through perseverance, reflection, and dedication in even the most challenging situations that they can reach their goals. Five of the six teachers, and five of the six deans, report that they are confident in their abilities to challenge and motivate students and deal with challenging parents. All but one of the schools where these participants are either teaching or serving as dean are schools where there are a significant number of students currently achieving below expected proficiency, and in general, a lower than desirable level of parental participation and support, requiring an even greater need for motivating students to learn. TCH1 shares how her work as an interventionist has helped her to increase her level of confidence in keeping students growing:

I feel more capable now only because we’re in small groups, and I feel like my instruction is more consistent…I feel like my math intervention is more consistent than it was last year. I feel like I have more control now than I did as a classroom teacher. I think that I play a huge role in trying to keep them motivated and getting them to want to be there and that leads to them doing their work. I’m the one who sets the tone for that. I think I’m hugely responsible, at least as long as they’re in my classroom. I can’t do anything about what happens when they go home. I try really hard to make sure they feel welcome and feel
safe and I try really hard to communicate to them that I do believe in them and that they can do whatever they decided they can do. Right now we’re at that point where they’re starting to turn into fourth graders and their independence is coming out which is a great thing, but they need to know that this is the time that they have to take responsibility.

TCH2 feels that a lack of parental support has a direct impact on her ability to get through to her most difficult students and to help them to believe that they can do well in school:

I say 75% because they have parents. I’ve had parents this year, who have threatened to sue, I’ve had parents who’ve hung up the phone on me. I’ve had parents who don’t return phone calls. You name it. I talk all the time about how I care for kids, even when they’re acting out as terrible as any other kid in class. I told a kid today, you know I care about you, I mean he was just acting awful in class and I was going to call his parent and he cried bloody murder as if he was going to get hurt when he gets home. So I pulled him out in the hallway and talked to him. I say 75% because some kids I’ll call home, write a note home, great days, good feedback all the time. The parents of the kids who are really struggling have to support me and support them and not just think that their child is the perfect child when you know that you’ve gotten several calls from me. I’m trying to help your child perform and be the best that they can be, and support the other kids in the class, I wish they would be able to support that.

However, when it comes to believing that she can help her students value learning, she reports that she has a great deal of control over that:
I would say 95% because I talk to them about being college bound and how you’re going to college…that’s what I stress all the time and I believe in them and I see that they, when they have those huge goals for themselves, I tell them you can do it, every day, what you’re doing right now is helping you toward your goals.

Many of the teacher participants share how their own commitment to their students’ learning and their personal beliefs in how successful they can be as a teacher working with struggling students is what makes the greatest difference in their classrooms. TCH5, who works with students who are all below grade level, shares her thoughts on how much she can impact a love of learning or a value in education in her students despite her frustration with a lack of parent follow through with some of her students:

I immediately went, how much can I get parents to do that? Cause they are my model. They model for me. So I look at my parents and go, I can tell you for my kids, what parent’s involved or not, I can tell by what I get in class, not by work, but by student engagement. Students valuing learning? I have 100% control over that. That is who I am. They know that I value it. I can only tell you do they value it? I’m between 50 and 60%. The others don’t give effort, the value. I’d say 50 to 60% of my students have an involved parent. I mean involved in their lives. Might be coming from a single or two parent home or a grandma or grandpa is involved. But there is a core group that no matter what I do, while they might be involved with me, I don’t know that they value it. And I think
that’s the important word. They might be very successful. I don’t know that they see it as having value.

In addition to working with teachers to improve student growth and proficiency, the dean role requires these participants to develop the ability to resolve issues that may come up between teachers and parents as well as help teachers handle difficult classroom culture issues as they work to build relationships with their students. DN4 shares how she feels about helping her teachers in challenging circumstances:

I feel like I’m a people person and I think I have a good idea of how to approach things with people, and I feel like I can help others do that. I want them to talk to the parents and if there is an issue, if they give it to me to take care of, it takes ownerships off of them and I want them to have ownership over what’s going on with their kids. At our one-on-one conversations they say, I’m having a problem with this child. I usually ask them, what exactly are you seeing? What have you tried? I usually backed it with the children that I’ve had that reminds me of things like that, give them some ideas and say, try this. I remind them that it might not work the first day and keep trying it until there’s a pattern. I usually go back to building relationship with the students, saying, if they feel like you care, they will perform for you.

Dealing with conflicts between co-workers seems to be a more uncomfortable challenge for most participants, particularly for deans who are directly involved in resolving conflicts that occur amongst their teammates. However, DN1 is very comfortable in handling challenging issues head on:
Very comfortable. For instance, I had a staff member that was having an issue and it was brought to my attention and the first thing I said to another staff member was this was brought to me, we have to deal with it, how do you want to proceed? And that’s how I deal with that…this was brought to me…you know, sometimes they just want to tell you about it…but if it hurts the building or can hurt anyone in the building, I have to act on it. And that’s when I give them that ultimatum.

For DN3 and DN5, the situations they face in terms of parents or students are considerably easier for them than those where co-workers are involved. DN3 describes how her confidence has grown over the past year:

I feel like I’ve grown by leaps and bounds. You don’t see it in a day to day basis, but every once in a while you step back and like, yeah, I don’t know as much as I want to know but I know more than I did…I’m pretty confident with the parents and the kids but sometimes when it’s with other staff members it’s harder because sometimes I know that what they’re not telling me is really deep, like how they’re feeling. I actually had a really tough conversation yesterday with one of my direct reports about her partner and about their team because I wanted…we’re starting to look at staffing for next year…thinking about I’ve heard from someone else that if I keep the two of them and even if I added a third person that was really strong, she may decide to leave, and I don’t want her to leave because she’s a really good teacher. A solid teacher, but she’s struggling that much with him. We’ve had conversations of specific things like this isn’t working and that isn’t working but to have that full sense of like, I
really don’t know if I can, I’m going to go out if I work with this person next year again…that was a tough conversation for me to bring off with her. For us to have… I’m like be honest…I just explained for you to be honest with me but you know it’s a tough conversation, making big decisions when it comes to them working together. Those are harder conversations for me than to say, how are we going to work this through with this parent.

As she shares in her participant profile, DN5 reflects on the differences between supporting teachers when they are faced with challenges:

Parents and students I’m much more comfortable coaching them to deal with that than I am with each other. It’s different because you’re not in their position so it’s easier to talk to somebody and say, okay, so I’m a parent coming in and here’s what I’m feeling and it’s easier to help somebody understand that when they don’t feel it themselves. There’s no way to emphasize that, like, it doesn’t bother me, I don’t understand why it bothers her. It’s also a different dynamic with kids, especially because most of my life is working with the at risk and the special ed kids so it’s much easier to talk through that and when people have had difficulty with that, I can role play through with them and I can even have conversations with the kids with them there and with parents with them there that they can model. It’s a little different dynamic…and I think sometimes for the teacher to teacher interaction, the response, you always want to go back to the social contract, and are we following that social contract and have you tried to work it out with each other.
Themes About the Structure and Effectiveness of the Model

The next concept or category examines how individual teacher and dean participants view the structure and effectiveness of the observation/feedback model. The observation/feedback model is one in which there are common practices that each teacher and dean are expected to follow. These include the length and frequency of both observations and one-on-one conversations, protocols for observations and expected instructional skills and practices, and recommendations for conducting observations and delivering subsequent feedback sessions. Themes that emerged from this category looked at the consistency of how the observations and feedback sessions were delivered, how observations and one-on-one conversations were planned for and prepared ahead of time, and feelings and experiences that participants voiced that often the model felt like they were being asked to check things off of a list.

Theme 4.0: While many participants report that consistency is key to the success of the observation/feedback model, they also report that consistency of observations and subsequent feedback sessions can be a problem. Four of six teachers and two of six deans mentioned the importance of consistency of observations and subsequent feedback sessions as one of the primary drivers to the success of this model. Teachers report coming into their positions with an understanding that their dean will be observing them regularly, at least once a week, and that they can expect to have feedback given after these observations in their one-on-one conversations. Deans also comment on how important it is that they are able to consistently observe their teachers and hold their one-on-one meetings but that frequently, other administrative duties such as discipline and paper work would prevent them from being in classrooms as much as
would be desirable. When teachers can count on deans for feedback and productive conversations about their growth and next steps, teachers grow in confidence, feel supported, and strong working relationships between teachers and deans are built. TCH1 especially values the consistency of her dean coming into her classroom because her experience prior to coming to this position did not include any observations or perceived support. She shares her thoughts:

The best part about the dean model is… I like the consistent observations looking back. Because when you’re in the moment you don’t always see things and it’s always nice to have somebody here to say, yes you’re doing well, or no this really didn’t work well, and they have a solution or a suggestion, so it’s not just, you didn’t do well… fix it. I feel like they’re not just going to leave me out to dry. I feel like I’m always supported and I always have help, and I’m not afraid to go say I don’t know what I’m doing or I need help figuring this out.

Both DN3 and DN4 share their belief that it is extremely important to conduct consistent observations and one-one-one conversations if teachers are going to grow in their instructional and professional practices. DN3 shares how over time, her focus on being a consistent and frequent presence in classrooms and in focusing on growth in one-on-one conversations has helped her teachers progress:

I think I’ve learned to be more consistent this year… like how important that consistency and relationship building is to the dean model to make it successful. With the majority I’ve seen them come out of their shell more. I think because I am meeting with them. It’s like this important time for me and you to have to talk about your professional practice. At the beginning of the year a lot of them,
still being first year teachers, really didn’t bring a lot to meetings, to our conversations. It was more me pouring in information. Over time, I think because they’ve gotten more comfortable with me and I’m there consistently, they’ve opened up more.

DN4 shares a similar experience:

The amount of observations and one-on-one conversations and having that be such a consistent part of the model, I think is so beneficial. I think if you only observe teachers two times a year, how are they going to grow? It’s crucial to have the dialogue in your one-on-one’s with it.

While all of the participants agree that consistency is an important component of the success of this model, all six teachers and one dean are open about their concerns and frustrations that the expectations and the actual practice do not always match up. Not having regular observations and one-on-one conversations contributes to some teachers feeling undervalued and at least one dean feeling, in her words, “discombobulated.” DN6 knows that holding weekly one-on-one conversations is a valuable practice but due to her large caseload of teachers and interventionists, she is not able to make this happen which is disappointing to her:

I think the one-on-one conversations are very important on a weekly basis. I see the need for them to happen just because of the connection, the comfortability, the relationship, but to help maintain that growth, the work ethic, and the direct report will grow whatever the goal is that you want to grow on there. This year, I just feel a little bit discombobulated and this is because the para-pros are every other week and because I have so many, I have half of them one week, and the
other half the next week, and its very hard and they forget, Is this the week I come see you? Is this the week? and I don’t like that.

TCH3 shares that he has seldom ever been observed or given feedback in the past three years. While four years ago, his first dean would spend time in his classroom and give him feedback that he found valuable, once this dean moved on to another building, TCH3 has been assigned to multiple deans but has not had the level of support he had before:

I don’t blame him. He doesn’t have time to meet with me. [Leader] was my boss for 3 years and probably was in my room like 3 times when she was walking through to take care of another issue. She sat down and saw me like three times over the school years. I haven’t had a one-on-one conversation since November. Generally my one-on-one conversations are held on the run. If the dean needs to touch base, it’s usually on the fly. He doesn’t send emails unless it’s an attachment in the email. He’ll just come down to the gym and talk to me…I don’t talk to him very much at all.

TCH4 has had a similar experience though observations do seem to happen occasionally. Similar to TCH3, this teacher questions whether or not holding regular observations and one-on-one conversations is a priority for the dean. There is a sense that other, more urgent issues prevent the dean from meeting with him and when meetings do happen he expresses that conversations are often not centered around student and teacher growth:

One-on-ones are hit or miss, depending on whether she has a fire to put out or I’ve got a student that needs some extra care. I think they are low on the list of
priorities but I can see my dean anytime I want. I probably meet with her once a month instead of every week cause things come up, fires come up that they have to put out which I understand, but during that one-on-one conversation we talk more social rather than academic you know…I know more about her kids than I do about what, you know…what she’s striving for me.

TCH6 also believes that other events in the school can prevent her dean from consistently observing her or holding weekly meetings. For TCH6, a first year teacher, this is especially concerning as the feedback she eventually received from her dean left her feeling like she was a failing teacher for much of the year. She also expresses concern that not knowing whether or not she will be able to meet with her dean causes her to both worry about her dean and question whether or not she can count on her:

I think it’s a good model, I think this school has had a lot of struggles with a lot of things coming from the top down and that affects deans…they are told one thing to do and then they are told that that’s not how they do it later, and so it’s been a struggle… the model…because it just wasn’t happening enough for me to feel that anything she was saying was a true reflection. I think my expectations [of what the model was going to be] but also just the time to get in here…she wasn’t in here a lot and I don’t think that’s her fault, I think she was just pulled. The few times she did see, and just the fact that she didn’t know me and she didn’t really take what I was saying, that definitely shattered me like I’m awful, I don’t know what I’m doing. What am I doing here?

In addition:
Like today, she wasn’t there. That’s not super uncommon. None of us know where she is. Maybe she’s at a training or whatever, but we’ll hear it in the morning at 7:00 am. My one-on-one was supposed to be today. I got a lot of prep done, that was awesome, but I don’t feel like I can count on you to be there when I need you because I have no idea where you are. Are you sick or is your kid hurting or whatever? I get that you need to be out sometimes, but she’s out a lot. Consistency, I think, is important. I think in a school, consistency is very important. It’s the first year, so inconsistency has been everywhere and I understand why. It’s good to have. You feel more confident when things are consistent.

**Theme 5.0: In general, participants have experienced the model as one in which they are often focused on “checking things off the list.”** As the observation/feedback model and process has evolved, a collection of researched-based strategies designed to improve classroom management and instruction has become a major focal point for both teachers and deans. In this model, the Teacher Observation Protocol or TOPs as it is commonly referred to, serves as a guide for teachers and deans to choose skills and goals that will be developed by teachers and observed by deans. At the time of this study, teachers are expected to master four of these skills a year in order to be considered effective. While mastering these strategies appears to be adding to individual teachers success in the classroom, all of the teachers and four of the six deans share that they often feel like they are more focused on checking things off the list of or worried about demonstrating an isolated skill during an observation than they are in
developing as teachers and focusing on student growth. TCH1 describes how she feels as she is preparing for observations:

When I first came in it was basically all of the beginning teacher stuff. He’s like, I know you have experience but we have to go through it and I felt kind of more just like a checklist, like she did I Can statements…you know what I mean? And that I had expressed to him, just because I have an I Can statement on the board, or I have my standards posted that doesn’t mean I’m a good teacher. I go through this little check list in my head, and part of it is from the TOPS thing so okay, am I doing this, am I doing this, am I reviewing the I Can statement, am I pulling in…so all that is going through my head as I’m trying to teach and it’s not even about…it becomes so much more about the logistics about everything instead of what I’m actually teaching.

TCH2 echoes this same feeling as she recalls what it was like for her the first several times that she was observed. Now that she has been teaching for a few years and being regularly observed, she is better able to see how the skills she is learning are improving her practice:

It’s almost like in the beginning you know like ‘Oh I’ve got to put this up on the board, I gotta do this, I gotta do this, cause they’re checking it off.’ I remember feeling like, like very analytical I guess is the only way I could explain it, like feeling like everything was being analyzed…I was analyzing and they were analyzing. I felt like there was more pressure on me and not on the students’ learning.
Now that she has been teaching in the school for a few years and being regularly observed, she is better able to see how the skills she is learning are improving her practice:

When I am actually applying it in the classroom and seeing it working and it being effective, then it is easier to balance and not be so frustrating that I am just doing it to complete a task, to please what the form is saying for me to do.

One trend that came up in my conversations with both teachers and deans in regards to teachers doing tasks or demonstrating skills in order to receive points on a form, is the practice some teachers have of demonstrating a skill or strategy during the observation whether it fits with the lesson or not, or whether they use the skill even when they were not being observed. TCH3 shares how this often happens and how for him, it seems to be an unwritten agreement between teachers and deans:

Dean would give me the sheet and give me 1, 1, 1, 0 and write down an example of me doing that point, but being a teacher and talking to other teachers, I know that TOPS are only shown when the observation is taking place. Like when their dean walks in, that’s when a teacher will snap in and start showing the TOPs…I’ve had a great dean. I’ve had less than average deans. But all of them have said to me, make sure that when I’m in this room you show me this, this, and this…so are we really improving or are we just showing things to make points?

TCH6 shares her personal challenge with feeling the need to demonstrate a skill or practice even if it does not belong in the lesson at the time her dean is present:
Actually, I’ve learned a lot about the politics of it all from my mentor teacher next door. She’s like, I know it wasn’t a time when you should have brought up your I Can statements, but [dean’s] in there, so just be ridiculous and make it up, and then turn around, wink at [dean] and go back to what you were doing before because she’s got to write it down that you’ve brought up an I Can statement… I appreciate her feedback on everything else, but as far as specific TOPS skills I kind of treat it that way now…like okay…this has to be done. I’ll get this…and as soon as it’s done, I can listen to your feedback about my actual teaching.

Most deans are well aware that some teachers will put on a show for them during an observation in order to get their points and move on to a new skill. DN1, DN2, and DN5 each refer to experiences where it felt like teachers were more focused on getting points by making sure they demonstrate a skill whether it fits the lesson or not. Several deans have a practice of directly telling teachers not to put isolated skills into a lesson where they otherwise would not, just because they are in the middle of an observation. DN1 strongly believes that the point of observations is not to check things off of a list but rather to help teachers know when and how to use effective teaching strategies. She shares her memory of what it was like when deans and teachers first started using TOPs:

When I started it was a checklist of TOPS, you got your I Can? check…which has evolved thank God. The other part was hard because there were existing teachers who have been teaching with the company for a while and they wanted that check. It didn’t matter if they just did it for show and I could see through that…that’s not the purpose of an I Can just to have it on the board. It was hard
because I was holding them accountable for being a master teacher and not a new teacher and I’m not just trying to check…they wanted all the points. It was to the point where I had to start videotaping back then…to say, look at your face…look at this…this is why you didn’t get the point or this is why you got part of a point and so…it was rough.

DN1 goes on to share how she insists that teachers not do skills just because she is watching:

I’ve told my teachers I do not want it to be artificial where you’re just trying to squeeze it in because I am there and it’s throwing your pacing off. One that comes to mind is the Five Questions, because that was the skill they were working on. Why did you question that kid, he wasn’t doing anything…well I had to get my points. Oh, Ok…that’s why…laughter…why in the middle did you re-direct just to say you redirected, and it could be minor things like…look at me…just to get a point, just to get that check…It’s really about the practices of teaching. Let’s pick the four or five areas you need to develop in opposed to me going down and saying, well you’re at start up, you’ve got these…I saw you greeting, I saw you thresh holding…no. Let’s look at the strategies of effective teaching. You need to threshold because you’re not greeting your children. You may not totally need to threshold the same way. I mean I need to do this check off, however, it’s a good practice of teaching that you need to work on because when kids enter the room you’re not prepared, engaged, and thinking about your opening…yeah…I’ve kind of cut the show out. Don’t do it for me, do it for good teaching practice. Don’t do it for me for show I actually take points away.
For DN5, changes to the expectations over the past few years contributes to her feeling that this aspect of the model is not as useful as it might be. As a dean she recalls learning that:

You’re going to do observations this way, and now we’re going to use this protocol and now…the first year I had to do eight and now you have to do four and you have to do this many within a year…nothing is ever the same from year to year …it makes it difficult to use what you want to use. If you’re only doing it to say, well I have to get four skills done and you only have to do 20 observations in a year to get those four skills done, if you approach it that way, it’s not useful and it feels like it’s kind of gone toward you have to get this many done and now it’s in your evaluation.

However, she is clear that there are some skills that teachers simply must demonstrate so that they can move on to a deeper focus on instructional development.

She shares:

I’m pretty honest with them about, okay some of this stuff, it just needs to be done. The start up skills in the beginning of the year…I just need to see that you’re grading. Well, you know that I do, I understand that, I know that you know how to do this, but every year they’re asking me to do this little piece of paper, so I just need you to do it for me.

**Themes About Teacher/Dean Relationships**

The third concept or category of themes looks at teacher/dean relationships. Building strong relationships between teachers and their deans is a critical first step to the success of this observation/feedback model. The quality of the relationship between
teachers and deans seems to impact almost every aspect of this model. Each participant talked at length throughout each interview about the relationship they have with their current dean, or teachers, relationships they have had with former deans or teachers, and the changes that these relationships have gone through over time. The two themes in this category include examining the importance of trust in developing strong relationships and looking at the need for authentic and genuine connections between teachers and deans when at times, for some participants, these relationships can feel as if they are forced and unnatural.

Theme 6.0: Above all, trust matters to most participants in developing strong relationships between teachers and deans. The relationships that teachers and deans develop in their work together play a very large part in the success of the observation/feedback model. As participants discuss how their relationships with each other were initially developed and how they evolve over time, the importance of trust comes up more frequently than any other quality as being necessary for the development of a strong relationship. Several things contribute to this sense of trust including honesty, vulnerability, listening, and confidentiality. Both teachers and deans share how knowing other teammates are watching out for them and supporting each other in times of struggle and crisis adds to the development of trust between deans and teachers and among entire teams. TCH1 shares how the mutual trust between her and her dean has helped to make a difficult year bearable:

I think I feel they are my leaders, and they are still administration, but I do feel like they’ve always got my back…so it’s like…not as intimate as a friendship would be because they are still my boss, but I do feel really close to them and I
feel like that makes a big difference, cause I know that if I’m upset, and I need a minute, I can just…I feel like they have my back and that makes a huge difference. So this year with all the stuff we’ve gone through and all the trauma and transitions from principals and losing deans, and losing teachers, it’s just…I really feel that they know and they’re really realistic about it. I mean they’re very honest…they show that they’re upset too at appropriate times. They’re human, so we’re all in it together so that makes a huge difference.

As TCH2 works toward her goal of becoming a dean, she shares her learning of the value that a sense of trust adds to relationships between teachers, deans, and students:

Trust is one of the foundational things that you want to have amongst your staff to be able to progress and build that relationship so that you understand each other and have a good feeling about where you work, and so I think that’s one of the main things…I think building relationships is really important. Not only with your students but also with other staff. When I went to leadership training, the baseline of this model was trust, you know the bottom line is trust. You want to be able to build trust between other staff members and your kids following through on what you say, and being there for them.

Every dean in this study talks about the importance of trust and about how developing that trust between teacher and dean will add to a teacher’s sense of safety and willingness to accept and grow from feedback. It is not always easy to develop, especially when deans are in their first year of the job, or take on new teachers who have been used to a dean with a different leadership style, or when teachers have had an
experience with other leaders who have not developed trust in their teams. DN5 shares a struggle she faced when she first became a dean in a school that was new to her but not to the teachers she was assigned to lead and how she almost changed her mind about being a dean. She recalls teachers telling her:

It’s not you personally, but I’m never going to trust you because we couldn’t trust the person we had before. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to be a dean or if I just needed to go to a different school. I just didn’t know if this was the right place for me. I think some of it was just finding something in common and just saying you have your weeks in the beginning where you don’t give the adjusting feedback because you have to develop that relationship. They told me this: I won’t talk to you in front of this one who was my dean last year or this one who I know is keeping notes on things. I give [principal] enormous credit for coming in and just the difference in the school is amazing. [Dean] taught me that the people aspect of dealing with the job takes up 95% of your day whether you realize it or not. She always smiles. I learned from that that you can’t let it drag you down.

DN1 also experiences some struggles in developing trust in some new members of her team. For her, the challenge seems to be to keep working at the relationship, to continue showing up even when a teacher makes it extremely difficult:

I’ve been yelled at recently, I’ve had a door slammed in my face recently, and it’s just take two steps back…it’s not about me right now, it’s about trust. They don’t trust me and it’s just, we gotta keep chipping at it, keep trying to build trust. That’s where I am now. I’m living that world as we speak.
DN3 and DN4 share how as relationships develop and the level of trust increases, teachers become more willing to share what is on their minds and become more accepting of the coaching and feedback a dean is giving. DN3 describes her relationships with her teachers as one where there is significant trust and shares that:

I think the consistency built enough trust where they feel comfortable enough to be a little bit more vulnerable and bring things into conversations themselves some of the time… If you’re not afraid of the failure piece of it and like, my boss is watching, I think you’re more comfortable bringing up, okay, this what I need help in. This is… I’ve already tried this and this and this and what can you do to help me. If you’re worried about being seen badly, you’re less likely to bring up, I’m struggling with this. I’m struggling with workshop, I’m struggling with dealing with my lower students that I’m trying to provide intervention for. I think if you can get them away from that side of things as much as possible, and really focus on the coaching and they can accept it, you get further with student achievement because those conversations would happen… At this point I feel like we’ve gotten to the place where I can have those conversations, those tough conversations and they are going to trust that I’ve had their best interests at heart.

DN4 adds:

The stronger relationship you have with your teachers, the better the outcome will be. You’re coaching teachers. You’re giving them feedback. They need to trust you. That relationship building is going to be key to that being successful.
For them to grow they need to trust you, they need to know that you’re there to coach and support them.

Developing that sense of trust takes vulnerability on the part of the dean as well. When that trust is missing or when life in the school becomes difficult, as leaders deans must dig deep in order to continue building their relationships with teachers. DN 1 shares how such challenges cause her to grow as a leader even as she strives to build trust:

It just really makes me reflect as a leader. Because of what we’ve gone through this year, whether it’s next year, the year before, there’s always some type of challenge. I have to make sure that my team still trusts me even through these hard times, when support is scarce because you’re pulled everywhere, so it really made me go back to the rest of the team and just made sure I take that extra moment to connect, to provide some mental support so they understand just things are the way they are and this is what you can expect from me during these tight times, and just to rebuild that trust. I don’t want to make an excuse about this year, because next year there can be something else. I really have to go back to trust. You have to trust that I’m supporting you and you have to trust that you can give me feedback and in the moment I’ll accept it so that we can move on.

Theme 7.0: Many participants state that teacher/dean relationships require authentic and genuine connections, yet several participants feel that these relationships can feel forced. In addition to trust, it is important to both teachers and to deans that the relationships formed between them are authentic and genuine. Knowing
that their dean truly cares about them and understands each of them as a person is a theme that comes up with the majority of the teachers and several of the deans in this study. In order to build that foundation of trust as discussed in the prior theme, teachers need to know that their dean can relate and connect to them individually before they will be able and willing to accept feedback from them. However, since deans are assigned to teachers based on grade levels and individual school needs rather than similar interests or connections, and since the format of this model expects that teachers will share their personal lives or good news with their deans in their one-on-one conversations, several teachers and some deans actually feel that the relationship can feel artificial and forced. TCH2 shares her experiences of feeling compelled to share her personal feelings as she began to build a relationship with her dean:

It’s like you almost feel forced to tell about, cause you usually start with how’s it going in your life? Is there anything going on? It’s like, okay I’ve got to talk about, I felt like I had to talk about personal things, or because it’s so structured, it’s not like a casual conversation that you just have with someone you just work with. It’s like they’re trying to build that relationship with you, but at the same time, it’s kind of like, you’re kind of like forced to go through the whole process. I’m just thinking about that would probably be a negative aspect of it.

For TCH3 it was more of an issue that his dean has little in common with him. This causes him to doubt the sincerity of his dean’s interest in him, or ability to truly relate and understand him, especially when asked about personal matters, and to question whether or not this is the best use of their time:
It’s like you know nothing about me, you really want to hear about football right now? Unless I have a personal relationship with you, let’s get down to business cause I just had a terrible class and I have another terrible class in 30 minutes, so if we could just move this along, I don’t need all the fluff at the start of a one-on-one.

TCH6 really wants to develop a mentoring relationship with her dean but struggles with the amount of attention that is centered on her during the one-on-one conversations she has with her dean, but she’s willing to trust the process and says:

I feel kind of narcissistic because the whole meeting is about me, every time, but I remember walking in in the beginning of the year and she’s like so what’s going on in here and hearing her say…how are you doing? I feel like I walk in here and all I’m talking about is myself and I’m afraid it’s going to affect my other relationships (laughter) now I just walk in and say…this is what’s happening with me.

DN2 shares how the expectations of the observation/feedback model initially caused her to feel that her conversations with teachers were not as authentic and genuine as they could be. She reflects on the need to use scripted feedback following a format that is prescribed to her versus delivering feedback in a manner that feels more natural to her:

It didn’t feel natural and I felt like it wasn’t conversational, and if I’m trying to build this relationship with teachers but I have this scripted feedback it’s not natural and it’s not coming from the heart. If I’m giving this feedback, I’m
trying to support you and help you grow but when I use this fake model it just sounds so…I don’t know…so premeditated.

Themes About Feedback

The final category or concept in my study consists of themes about the feedback teachers and deans give and receive from one another. One of the most challenging, but potentially most impactful, component of this model is the quality, frequency, and type of feedback teachers receive from their deans during their one-on-one conversations after their weekly observations. Becoming more skilled in designing and delivering effective feedback that will both support teachers and challenge them to continually work toward improving their practices in the classrooms appears to be a primary growth area for each dean participant in my study. Themes in this category include the value of reflective rather than directive feedback along with feedback that is consistent and meaningful, teacher concerns that while feedback is most valuable when it is consistent and valuable, for many participants, minimal, frequent feedback is given, and finally, how practices have changed for both teachers and deans because of the feedback that has been delivered and received.

Theme 8.0: While they look for a balance of both reflective and directive feedback, the majority of deans believe that reflective feedback is more impactful than directive feedback and that feedback needs to be consistent and meaningful. Meaningful, actionable feedback is one of the primary keys to growth for both teachers and their leaders. Once a relationship has successfully been developed between teachers and deans, most teachers are much more open to hearing affirming or positive and adjusting or constructive feedback. Throughout the interviews conducted for this study,
participants frequently address the desire for feedback that will help them to grow into more effective educators. TCH1 shares that the feedback she has received from her dean this year, whether it was positive or more adjusting is generally valuable, meaningful, and specific:

Every time I received feedback it was always, it was very positive and it was done in a way, it wasn’t so much a critique as it was this is what we noticed, maybe you should try this…and again, when they came in and they said something to me, whether it be positive or negative, I knew that they knew me cause they had been in my room, so it wasn’t that generic, oh you’re a really good teacher that I got before, because how would they know? But coming to [school] when they tell me I’m doing really well, or I’m not doing as well as I should be doing, I believe them because they see me…that makes a big difference you know. Just like our kids, there’s a genuine praise, just like if I say, oh you’re a good kid, it doesn’t mean anything but when you’re specific and you know that you care it makes all the difference in the world.

TCH2 also comments on how she utilizes the feedback she receives to reflect on ways in which she can improve:

It (feedback) really made me think because I always reflect on everything, like when I go to bed I’m still thinking about my day at school. I’m always thinking about how can I get better, what can I do better, how can I help students learn more, how can I differentiate instruction? So I’m constantly thinking about it so having those discussions definitely helps me reflect and think more about…hey she came in, did that observation and observation and obviously those students
were not paying attention because she has documentation that this was what the kids were doing. I didn’t redirect them to focus on what I was teaching, so I need to make sure that my classroom management is on task, that I’m as effective as I can be so that when these students are at the carpet that they are engaged.

All deans receive training on how to give feedback in their one-on-one conversations and are expected to develop the skill of offering both written and verbal feedback on an ongoing basis to each of their teachers. Each dean who participated in the study talks about the need to learn how to give both directive and reflective feedback. Some of the deans seem to struggle with the balance between the two, and talk about their preference for being more direct when it comes to giving feedback. DN2 shares that she understands how and why to give feedback that encourages a teacher to be reflective but is clear that she prefers a more direct style:

I would rather be direct. At every training they talk about reflective feedback and coaching teachers and I don’t mind doing that, but sometimes it’s just easier to say “well you know, when you did this, maybe you should have tried this. Here’s an idea. This is something that I’ve seen before. This is something I’ve tried. What do you think about that? I try not to ask a reflective question to something that I already know the answer to though because it can feel rude and condescending. I’m really careful about how I phrase the questions so I don’t irritate people.

DN5 shares how she continually works to improve her own personal style of delivering feedback and the sense of urgency she often feels to move her teachers
toward goals and change. She realizes that telling people what to do is not as effective for change as having them realize the need for change themselves:

I don’t say it that way, but when I walk in and I’m like, I just got to do this…we’re always so…I’m just three thoughts ahead before it comes out of my mouth. I had to teach myself to slow down. What I learned through the process with my team is that I needed to stop looking at everything that needed to change and start looking at everything we were doing good and everything that was just fine the way it was. Focus on that and on what they needed first, then move back to okay, not we have to change this.

She goes on to add:

I’m a bulldozer in certain aspects. I’ve always wanted to go into situations with people and say, I saw this, this, and this, so you need to do this, this, and this. Over time it’s had to be more of a “what do you see or what do you think I saw? As opposed to this is what I saw. When we set goals this year, I went through it with my team and I’m like here’s some skills that I think might be beneficial for you based on this. There’s more than what they’d have to do. Which ones do you think would be…so guiding in a direction…narrowing the focus, but not pinpointing the focus. If you tell me what you want to do and then you tell me how you need me to support you to get it done, it’s going to happen. That’s probably my biggest mind shift in the four years I’ve been doing this. I came into it as a dean thinking that my job was to tell people what to do and how to do it. I don’t know why in the world I thought that.
The understanding that more experienced teachers may be more receptive to feedback that is reflective and allows them to come to their own realizations and conclusions rather than relying on direct feedback comes up from several deans. Many deans share how the scripted feedback for delivering feedback that they were taught as new deans coming into this position really does not work very well for many of their teachers. DN3 recalls what it was like for her to convince her teachers that weekly one-on-one meetings and conversations were important and how she had to change her style of delivering feedback. She remembers:

Trying to work through some of that to get the value and to change sort of my own way of giving feedback in some ways, because the strict, like “here it is” and then the format that [organization] teaches for a dean to give feedback doesn’t always work, especially with the veteran teacher, so I think I went back and sort of relied on some of that cognitive coaching thing where I was giving them a little bit more freedom to talk and kind of reflect on their own teaching versus pouring feedback down their throat. I think that eventually got them to feel like okay…like well she’s not really telling me what to do. She’s trying to help me figure out it myself. But it took a while

DN4 shares how she is personally reflective as she determines how to deliver feedback in a manner where teachers are encouraged to be more reflective. She shares how she has grown:

For [teacher] instead of saying like, you didn’t do a, b, and c, it’s like asking questions and giving her more of a big picture about it. Being able to give her that feedback was helpful for me, because I don’t want to be the type that’s just
like, here is what you didn’t do. I want them to see where the point is and see from their own reflective process, Oh that’s what I’ve been doing. That’s giving them feedback and that way is helping me grow and helping me make sure that I intentionally do that. It’s easier to set and the problem’s solved right away. When they take ownership and they think about their own, that’s important. That’s been my thing to work out with myself, is making sure that I allow that and ask them questions and prep beforehand, how do I want them to get to this point.

When asked how she came to this understanding of the value of reflective feedback she states:

As a teacher, my dean, did a really good job with that. I started to do that with my co-workers. I like to watch people and think what they’ll do in that situation. I remember many times seeing one of my co-workers, he liked to ask questions and I guess he’s a difficult one. It if should be black and white, he’s going to be gray. She hears them so well and he came about on his own because she asked the right questions. It always reminds me of that about her. I said that’s the dean I want to be. That’s always been in the back of my head. That’s what I’m striving for. It helped me stay focused on that and tried to be that way. I haven’t been that way all the time. I always reflect, Okay, how can I have done this differently? And that going forward, but I want to make sure that I do.

You can be reflective, but after two times that we’ve talked about it, it’s still not being fixed, then that’s like Okay. The message isn’t clear, apparently. If we talked and they’ve said, Okay. I need to do this later. Or even cue, if in the
reflective part, if they’re not getting to the end result that I’m looking for and question after question or prompting to prompting, then not at that 03, but at another 03 coming back to that, being more directive. It just depends if they’re getting it or not or if they’re not applying it. You can say you’re going to do something, but you don’t do it, then that’s like, well you might need to shift a little bit.

DN6 reflects that her greatest accomplishments in getting teachers to accept and own feedback, both affirming and adjusting, is in getting teachers to become more reflective and to have the changes in instructional practice come from their own experiences. She shares how she begins to move teachers toward this goal:

I want to make sure that the relationship is solidified and that if there’s some adjusting feedback, I want to make sure I promote it in a way that they’re part of the change. How can we do this better? What are your thoughts? What are you thinking? So it comes more from a shared thing instead of them looking at me as a dean and slapping their hand with something.

She acknowledges that in order to be truly effective in developing reflective practices in her teachers that she needed to make changes of her own.

I made sure that I stopped talking about me and what I would do and let them figure out what they would do. It’s easy to go to someone and say, well, you know what I would do when that happened to me…and that was my experience, so it made an impression on me. But it’s not their experience so it doesn’t make an impression on them. When they experience something for themselves…you know the saying, a man’s argument is at the mercy of a man’s experience? So
you have to give them those experiences because that’s what they are going to truly hold onto for themselves. That’s what I held onto for me to help change my teaching abilities so I had to give them that chance.

Additionally, she reflects:

About two years ago I had to go back to, some of it was easy because of being a new teacher coach, that’s how they trained you as a new teacher coach to question them, because you want them to be able…to figure out things so that they’re not reliant on someone else. But I stepped away from that and so then I just came back to it about two years ago, because people would respond better.

Theme 9.0: While participants share that feedback is more valuable when it is consistent and meaningful, the majority of teachers in this study wish that the feedback that they receive from their dean was more frequent and more meaningful. The majority of the teachers who participated in this study share that they have received feedback from their dean that was helpful to them in the classroom.

Four of the six teachers who participated in this study share that they would appreciate and value feedback even more if it was more frequent and was more actionable and meaningful. In some cases, it is more a matter of not enough feedback, or feedback that is positive but does not really give teachers information about how they could improve their practices.

TCH2 shares a frustration experienced by some teachers who feel that they really have not been given adequate enough feedback throughout the year to make adjustments to their practices:
A lot of times this year when I go to meet with my dean, it doesn’t seem like she has a whole lot of feedback to improve the instruction that I’m doing in my class, so she’ll just maybe talk about what she saw, or what was going on and we’ll talk about what was happening, but I haven’t gotten a whole lot of feedback of like how I could make it better. When I go to the meeting and there is not the feedback or it is just housekeeping stuff. It is like, how much is it benefitting me at this point? I do not know.

TCH3 shares his belief that since he is capable of handling his position without a lot of involvement with the dean or principal that he feels as if he is left alone without any feedback or support:

[Dean] and I have never had a one-on-one. I’m kind of like…he just looked at me and was like, if you need anything come to me…I don’t ever use the walkie talkie, I never email anyone. I just kind of teach and do my own thing. He’s like, I have so many other issues and I know you’re capable of doing your job. If you need me…Kind of like you get punished if you’re a good teacher…if you can do your job and not cause any problems to the dean, they love it, but you don’t get any feedback or support. Nowadays, it is me just closing the door.

Similarly, TCH4 shares that feedback he has received from his dean has been minimal and that while he appreciates a hands off approach, he would welcome feedback that might improve his practices:

I’ve been observed a couple of times, the feedback’s been minimal if any…but what I always like about it…it’s a hands off. She doesn’t come in and micromanage my room. When I shut the door, I’m on my own. (Observations)
two short ones, one long one. So I would be observed…I wouldn’t get any immediate feedback. They’d come in, they’d sit in the back of the room, type a couple of things out, whatever…and then during my one-on-one conversation, they should have reviewed with me and said okay…I like the way that you approached the kids to begin with, you greeted them, you had an I Can statement on the board, that’s the purpose but it slipped through the cracks.

**Theme 10.0: Most deans and teachers share that their professional practices have changed because of feedback they have received.** The final theme of this study in regards to feedback centers around the changes to professional practice that come about as a result of feedback received. All of the teachers and half of the deans report that they have changed some aspect of their practice after receiving feedback.

TCH2 shares how feedback she received helped her to take a closer look at the level of engagement in her classroom:

[Feedback helped me] to be more aware of the engagement, in that I was more worried about what I was teaching on the board and not thinking what they’re getting…because I was relearning…now the next half of the year I found myself I’m at the back of the room, they’re at the board. I can see who’s plugged in. I can walk around and go, okay, who doesn’t have it? Who does? Engagement has increased for me, but I’ve been more engaged so it’s the other way around.

TCH4 adds:

She was absolutely correct that instead of my affirmations of being from teacher to student, we need to get those so it’s student to student at times. . I think being more visual, do more things on the board. She did ask me to put up some of the
papers that the students came in, with grades on….I need to put up more of the students’ work so they take pride in their work, more of an ownership, so I started putting that up and surprisingly, the kids bought into it. They come in, it’s a 2.0 or whatever…hey…can I put it on the board? Absolutely! Now my walls aren’t filled but they do have a lot more of the student work on there, which is super.

TCH6 shares how over the course of her first year as teacher she has learned to accept the feedback and to put ideas and suggestions from her dean into practice and how much more comfortable she is now knowing how to use the feedback:

Now I think I handle it better…and I think it’s just overall going better. I think I can actually use the feedback I get very effectively…A lot of little examples come to mind. There’s probably bigger things, but they don’t pop into my head right away. Things like center cubbies. They started out those (points to storage containers on top of shelf). I still haven’t even cleaned them out. She didn’t like them because they would tip off the tables. I liked them because everything was all in one thing. We got these, I got these. These work….I learned a lot about organization. I would get nervous when she would come in the room. If we were sitting on the carpet, I’d want to finish what we were doing on the carpet before we moved on. She would say, “I know you’re doing that for me, but your kids are getting really antsy and you don’t need to do that.” Just little things like that. I could feel free that even though she was in here, I needed to show her that I knew how to respond to my kids when they couldn’t sit anymore and things like that and not be afraid to do our wiggle time when she’s in here. I would feel bad,
“I know you only have 15 minutes and we’re spending three wiggling, but they need to move…It’s just become more comfortable. I use her a lot more now. I think as you get to know someone, you get to know what they want of you when they come in and it just works better.

DN2 explains how feedback stating that her naturally reserved nature can be seen by some as standoffish or insincere has made her really think about her interactions with teachers and the need to take the time to listen and build relationships. She shares an incident where a teacher wanted to talk to her about something when it was time for her to be involved in a required duty. DN2 was very conscious of the importance of letting this teacher know that she heard her need to talk:

I’m like, okay, you know I really want…this is what I said to her. I really want to listen to you right now. I really want to listen to you right now, but I want to make sure that I’m giving you the appropriate time and that I’m paying attention to you, so can we talk about this later? She said to me, you know [dean] I feel like what I have to say is important too…it’s like how do I hurry up and build this relationship? Let me go and ask her how her weekend was again. I’ve got two minutes, just enough time. She actually did give me that feedback. I was able to rebound from that and talk to her that afternoon after dismissal. In the moment it didn’t feel very good because she was like, well, what I have to say is important too. Don’t cut me off. You just come in and delivered everything you wanted to say and now I’m ready to talk and you have to go outside. I was glad that she shared that.
DN4 shares how requests for feedback from her teachers resulted in her adjusting some of her interactions. She remembers that:

There were some things that took me off guard. I wasn’t upset by it, but I was like, Oh, I didn’t know I was perceived that way. I want to make sure that I adjust that. One was, I keep my word when I agree to do something. When I got a “sometimes” from a person that one clearly said to me, I need to make sure my follow through is a little bit better. If I make a promise, I have to make sure I do it. Even little things like one of the doors has all the chrome books in it and sometimes I forgot to unlock it in the morning, so I put a little sticky note on my calendar that will say, every morning, unlock that door. You know, I don’t want them to sit and wait for it. Really, I thought I did a good job with that. It made me rethink about myself and I was like, okay, make sure you’re better with that.

Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter shared the voices and experiences of teacher and dean participants in ten themes that evolved from the interviews conducted during this study. The themes fall into four major concepts or categories: themes about growth, themes about the structure and effectiveness of the model, themes about teacher/dean relationships, and themes about feedback. In general, teachers and deans both view the purpose of this observation/feedback model as growing and coaching teachers. Deans and teachers have differing views on how they actually experience the role of the dean. While some participants acknowledge that deans have in fact impacted their growth, most see their growth as professionals coming from their own intrinsic efforts or guidance from their peers. The majority of all participants feel very confident in dealing with challenging
situations involving parents and in motivating students to value learning. Consistency in the implementation of the observation/feedback model appears to be critical to the success of and impact on teacher development. This consistency leads directly to a development of relationships where trust and authenticity is key. Most deans share their findings that consistent and meaningful feedback delivered in a manner that encourages reflective thinking on the part of the teacher versus directive statements from the dean is far more powerful, and while the majority of teachers and deans report that their practices have changed because of feedback they have received, most teachers report that they desire much more feedback from their deans than they are currently receiving.

The final chapter of this study will discuss the findings resulting from the experiences of these twelve participants as well as present further research recommendations and implications for those educational institutions considering implementing a similar observation/feedback model.
CHAPTER 6
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides the results of my study as it relates to the research questions presented in Chapter 1, as well as the connections and relationships of the findings to the literature as presented in Chapter 2. Finally, I discuss suggestions for further research, future recommendations, and my final conclusions and reflections.

The purpose of my qualitative research study was to explore the shared experiences of teachers and their deans in a school system currently engaged in an intensive teacher observation and feedback model. Utilizing a series of three interviews with each of my participants, I explored how the teachers and deans involved make meaning of this observation/feedback model. Through the sharing of their lived experiences, I sought to better understand the impact of this model on the development of teacher and leader efficacy, the changes that come about in each of their practices, the resulting relationships between teachers and their leaders, and their perceived value that this observation/feedback model brings to their professional growth as educators.

This study sought to make connections between the constructs of teacher efficacy and leadership efficacy and how this model of regular observation/feedback sessions contributes to or does not contribute to teachers’ and their leaders’ sense of efficacy through the construct of Bandura’s social learning theory (1977, 1978, 1986, 1989). Bandura defined self-efficacy as a person’s estimate of their ability to successfully execute the necessary behaviors required to produce desired outcomes. His social cognitive theory (1989), further refined this work to state that it is the capacity of individuals to exercise control over their own thought processes, judgments, and
actions, and the beliefs that individuals hold for themselves regarding their capabilities, rather than what they are actually capable of accomplishing, that results in higher or lower levels of self-efficacy.

Bandura’s research on self-efficacy led to the development of the construct of teacher efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1982, 1986; Ashton et al., 1983; Gibson & Dembo, 1984, 1985; Gusky, 1987; Hoy & Wollfok, 1993; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2001). Teacher efficacy is defined as a teacher’s judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or motivated. Paglis and Green (2002) extended Bandura’s self-efficacy theory to consider that of developing leadership efficacy, especially in regard to leading change. They define leadership efficacy as a person’s belief that he or she can successfully exert leadership as they set a direction for the work group, build relationships with those they lead in order to increase commitment and willingness to adopt new change goals, and continue to persevere even in the presence of obstacles. These three constructs of self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, and leadership efficacy provide the theoretical background for my study.

Participants in this study are all teachers and deans within the same public charter school organization. Six teachers and six deans participated in the research over a period of three months as they each completed three individual 45-60 minute interviews with me. During these interviews, using a semi-structured interview question protocol, they shared their experiences of how this observation/feedback model has impacted their work in their classrooms or as leaders, how their own perceived teacher or leader efficacy has or has not been changed, thoughts on their developing
relationships, and their impressions of the value they have received from the model. The results of their interviews along with the theoretical framework led to the emergence of the categories and themes for my study. Four major categories of themes emerged: (a) themes about growth, (b) themes about the structure and effectiveness of the model, (c) themes about teacher/dean relationships, and (d) themes about feedback. Table 2 summarizes the major themes from my study.

Table 2

Major Themes and Subthemes of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes about Growth</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.0 Most participants describe the purpose of this observation/feedback model as growing and/or coaching teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 The majority of teachers view their dean more as an evaluator or boss than a coach.</td>
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<td>1.2 All deans view their role more as coach than evaluator.</td>
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<td>2.0 Participants had varying views on the impact that the model has had on their growth as teachers or leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 While some teachers report that their dean has had an impact on their growth, the majority of teachers see their growth as something that they take responsibility for rather than giving credit to their dean.</td>
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<td>2.2 Many teachers and deans rely on their co-workers for growth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.0 The majority of teachers and deans report feeling confident that they can handle difficult situations such as challenging and motivating students, or dealing with challenging parents or co-workers.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Themes about the Structure and Effectiveness of the Model</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.0 While many participants report that consistency is key to the success of the observation/feedback model, they also report that consistency of observations and subsequent feedback sessions can be a problem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.0 In general, participants have experienced the model as one in which they are often focused on “checking things off the list.”</td>
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<th>Themes about Teacher/Dean Relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td>6.0 Above all, trust matters to most participants in developing strong relationships between teachers and deans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.0 Many participants state that teacher/dean relationships require authentic and genuine connections, yet several participants feel that these relationships can feel forced.</td>
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<th>Themes about Feedback</th>
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<tr>
<td>8.0 The majority of deans believe that reflective feedback is more impactful than directive feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.0 While participants share that feedback is more valuable when it is consistent and meaningful, the majority of teachers feel that minimal meaningful feedback has been given to them by their dean.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.0 Most deans and teachers share that their professional practices have changed because of feedback they have received.</td>
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Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

Research question 1 examined how teachers engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process described: (a) changes in their teaching practices after receiving frequent and ongoing observations and feedback; (b) changes in their perceived teacher-efficacy as this process unfolds; (c) their developing relationships with their dean; and (d) the value obtained from this observation and feedback process in their professional development as teachers.

Research question #1a findings: This part of question 1 examines how teachers describe the perceived changes in their teaching practices after receiving frequent and ongoing observations and feedback. Findings for this question come from both themes about growth and themes about feedback.

In general, while most teachers report that their work with their deans has resulted in some changes to their practices, such as higher levels of student engagement, more attention to putting up student work, or organization within the classroom, the majority of the teachers interviewed strongly feel that their own internal drive and beliefs are the primary influences on their professional growth as opposed to an impact directly related to their dean. Several of them speak of growth as being “an inside job.” Many of the teachers in this study report that their own reading, personal seeking out of professional development opportunities, and/or consulting or observing peers has had a greater impact on their growth than the feedback they have received from their dean. TCH5 shares her belief that it is her personal passion to be the best educator she can
possibly be, rather than her work with her dean that has made the difference in her own growth as a teacher:

I’m self-motivated. I impact myself more than anybody. I really am and I think it’s because of all the years I wanted to be a teacher. I didn’t want those years to go to waste. I did buy all kinds of books to read on my own, different ways of handling behavior or bringing new things to the classroom…I don’t need anyone to give me anything…I can do it on my own.

Teachers who have had opportunities to see their dean interact with students or model lessons for them, tend to report a greater level of impact or influence from their dean on their practices and growth. This impact is related to one of the four primary sources of efficacy. Bandura (1997) labeled this source of efficacy as vicarious experiences, in which teachers observe a competent teacher or coach successfully model skills and strategies as well as sharing their thinking about those tasks (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). TCH2 shares her thoughts on the value of deans demonstrating or modeling behaviors and skills that teachers are expected to demonstrate in the classroom,

I thought about it if one day I become a dean. If I used it as a dean, like if we are expecting teachers to use it in their classroom, how can I be using it as a dean with the teachers? If we are required to make I can statements for what we are doing, how can I create I can statements for what the teachers are doing? So that they can see…that I can believe in you. We create goals. Maybe listing those goals that we make in I can statements with the teachers, so when we are having those evaluations…using the same language…it seems like if we are expecting
our teachers to do it, then deans should be the examples of it. We should know how it works and what is behind it so…I think there could be an impression from teachers who might think that the deans have not been in the classroom, and the teachers have this to do and this to do and this to do. They have so many things to do. That if the deans were required to do it too then it keeps that accountability piece.

Finally, teachers who have had negative experiences in other school settings where they were not observed and little feedback had been offered are more likely to state that feedback from their dean has positively impacted their professional growth.

TCH1 shares how coming to her current school after being in an environment where she was never observed but still received an evaluation has helped her to grow as a teacher,

I remember when I came in I was scared to death to have people in my room all the time because I’d never had that before…when I went to [organization] I thought maybe I’m not a good teacher. Maybe this has all been in my head, because nobody had ever been in my room. We always got our evaluations two days after the kids left, so I never saw my principal because we were in two buildings, and he was always in the main building. So he’d tell me I was doing a good job and I’m thinking how would know? I could have been down there finger painting with them all day. As long as they were quiet and I didn’t have any discipline issues, I was doing a good job. It took me a long time (to realize I was a good teacher) almost the entire year. But I was coming from…I think it would be a different perspective as a teacher just graduating college and starting
at [organization]. I felt like a first year teacher again. The culture, everything was so completely different. It really knocked me for a loop and it took a year for me to be like okay, it’s okay, I’m going to be alright…I think I look at when I receive feedback in generally I always think well how much do you really know? Their feedback is authentic and genuine because I see them in my room, or I see them in the hallway. So when they look at me and say, you’re doing a good job or you’re not doing so well, I take it with more sincerity because I know that they know.

In their research on feedback, Hattie and Timperley (2007) discussed how people are more likely to increase effort to reach their goals or change behaviors when they have a clear understanding of those goals, a high level of commitment, and a belief that they can eventually reach these goals. The process Hattie described as “feed up, feedback, and feed forward” (p. 85) outlines the need for feedback to answer the questions: What are my goals? What progress am I making toward that goal? and What do I need to do to make better progress? When discussing progress toward professional goals set by collaboration with teachers and deans, some teachers share that while goals may have been set early in the year, they seldom look back on them with their dean or have since forgotten what they are. Other teachers report that they pick goals off of a list that they think they already do so that they can be given credit for these skills and that often they see these goals as simply jumping through hoops. TCH3 admits,

I picked three that intentionally I knew were already in my teaching, so I don’t have time to do that…I kind of think it’s a joke, I kind of do. If you’re a good teacher, keep doing what you’re doing. These things are for people that are on
plans and things of that nature. There are certain teachers that I feel like don’t need that, you already know how to focus an unfocused kid, you already know how to do this, do you really need to have a little TOP that says when I come in for 15 minutes make sure you say your I can statement and stuff like that? It’s all scheduled in the day. It’s something I already do.

Still other participants spoke of their current goals as set by their deans through the observation/feedback model as not being professional or challenging enough for their growth and consequently they look outside of the model for professional development. TCH5 shares how she feels she has to start over with the same skills every year,

It feels like it…and people have said that and so to always feel like, okay, didn’t I do turn and talk last year? Why am I starting over again, so we’re not sure that…well let me say it this way…there should never be an end to learning, but there should be an end to a section you’ve mastered. There should be progression and not regression every year just because it’s September. So there’s a perception out there that that’s what’s happening. I’ve mastered one, I should be coming back to it again, and I’m not sure that that isn’t happening. At least I feel that way.

**Research question #1b findings:** The second part of research question 1 examines how teachers describe changes in their perceived teacher-efficacy as this process unfolds. Themes about growth, feedback, and the structure and effectiveness of this model give insight into these findings.
The years of experience among the six teachers participating in this study range from less than one year to over 11 years in the classroom. Every teacher shares that they are currently working in a school environment that is challenging and demanding in terms of student behavior, student achievement, and workload. All but one teacher speaks of a high level of confidence that they believe in their own abilities to rise above the challenges they face on a daily basis, as long as they keep striving to reach their own personal goals. Regardless of years of experience, the majority of teachers share their beliefs that they have developed the necessary coping skills to face even the most demanding or difficult situations. While many report that they know their dean will support them if need be, the majority of the teachers in this study report that they generally choose to handle these challenging situations on their own rather than seeking support from their dean, as they view their dean as being busy and having “a lot of fires to put out.” TCH3 shares how he tries to protect his dean by not asking much of him, even if it means his own job becomes more demanding, “Me and [dean] formed a good relationship but he’s a pretty abrasive person and he’s always running around…where if I can just take the bullet and avoid having to put another stressor on him, I really will.”

According to Bandura (1977b), people will typically fear or avoid situations which they believe exceed their coping skills, but will engage in activities or behaviors when they see themselves as capable of handling challenging or previously intimidating situations and that those with a higher sense of efficacy demonstrate greater effort, persistence, and resilience. It is the resilience and effort that the majority of these teachers speak of as they share how they overcome adversity that suggests a high level of perceived teacher-efficacy among these participants. Yet, few of these teachers
attribute this ability or tendency to stay the course, even when it is challenging, to their work with their dean or to the observation/feedback model. Most participants share that this confidence to handle difficulties comes from their own internal drive and reflections from previous experiences.

The teachers in this study report that, for the most part, they are quite confident when handling difficult situations with parents or students and that they believe that they have the necessary skills for motivating and challenging their students, even when they do not have strong support from parents. These findings are in keeping with Tschannen-Moran and Woolfok Hoy’s (2001) research indicating that teachers with a higher sense of teacher efficacy believe that they have the necessary skills to effectively reach unmotivated or difficult students. Teachers with a higher sense of teacher efficacy also tend to demonstrate a belief that the reinforcement and success of their teaching activities is within their control or is internal. Though some teachers share a sense of frustration that low levels of parental support make their work with students more challenging, very few teachers in this study voice a low teacher efficacy belief that the influences of the environment are greater than their own abilities to make an impact on their students or that the reinforcement of their efforts is external or out of their control.

Trained as a special education teacher but working with general education students, TCH6 works in a school where many of her students achieve at a high level. Still her passion is for working with those with the greatest needs:

That’s what I think I can do. I have a special ed degree so I love working with kids that nobody wants. I work with them over in [country] too, that’s what I want to work with. So yeah, I just love the challenge of it I guess, I don’t think
I’m a master of it by any means. Just the love of the kids you know, …let’s go do this I guess. I mean there’s no other reason. …we’re going to do it. There’s no reason I can’t reach them. I really, I don’t know, maybe I’m very optimistic.

Much of the perceived changes to teacher efficacy that appear to be present among the teacher participants in this study seems to come about from their own reflections on their practices. This ability to reflect and grow from both experiences in the classrooms and feedback from their deans is an example of the development of Schon’s (1998) reflective practitioner, defined as a “builder of repertoire” through inquiry rather than a collector of procedures and methods. According to Blasé and Blasé (2004), reflective practitioners continually recognize and evaluate their own actions and behaviors in the classroom as they think about previous experiences, make decisions, and refine their practices based on their own thoughts about their work. In addition, feedback from and conversations with instructional leaders encouraging them to become more reflective on their own learning and practices helps to increase teacher growth and effectiveness in the classroom and adds significantly to a teacher’s sense of efficacy. TCH1 shares how receiving feedback about her instruction and thinking about her practices has caused her to be a more reflective teacher,

Going from having no structure and having entire freedom in my classroom to being more, I don’t want to say micro-managed, but it’s a little more intense at [organization], you have to follow the curriculum, and I didn’t have as much wiggle room, but in a way though it helped me focus my instruction, and the way I looked at activities was more like, okay this is a cutesy little activity, but when I started looking at it, is the rigor there, are the things there that you
know…it made me examine my own choices… it made a difference in what I was doing. I saw, like almost in some cases it was immediate, then also a lot of it had to do with me rethinking how I focused my instruction and how I was teaching before, versus what they wanted, what they wanted me to do in the sense of the goal for the end of the day, what did I teach my kids.

The six teacher participants in my study speak frequently about the lack of value they place on remembering what several teachers describe as a list of isolated skills from a checklist during observations with their dean. Little value is placed on developing these behaviors or exhibiting them just because their dean is currently looking for them in an observation. Instead, feedback that is most helpful for the participants, whether it is positive or more adjusting, is feedback that is actionable and gives them meaningful information about how they can improve their practices. TCH1 shares how her practices in questioning have improved because of the feedback she has received from her dean,

I’ve definitely started looking at more rigorous questioning and things like that. I have a chart that’s now on my kidney table, like question stems, cause I always thought…yes I ask these questions, but then when I talked to her, she’s like, no you really don’t. Most of your questions are you know, whatever type. I forget what she called them. So putting that in place has helped me be more effective because it’s always in front of me. That’s in the forefront of my mind because we’ve talked about that and bringing more rigor into the classroom and that’s definitely made me more effective. It’s nice because sometimes when you’re in the moment, you don’t see everything else that’s going on.
Most of the teachers in this study desire more frequent and ongoing feedback than they currently receive from their dean and acknowledge that their practices in the classroom change when they have opportunities to engage in reflection both individually and in conversations with their dean. TCH2 shares how a lack of actionable and ongoing feedback also leads to questions about the impact this lack of feedback has on end of year evaluations,

I think what definitely frustrates teachers is when you get to the end of the year evaluation and you really haven’t gotten much feedback. I think that’s what’s hard. I know that giving feedback is challenging but there are models, there are ways to give that feedback to not only affirm but also to support them and then when you don’t hear that until the final evaluation then, the teachers won’t say it to the deans, but then the teachers definitely talk about it outside of it, not necessarily what their number was but that how could this happen without getting any feedback along the way.

**Research question #1c findings:** The third piece of research question 1 examines how teachers describe their perceived developing relationships with their dean. Themes about teacher/dean relationships, themes about growth, and themes about feedback help to clarify how teachers view their developing relationships with their deans.

According to Ebmeier (2003), one of the most significant predictors of teacher efficacy, commitment, and job satisfaction are a teacher’s perceptions of his or her administrators as caring and concerned about life in the classroom. He stated that leaders who desire to increase teacher efficacy find the greatest success when they
involve teachers directly in decision making about classroom activities, support innovation and encourage collaboration among teachers, provide clarity in regards to school-wide goals, give teachers time to observe other effective teachers, and provide ongoing feedback to teachers about their classroom performance.

Similarly, Blasé and Blasé (1999) discussed strategies most commonly used for effectively developing teachers, including emphasizing the study of teaching and learning, supporting efforts of collaboration between teachers, and developing strong coaching relationships among teachers, coaches, mentors, and supervisors. Blasé and Blasé stated that growth and learning for teachers, as well as an increased sense of efficacy, can be increased by building leaders who focus on engaging in conversations and feedback that encourages teachers to become more aware of and reflective on their own learning and professional practice. It is the weekly observation and feedback sessions shared by the participants in my study that provides an avenue for deans to develop such a coaching relationship with teachers.

As the teachers participating in this study share the development and the changes over time in the relationships they have with their deans, it is evident that above all, trust is a critical component in building a strong, effective relationship between teacher and dean. According to the participants, trust is built through an ongoing practice of deans being visible, available, and consistent in their interactions, observations, and one-on-one conversations with teachers. Teachers who have deans who are frequently present in their classrooms, and who are aware of and helpful in resolving the challenges present in the classroom or between co-workers or parents, develop a sense of trust much earlier in their relationships than those teachers whose
deans are frequently unavailable or unaware of the significant challenges teachers are facing. Additionally, those teachers who work with a dean who provides frequent feedback that focuses on strengths as well as deficits and fosters reflective conversations in one-on-one conversations designed to address areas of growth, feel that they can trust their dean and be more receptive to the feedback they are receiving.

Teachers who have this sense of trust and safety with their dean report that they will often willingly seek out feedback from their dean as well as share their successes and their difficulties in open, honest conversations. Until that sense of safety and trust is developed, it appears to be much more difficult for teachers to be accepting of coaching and feedback. Participants share that without a high level of trust, that they view their relationship with their dean more as one in which they feel continually evaluated or judged rather than a relationship that is focused on coaching and helpful to their growth and development as teachers. TCH 5 shares her struggles with developing a relationship with a dean who she was never able to fully connect with,

It was unnerving…I’ll be frank because I don’t believe that who was observing me was qualified to do so…and I could be very wrong, but I didn’t respect the person that was doing it and so I found little value in it, and I tried. I tried very hard. I think that because that had not been established, that relationship had not been established, that that is where it is today. I don’t know what to think about it. Still today I don’t know that that relationship was ever established. I can only speak to me but I am aware that there are other teachers who have been there as long as me and that relationship has still not been established.
When the teachers in this study believe that their dean does not really know them as a person or have much in common with them, or feel that their dean may not have adequate experience as a leader or knowledge in a teacher’s area of specialty, it is much more difficult for them to develop a trusting relationship. TCH 4 shares how his dean’s lack of experience in his specialty as well as her laid back nature and focus on being too friendly with teachers makes it less likely that he will trust her feedback or support,

I think I’d rather have another special ed teacher come in for observation or group observations than a dean coming in because they’re not in the trenches…they’re detached from what goes on in the classroom. One dean has years of classroom experience. My [dean] has…I don’t even know what she even taught. I think she’s in the lower el, so I think when she comes into middle school, I think she’s a fish out of water and she’s not sure of the academics and she’s not sure of the behavior or the relationships. She’s extremely friendly, she’s extremely personable, but she’s not academic based, she’s social. She’s lost respect of the team because she’s not a dean, she’s a friend. You can’t be a friend and supervise.

Additionally, if they feel that they are a burden to their dean because their dean is too busy and pulled in many different directions, teachers are likely to not seek support and to not develop trust in their dean. While TCH4 shares that he likes his dean as a person, his dean simply does not have time for him,

It’s been a tumultuous year. I’ve had three different bosses. So I’ve just been getting kind of…it hasn’t been smooth, and I think that has been a big cause of
it. In the past I was getting some guidance, this year it just so happens that the wheels fell off the bus. Like being with [dean]. It’s just…he doesn’t really have time for me. The guy’s making 50 phone calls a day for behavior…I know all the teachers lean on each other, more than most schools. No one’s going to say anything back to [dean] because of his personality. So we usually talk to each other about it. I don’t know.

Teachers working in challenging environments develop strong relationships with their deans when they can trust that their dean is regularly available for them in an understanding and supportive role. Knowing that it is safe to be vulnerable and honest with their leaders both when things are going well in the classroom or in their own lives, as well as when there are struggles both professionally and personally, is important to the teachers in this study as they share their experiences of developing relationships. TCH6 shares how much she has grown to trust and value her dean as her first year as a teacher is drawing to a close and they work through a challenging situation together,

I value really honest moments. I think I value that with anybody. We had a conversation on Friday and she was just at her wit’s end and I was at my wit’s end, not with each other but with something else in the school. Neither of us were angry or coming from a place of emotion, but we were just very raw.

Several teachers share the need for an authentic and genuine connection with their dean, yet report often feeling that this relationship is being forced upon them. Sometimes this sense of a relationship that does not feel sincere and genuine appears to result from a lack of common interest or common experiences and sometimes it seems
to come from the format of the model itself. Some teachers discuss how being expected to share personal information about themselves or to have to talk to someone who is their boss every week for 30 minutes, at least initially feels like a contrived and artificial relationship.

**Research question #1d findings:** The fourth part of research question 1 examines how teachers describe the perceived value obtained from this observation and feedback process in their professional development as teachers. Themes about growth and themes about teacher/dean relationships help to define the value teachers place on this model.

When considering the value that this observation/feedback model and their relationship with their dean brings to their own professional development teachers most often use words like honesty, approachability, warmth, and emotional support. Several teachers in this study value the open door policy and the visibility of their deans, stating that they take great comfort in knowing they can call on their dean to help when needed. TCH1 shares what the support she receives from her dean means to her,

> They help me find the good and the bad in what I do. I like the fact that, I feel like I’m always supported and I always have help, and I’m not afraid to go and say I don’t know what I’m doing or I need help figuring this out. The comfort and support I get has been awesome!

In general, teachers share that their dean provides assistance and solutions to every day problems in the classroom. They value the extra set of hands, especially when there are students who struggle with behavior or emotional difficulties. TCH5 sums it up in her description of what she values most about this observation/feedback model,
What works for me is the support…I appreciate that they are there for the support. I feel their support and I use it when I need it, student support, those kids of things. The continued process of keeping student engagement, those TOPS, those TOPS things going. I think that is valuable for me. The support is valuable for me. It’s there when I need it. If I don’t need it, I don’t need it…there is nothing else intended. I don’t always have to be at someone’s door. I’m pretty self-managing.

While it is clear that the relationship they have established with their dean has helped the majority of the teacher participants feel that they have a supportive co-worker as a dean, there are other aspects of this relationship that seem to detract from the value of their relationship. Teachers share that the number of meetings they are required to attend with their dean, along with a perceived lack of preparation, lack of meaningful feedback, lack of focus on student and teacher growth, and inconsistency or lack of observations and one-on-one conversations has made several teachers question whether or not this observation/feedback model is truly impacting their growth as teachers. TCH2 shares her concern,

Sometimes I will go into my dean meeting or one-on-one conversations and there is nothing prepared. They will just say…I do not have anything to really meet with you today, but then at the same time that is a break for me too. So, I guess the feedback. Not just affirming but the growth feedback…I felt like my last dean asked a lot of questions that made me think a lot. Then now it is like, it is just different. It is a different person, but yeah, I guess there’s not as much feedback…I do not know.
Some teachers see the dean role as a luxury, noting that it does little to improve individual teachers, especially when the relationship between teachers and deans seem to be too friendly with too much time spent on small talk and sharing personal lives and stories instead of focusing on student growth and achievement.

Marzano et al. (2011) in their research on the history of supervision and evaluation discussed the presence of an adequate knowledge base for teaching, and remind those in the role of providing supervision that this knowledge of what good teaching looks like “should not be used as a prescription for teacher evaluation” (p. 28). Instead, they suggest that focused feedback and coaching practices that promote teacher self-reflection will result in true pedagogical development and clear goals for improvement.

The majority of the teacher participants in this study initially understood that the intention of the observation/feedback model and the role of the dean is to provide coaching and mentoring to teachers. The experiences thus far of most of the teachers however, is that their dean is more of a supervisor or manager than they are a coach. Teachers spoke of desiring a relationship that has more qualities typically associated with coaching or mentoring, but share that in practice, their perception is that their dean is more likely to focus on evaluating them or handling other administrative duties than providing the level of support and guidance one would expect from an instructional coach. As a first year teacher, TCH6 shares that she thought she would have a coaching or mentoring relationship with her dean but that it did not work out that way for her, although she still holds out hope that in the future it might, as she gives advice to new teachers entering into the teacher/dean relationship,
I would make sure they understood that it’s not a mentor relationship right off the bat, because that’s how [organization] phrases it. Ideally that’s what it will become, but it can’t be that right away. If you’re foolish like I was, you will think it is. I think talking to them like that and reminding them that this is your boss, but they have a great role of being your coach. What’s nice is you don’t have to walk in there and just tell them all the good things. You can go to them with problems, but make sure they know what’s going on and make sure they understand what kind of teacher you are. Just make sure you’re represented well, because you’re the only one who’s in there 24/7, or hopefully not (laughter).

**Research Question 2**

Research question 2 examined how deans engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process described: (a) their perceived development as instructional leaders as they implement this model; (b) the changes in their perceived leader-efficacy as they participate in this process; (c) their perceived developing relationships with the teachers with whom they make frequent observations and give ongoing feedback; and (d) the perceived value obtained from this observation and feedback process in their professional development as leaders.

**Research question #2a findings:** The first part of research question 2 examines how deans describe their perceived development as instructional leaders as they implement this model. Themes about growth and feedback led to the findings for this research question.

Many of the deans in this study are in their first role as instructional leaders though some have had previous experiences as mentors or instructional coaches that
have helped to prepare them for their first experiences as building administrators. All of the deans interviewed talk at length about how this position as dean has caused them to grow and change as leaders in order to effectively impact teacher development and growth and student achievement. Each of these deans is working in a school setting with teachers with varying levels of experience. Some of the deans are serving in positions such as dean of special education or dean of intervention despite any previous experience in these specialties. Deans view their role as one in which they are expected to grow and coach teachers and ultimately to impact student academic growth.

Most of the deans in this study became deans on the recommendation of another building leader who recognized that they possessed the qualities of leadership that would help them to be successful as they moved from the role of teacher to that of dean. Several of the deans had originally set goals of becoming leaders in curriculum and instruction and eventually moved into educational leadership as building administrators because of either a lack of opportunity in curriculum and instruction or as a stepping stone to a future career. Many participants share that the decision to become a dean came about because they thought that they could make a bigger impact on more students by helping teachers to grow. DN5 talks about why she wanted to become a dean,

Short answer, as a teacher, I had 18 kids and I impacted 18 kids. As a dean, I have four resource room teachers, an academic specialist, an ELL teacher, and 12 paras times however many kids than just the 18 I had.

The majority of these deans have aspirations of becoming building principals although a few now admit that that given their success as a dean and the opportunities to
build strong relationships with teachers, they are not at all sure that they want to become a principal and lose that close connection to teachers. It is the close relationships with her teachers that causes DN6 to question whether she really ever wants to become a principal. She describes her relationships,

I would probably say caring, trusting. I would say friendly too. We can joke, you know, laugh. Sometimes in stressful situations they come to my room and I say…lock the door, turn the lights off, let’s just do something fun or something like that. I don’t look at myself as a boss to them but as a colleague.

She continues by sharing the she loves her job and when asked if she could do it forever, for the rest of her career she replies,

Yes…this is what I think a principal used to do or should have done and this is why I thought of being a principal. But now that’s not what principals do, so now I don’t want to be a principal! (laughter)

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), in their study on high efficacy administrators, pointed out that leaders with strong self-efficacy beliefs continually measure their personal skills, knowledge, and personality traits against their perceived personal weaknesses or constraints that may appear in their current positions, and that it is the interaction between these strengths and weakness that lead to an individual leader’s judgments about his or her self-efficacy for leadership. They note that high efficacy leaders typically do not view their weaknesses or inabilities to solve problems as failures, but rather remain calm and confident, keep their sense of humor, and adjust their expectations accordingly while working to develop the skills they need to be more effective leaders. Bandura (2000) added that those leaders who have a strong belief in
their own capabilities to eventually solve a problem or overcome an obstacle typically work even harder to master the challenge. This sense of self-reflection and awareness of constraints along with a goal of continual improvement was evident among all of the dean participants in this study.

Each of the deans in the study are quite open and reflective about the individual challenges and growth areas that they have faced or continue to face in their development as instructional leaders. Some deans share that learning to take the time to be more relational with their teachers was a challenge for them as their natural tendency as teachers and leaders is to focus on the work to be done more than on interpersonal relationships. This was a learning curve for several of the participants. DN5 shares how she struggled initially to learn how to change her relational approach when working with her teachers.

I’m not the warmest, fuzziest person in the world. I’m very direct. I’ve worked really, really hard over the last couple of years to have a different style…when I walk in and I’m like, I just got to do this. I’m just three thoughts ahead before it comes out of my mouth. What I learned through the process with my team is that I needed to stop looking at everything that needed to change and start looking at everything we were doing good and everything that was just fine the way it was. About a year and a half later I’m still learning it. Every time I have an interaction with somebody, it’s just a different learning. Every time we have a new staff member come in, how do I talk to this one different than this one? Learning to give feedback in a style that gives teachers opportunities to be reflective rather than telling them what to do is another common area of growth among these six
deans. Deans who have had previous experience as instructional coaches and have received specialized training in reflective coaching share that moving away from the prescribed method of giving feedback back to the use of more reflective questioning has improved their practices and impacted their growth as deans. DN6, who had experience as a new teacher coach prior to becoming a dean reflects on the value of using reflective coaching when working with her teachers,

They feel like they’re coming up with the answers as well. It’s just not you messed up here so now you gotta do this, you gotta do that…it just makes the whole dynamic. It doesn’t break down the relationship between you and the direct report and it makes the process easier and faster to come up with the solution.

**Research question #2b findings:** The second part of research question 2 examines how deans describe the changes in their perceived leader-efficacy as they participate in this process. Themes about growth, feedback, and the structure and effectiveness of the model led to the findings for question #2b.

The years of experience range for the six deans in this study is from less than one year to six years, with the average being four years. All but one of the deans had been a teacher within the organization before transitioning into the dean role. Each of the deans participating in this study spoke of changes in their own beliefs regarding their effectiveness and ability to handle all of the many demands present in their jobs as administrators. While the primary function of deans in this observation/feedback model is to provide instructional coaching and support to teachers, they are also engaged in managing student behaviors, supporting student achievement, managing standardized
testing, resolving parent concerns, handling conflicts that may arise between teachers, driving building initiatives, and assisting in a myriad of other administrative responsibilities. Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, and Harms’ (2007) definition of leader efficacy includes leaders’ beliefs in their perceived ability to organize and motivate those they are leading, as well as to be effective in all the various leadership responsibilities and demands required of the position. The deans in this study spoke frequently of the need to learn to prioritize and find a balance between all the many responsibilities an educator in this position is expected to fulfill. They share that paperwork, student behavior, and a lot of little things that take up their time during the day can get in the way of them feeling that they can effectively support and coach their teachers. DN1 shares how sometimes the paperwork she has to do makes it more challenging for her to provide the level of support her teachers need,

I just won’t do it if it gets in the way, but sometimes, just some of the logistical stuff that gets in the way, that is really good for data purposes but it gets in the way. Entering TOPS sometimes is just unnecessary for me, it gets in the way. Discussing best practices doesn’t, that doesn’t get in the way but just to sit and say how many did you get in this week? That gets in my way.

The majority of the deans in this study share that they are confident in their ability to work with teachers to improve student growth and proficiency. Most all deans share that student academic progress and changes in teacher practices are their primary measures of effectiveness as instructional leaders as they observe and coach the teachers on their teams. They are also confident in their ability to help teachers resolve challenging issues with parents and in handling difficult student behavior or learning
difficulties. The one area in which four of the six deans report that they are not as confident in is in resolving conflict between co-workers. These incidences tend to make them uncomfortable and uncertain as how to best proceed. DN2 describes how she goes about dealing with conflict when it arises among her teachers,

Conflict between teachers, I like dealing with that stuff head on. Let’s sit down in a room and talk about it. Well I don’t want to talk about it. Then don’t bring it up. In the end this is really just stifling what we’re able to do as a school. This is stifling our mission because you can’t sit down and say hey, I didn’t like when you said this or you offended me. I like dealing with that stuff head on. Then I’m direct that way too. If somebody felt a certain way about me, I would love to hear it so I can say I apologize or it sucks that you feel that way. You’re going to have to get over it.

In her research on trust and leadership, Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated that school leaders who have developed a framework of trust are better able to monitor their own behavior and communicate with teachers in an honest, straightforward manner. This skill, which Tschannen-Moran calls “trustworthy leadership,” is a leader’s ability to speak about hard truths while still conveying a sense of value and caring. This requires courage but done well, is likely to result in constructive change and a staff that can better manage conflict amongst themselves. These leaders must model norms of behavior that promote a culture of care for all members of a school community, encourage and expect others to behave accordingly, and make it clear by their behavior that disrespecting others is not an option. A common statement among deans when dealing with conflicts or difficulties between teammates, is that if conflict between staff
members impacts student well-being or student achievement in any way, then they will intervene directly among the parties involved. DN1 shares,

I don’t sugar coat it. It is what it is and we have to react to that. Either you’re going to say something and then at the next time we meet, and I’m not waiting a week depending on what it is, you’re going to tell me how it went, or if you don’t feel comfortable, I’ll do it for you. That’s one of the many options that I’ll allow. But if this hurts the building I have to give that feedback or I have to help them give that hard feedback. They know if they bring it to me there’s going to be some action because, it’s getting in the way of the mission.

Planning for, scheduling, and completing observations and one-on-one conversations with their teachers is one of the primary responsibilities of the deans. Each of them shared their system for deciding what they will be looking for in an observation and how they will deliver feedback in their one-on-one conversation. The majority of deans report that they have a system for carefully documenting their feedback through the use of an observation/one-on-one conversation template that teachers are given prior to their weekly meeting with their dean. Most deans email this form to teachers immediately following their observation so that teachers can review it before their one-on-one conversation. These deans speak of the value of taking time each week, whether it is directly after the observation or after school when they can work uninterrupted, to document their observations and their feedback for the teachers their direct reports. DN4 shares her process for preparing for one-on-one conversations,

Before the one-on-one conversation I look through (notes) and then anything else that I notice they want to talk about. I’ll just put it aside and then when
they’re in here, that’s my point of contact. We talk about how they’re doing and they get their full first 15 minutes. Usually too, with their observations, I always print it right after I observed them and then I have follow up questions in the bottom. Usually those follow up questions are what I use to focus on. That might be the adjusting feedback that I’ve talked about or it might be something different. The observation form? They get it in their mailbox. I always put it face down in their mailbox so that they always get it that day, so they’re not wondering or waiting. They had time to look at it before I meet with them at their one-on-ones. They always have it with them.

A common theme regarding feedback among these deans is the need to carefully balance adjusting feedback with affirming feedback. All deans speak of the importance of not giving adjusting feedback until they had established a good working relationship with the teachers they serve. The majority of deans share how while they initially delivered feedback to teachers in the style that they learned in their training for this role, as they gained more experience and noticed a need for a more genuine, natural way to deliver feedback, they have learned to speak to teachers in a manner that does not sound so scripted. DN3 shares how she has learned from experience how to prepare for delivering and differentiating the feedback she gives her teachers,

Over time I realized that not everybody is the same, and I have to differentiate that just like I would if I was in a classroom teaching kids. Then I thought back, I did a lot of mentoring when I was still a teacher and all of that and even having mentoring conversations it’s different with every person. Positivity and what they’re doing well and recognizing strengths is always a good thing to do…I
used to write every single thing (feedback) down. Like write down the adjusting feedback word for word of what I was going to give because that’s the model that they do teach new deans. That I don’t do as much now. I just have like, okay, here are the three questions in my head, this is what I’m going to ask.

Additionally, deans speak of the challenges they face in determining when and how to deliver feedback in a manner that encourages teacher reflection and questioning, and when it is more effective to be more directive in their approach. In their research on feedback, Runhaar et al. (2010) pointed out the importance of leaders learning to understand that for many teachers, the process of reflection and asking for feedback can be regarded as risky or scary as they may receive feedback that may inadvertently challenge their self-confidence. This may be why deans are hesitant to move toward this type of feedback. This is why, according to Runharr et al., it is important for leaders to have the necessary training and skills to effectively deliver feedback that encourages teachers to be reflective about their practices and develops a sense of confidence in seeking feedback. DN6 shares that her work with her teachers became more effective when she returned to her practices learned as a new teacher coach,

Some of it was easy for me because of being a new teacher coach, that’s how they trained you as a new teacher coach to question them, because you want to new teachers to figure out things so that they’re not reliant on someone else… more so coaching by asking them what they think and leading them into coming up with a plan, more so than me telling them.

Several deans share that their first inclination is to be more directive and that they have had to work to develop the art and skill of asking questions that encourage
teachers to be more reflective. Several of the deans admit that this may be difficult for them because they prefer their own feedback to be delivered directly, and that learning to be reflective both in giving and receiving feedback has been an area of growth for them, much like it is for their teachers. DN2 shares her thoughts on why she often prefers giving feedback that is more directive,

> Because I get to the point faster and some teachers just need that. I remember being at [school] and all the teachers were like: please don’t ask me questions, because I guess my predecessor used to just always ask questions. Well what do you think about that? How do you think we should do this? It got to be really irritating. They thanked me for being direct. Different people need different things.

**Research question #2c findings:** The third part of research question 2 examines how deans describe their developing relationships with the teachers with whom they make frequent observations and give ongoing feedback. Themes about teacher/dean relationships, themes about growth, and themes about feedback led to the findings for question #2c.

Much the same as for teachers in this study, all deans speak about the importance of developing relationships with a high level of trust between themselves and the teachers with whom they work on a daily basis. Fullan (2014) referred to this as “relational trust,” which he defined as trust that “pertains to feelings that the culture supports continuous learning rather than early judgments about how weak or strong you might be” (p. 75). He goes on to state that leaders develop this collaborative culture by being nonjudgmental as they offer feedback designed primarily for growth and by being
transparent when they are open with teachers about results and practice. This relational trust is critical for teachers to feel safe and be willing to accept feedback from their dean. Establishing this sense of safety and trust requires a great deal of vulnerability and openness to feedback from deans as well as from teachers. Several deans share how their willingness and ability to actively listen to teacher concerns and to acknowledge when they as a leader have made a mistake is also important to developing this sense of trust when working to establish and maintain relationships with their teachers. As a first year dean, DN4 speaks frequently of this need to own her perceived mistakes and shares how she reflects and works to develop trust,

Sometimes I talk quickly and I have it in my head where I know I want the conversation to go and forgetting that there are steps and that’s a person you’re actually talking to…so when I was talking to her in her one-on-one conversations I said, you know, you have them from 9:00 until 9:35 so if they’re taking 10 minutes get started, you’re losing like this much teaching time. I usually say things in a very positive, supportive tone, and I didn’t with that. I wasn’t trying to be mean about it. I was just very all business about it, and I think it’s only her third week going into this and you know what I mean, I think I needed to be a little more of the supportive role and I could have approached it in a different way, would have gotten the same results and probably would have made her feel more supported.

Gaining a teacher’s trust early in the teacher/dean relationship can be challenging for deans when working with teachers who are not accustomed to being frequently observed and given feedback about their instruction. Several deans speak
about the difficulties they face when trying to build trust with teachers who had negative experiences with deans or principals prior to working with and getting to know them. Each of the deans in this study reports that they learned the importance of taking time with all teachers to build trust between the teacher and themselves before they begin to give adjusting feedback.

Being consistent with weekly one-on-one conversations and honoring commitments made to teachers is critical for developing a high level of trust. Several deans share that they are too often not able to consistently observe and meet with their teachers because of interruptions to their schedules caused by student behavior and building emergencies. DN6 shares how the number of teachers and para-professionals who report directly to her, on top of the meetings and other things that come up, can make her feel as if she is not supporting everyone the way she would like to,

It’s different this year…I wish it was different…because the paras this year, because of so many, because they’re not really full time that their one-on-one conversations could be every other week and I’m finding that that’s hard. I would rather have everything every week, same time, same thing, and everything is different every other week and it’s hard because IEP meetings come up, or other meetings come up and then I’m rescheduling the one-on-one conversations anyways, so this year it’s been a little…

It also appears to be especially important that deans create an environment where teachers feel safe to admit that they are struggling and need help. Several deans speak about the challenge of having teachers trust that they, as dean, are there to coach and support teachers, and not just to evaluate them. It appears that it is not until that
coaching versus evaluation hurdle is cleared that the majority of teachers are willing to admit that they need help, to accept coaching, and to have tough conversations. DN3 shares her reflections on managing the coaching versus evaluating issue,

When I was an instructional coach, people really felt that they could trust, really trust me to just coach them, like just give them advice, help them figure it out, and I wasn’t anybody giving them a score…I think that made them more confident and share their struggles. I think it halts discussions sometimes because people are worried about evaluation.

As Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated in her research on trust and leadership, as new evaluation systems require leaders to more frequently observe and give feedback to teachers, some teachers may see this increase in inspection as a perceived lessening of trust by the leader which can unfortunately result in a loss of trust by the teacher. She goes on to state that if the supervision or observations are conducted in a manner in which there is a focus on problem solving and coaching, along with a level of increased care, that this sense of trust can be strengthened and will likely contribute to improved instruction in the school.

Research question #2d findings: The fourth piece of research question 2 examines how deans describe the perceived value obtained from this observation and feedback process in their professional development as leaders. Themes about teacher/dean relationships and themes about growth led to the findings for research question #2d.

The six deans who participated in this study talk at length about the value they place on this observation/feedback model, both for themselves as leaders and for the
teachers that they serve. All of the deans speak quite positively about the model and their work with their teachers, often sharing that they have grown significantly both in their understanding of effective leadership and in their understanding of human nature and personalities. Several comment that while they might aspire to become a principal in the future, that they would definitely miss the close bonds and the relationships they have built with their teams. In this model, they perceive the principal as being further removed from the day-to-day coaching and support of the teachers. DN3 shares what she values most about this model and reflects on the difference between being a dean and being a principal,

I think probably seeing teachers grow is huge for me. I loved being a mentor before, the part of the dean model I value most is helping them see areas where they can grow and then seeing them do it. I think them seeing them more confident in themselves. When it was principal and assistant principal I didn’t see the relationship building that happens with the dean model. You have a closer…people trust you more if you do it right. If you know the relationships…and I’m spending that time on you and I’m focused on what you’re doing and helping you grow. I think that’s probably the biggest value to the dean model.

Most deans share the belief that the challenges and the successes they have experienced as deans, whether they are a first year dean or have had many years of experience, motivates them to continually grow and develop as educational leaders. All of the deans share that they spend a great deal of time reflecting on their practices, the feedback that they receive from their teachers and from their principal, and the impact
they see their work having on teacher development. Several share how their teachers are always on their minds and how they are continually seeking ways to better support them. They each speak openly about their desire to consistently seek more professional development in order to be more effective as leaders. Becoming more skilled in delivering effective coaching seems to be the most frequently mentioned area of professional development that deans focus on. DN5 shares how she uses feedback from her teachers to help improve her work as a dean,

I ask for feedback from my teachers. Some of them have said to me, when you give feedback in that way, it’s just very static and it sounds like discipline. I think part of that is it kind of ties to our five questions now when we talk to the kids. When you do this, it impacts the learning. We use it, and that’s how the teachers are doing it. Now I’m talking to a teacher the same way they’re talking to their students. It’s not intended to be that way and so if somebody has said to me, I don’t like the feedback that way, I say, okay, we don’t have to do it that way.

The deans in this study speak of valuing most the genuine, open, collaborative, and friendly relationships that they have developed with their teachers. They appreciate the sense of feeling valued and needed by the teachers they lead. Additionally, they share that they highly value this model when they see teachers grow in confidence and when they work with their teachers to develop plans for changing and improving practices in the classroom that that students achieve at higher levels. DN6 shares her thoughts,
I value most that we can get together and talk about how can we change to make it better for students. For instance the rigor, how can we up the ante with the rigor, so I value the most that I can go to them and just ask them what we can do. I value that more than anything, cause I look at myself more as a coach than a supervisor. I look at it that way in my heart, and in my eyes that’s what I see.

**Leadership Recommendations**

My study explored the shared experiences of six teachers and six deans who are currently engaged in an intensive teacher observation and feedback model at four schools within one charter school organization. The goal of the study was to learn more about how participating in frequent observations and receiving ongoing feedback impacts both teacher and leader efficacy, and what, if any, changes come about in each of their practices. Additionally, through my interviews with each participant I listened carefully to learn more about how the relationships between teachers and deans are developed, what value each of them places on this model and its contribution to their growth and development as educators.

The findings suggest that for the majority of these teachers, while some impact on their practices in the classroom can be attributed to their work with their dean, many report that the majority of changes in practice or professional growth are self-directed. Deans are seen as helpful in some aspects of daily life in school, such as handling behavior or being a friendly co-worker, but in many cases, from the teachers’ point of view, it appears that deans are not perceived as delivering the coaching that teachers could benefit from, and for the most part, seem to desire. However, the deans in my study tend to see themselves as coaches who are adding a great deal to teacher
development and its impact on student achievement, yet they acknowledge that building relationships with their teachers while learning to give feedback in a reflective rather than directive manner has been a learning curve for most of them. More training in reflective coaching and questioning is needed for this model to be more effective for teachers and leaders.

Additionally, while it appears that deans are deeply focused on reaching their own professional development goals and can easily identify and share how they are growing to reach these goals, as well as how their work as dean is helping them grow as leaders, the majority of the teachers in this study struggle to recall their own professional development goals, report that they set the goals with their deans from a list of skills and then forget them, or share that they choose goals or skills to work on with their dean that they believe they are close to achieving or already do. These findings point to a need for a greater understanding and training in the art and skill of coaching and delivering reflective feedback on the part of the dean and additional training on how, as leaders, they can help teachers to set professional development goals that are relevant, meaningful, and will truly impact student learning. Helping educational leaders gain the skill of coaching teachers to develop a mindset in which they strive to challenge themselves to set professional growth goals that will help them to develop into highly effective teachers is an important next step to making this observation/feedback model more impactful.

As many of the deans in this study point out, they are learning a great deal about personality styles and receptivity to feedback as they are observing their teachers, working to establish relationships, and giving them feedback in their one-on-one
conversations. Encouraging these leaders to understand more about how their own strengths and weaknesses as educators as well as their personal communication styles impact their ability to coach a team with a variety of personalities and mindsets would also increase the likelihood of teachers valuing the contributions their deans are making to their professional growth. Kise’s (2006) research on differentiated coaching presents a framework that connects research on teacher efficacy as it relates to teacher beliefs, needs, and learning styles with best practices in effective staff development. She suggested that leaders such as these deans who are serving as coaches consider that teachers tend to fall into four different coaching style preferences: (1) coach as useful resource, where to be most effective a coach needs a bag of tricks and multiple methods all tailored to specific subjects and situations; (2) coach as encouraging sage, where to be most effective a coach needs time, enthusiasm, on-the-spot suggestions, encouragement, modeling, and follow-up monitoring; (3) coach as collegial mentor which requires a coach to have patience and listening skills along with skills in adding structure to ideas, objectivity, and an ability to identify root causes of difficulties; and finally, (4) coach as expert, where to be most effective a leader needs a depth of knowledge, objectivity, persistence, and an ability to not take intellectual challenges personally. Similarly, Jackson’s (2013) model for helping instructional leaders understand the varying needs of individual teachers’ ongoing professional development suggested that leaders need to understand the level of an individual teacher’s “skill” or the pedagogical and content knowledge of the science of teaching along with their “will” or the drive that causes a teacher to continually desire to grow, reflect, embrace data, and seek feedback when considering coaching strategies. The use of either or both
of these frameworks could assist deans as they deliver feedback and develop growth plans for their teachers.

In their report on prioritizing teaching quality, Hill and Herlihy (2011) stated that “teaching quality can be defined as the complex set of knowledge, skills, and judgments that comprise teachers’ everyday work, such as conveying content accurately, implementing cognitively challenging lessons and tasks, and diagnosing and remediating student misunderstandings” (p. 2). They go on to say that many tools currently being used in schools to observe and evaluate teachers often do not focus enough on teaching quality and often measure the more superficial skills and aspects of the job, such as looking to see if the teacher has a written lesson objective or a specified number of higher-order questions in their lesson. The teachers and deans in my study agree that sometimes it seems as if the focus on a checklist of skills is inadequate to truly result in a growth of teaching quality. Yet to move beyond this list of isolated skills and practices requires a high level of understanding of highly effective teaching practices for both teachers and deans. To further develop a dean’s knowledge of which teaching practices and skills will have the greatest impact on student learning and their ability to engage a teacher in reflective feedback that will significantly impact teacher growth, deans must receive adequate and ongoing training in the components that research indicates are most likely to improve the quality of teaching in classrooms.

Finally, helping deans further develop their skills in creating professional growth plans for each teacher, which help to increase the intentionality and focus of their observations and one-on-one conversations, will lead to increased teacher effectiveness and the ability of their leaders to effectively lead instructional growth and
improvement within the school. Using these growth plans in weekly one-on-one conversations throughout their work together will also increase the likelihood of teacher buy in and progress. Instructional leaders who participated in the 2008 Chicago Public Schools Excellence in Teaching Pilot conducted conversations with teachers both before and after an observation using the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching.

This 2011 report stated that principals and teachers found this tool gave their conversations focus and direction, and led to deeper conversations in which teachers felt like the process made them more reflective on their teaching practices. As the deans and teachers in the observation/feedback model examined in my study experience many more opportunities for these observations and conversations, it seems as if the use of well-developed growth plans should create opportunities for teacher reflection and growth at an even greater rates.

Yet, simply training teachers and their leaders to a greater understanding of these observation and evaluation tools is insufficient. A significant amount of ongoing research based training and practice on how to work alongside the teachers they coach is needed in order to insure that deans become skilled using evidence from classroom practices along with student outcomes when guiding teachers. In order for deans, as coaches, to truly engage teachers in these deep conversations around instruction, it is critical that they learn coaching skills including but not limited to learning to be active listeners, prioritizing individual teachers needs, determining which instructional practices or behaviors would create the greatest impact, and finally, taking steps to become more reflective in their own thinking and work as educators. Developing these skills in deans is a time-consuming process of growth and one that must continue on for
many years as these leaders grow into an increased understanding of how to most effectively guide and support their teachers into taking full responsibility for their growth as effective educators.

Finally, each of the teachers and deans shared their suggestions for improvement of this observation/feedback model:

- Deans should model their expectations for teachers and demonstrate that they possess the same skills they are trying to develop in teachers.
- Teachers should take more ownership in their one-on-one conversations rather than having deans do most of the talking.
- Deans should use curricular tools more frequently in one-on-one conversations. This could make the one-on-one conversation have more of a professional development focus.
- Deans should be reminded that they are there for teachers and need to support them. They should remember that their goal should be to improve the education of the students.
- Schools in urban settings should have behavior deans in place in order to free up deans to actually support instruction. (This suggestion came up multiple times)
- More training is needed for deans for specials teachers so that they can give them more useable feedback.
- Drop in “surprise” observations will keep teachers on their toes, less of a “dog and pony show.”
• Hold fewer one-on-one conversations (This suggestion was made by both a teacher and a dean).
• Hold one-on-one conversations in teachers’ classrooms rather than in deans’ offices. This would create more of a give and take relationship with less of a power differential.
• Maintain consistency and transparency in how evaluations are scored.
• Keep one-on-one conversation times sacred with no interruptions. Have a back up plan for discipline.
• Create surveys directly applicable to deans’ and principal’s voices.
• Differentiation in amount of observations based on teacher needs.
• Fewer extra duties for deans so that they can focus on instruction.
• Dean mentors paired up by same role (grade levels or specialties) and in place for longer than the first year.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This qualitative study looked at the lived experiences of six teachers and six deans as they make meaning of an intensive observation and feedback process. Findings from this research add to the growing body of knowledge of how teacher efficacy and leadership efficacy are linked. It also adds to a growing understanding of how teachers make meaning of ongoing observations and feedback from supervisors and how their leaders (deans) come to develop the skills to successfully coach and lead teachers of varying years of experience and skill.

Further research is needed on processes currently being developed to help school leaders understand how best to coach teachers in developing proven instructional
practices that will have the greatest impact on student achievement. As teacher and leader evaluation processes become more complex, it is important that those in positions of school leadership develop a higher skill level in delivering feedback, questioning, and coaching that encourages teachers to become more reflective and involved in conversations about instruction. Additional qualitative and quantitative studies that examine how current leadership development programs are preparing new leaders to serve as instructional coaches in addition to other administrative duties they will assume in these positions are needed. Finally, while there is a growing body of knowledge around developing a growth oriented mindset for students, there is a need for further research on how to develop a stronger growth mindset in teachers. This knowledge would help to encourage teachers to become more reflective and intentional as they develop their own professional growth goals.

As this study focused on a limited number of participants who were all teachers or deans in an urban setting, the findings cannot be generalized to all teachers and deans currently using this observation/feedback model. A larger scale study or one conducted in schools not located in an urban setting may result in different findings, particularly in regards to the teachers’ perceived value of the model.

**Overall Conclusions**

There is a significant body of research that indicates the greatest factor in high student achievement is the presence of highly effective teachers. In order to close the achievement gap currently present in many of this nation’s schools, it is critical that educators learn more about how to measure teacher effectiveness, and even more importantly how to provide the necessary coaching and support to ensure a teacher’s
continued professional growth. Through the lens of research on self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, and leader efficacy, this qualitative study looked at the lived experiences of six teachers and six deans currently engaged in an observation/feedback model designed to improve teacher effectiveness. Through a series of three interviews each, the teachers and deans in my study shared with me their individual experiences, thoughts, feedback, and suggestions for change for this model. Their transparency and openness to talk about what is working and what is not working for them as they experience this model helped me to better understand the impact this model has on their growth as professionals, the relationships they have developed with teachers or deans over time, and the value they place on this model. Their voices and feedback can help leaders within this organization continue to improve their processes in order to more effectively impact student achievement.

The results of this study reveal that teachers do not value or see the impact of this observation/feedback model on their professional growth to the same extent as the deans do. This suggests a need for further developing the dean’s skills in helping teachers set professional goals that will have a greater impact on their professional growth and ultimately on student learning. In addition, providing more training for those in leadership roles around identifying effective teaching practices and guiding reflective conversations with teachers is indicated. Trust and consistency is critical for developing relationships between teachers and deans and must be present before adjusting feedback can be effectively delivered. Deans would benefit from additional training in coaching and delivering feedback, in particular, reflective feedback that challenges teachers to think deeply about their practices. These findings can help to
provide educational leaders, even those who do not have a model where teachers are observed or given feedback as frequently as the teachers in this study, insight into how they can better support and lead teachers in order to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

**Follow Up**

It is important to note that in the school year immediately following the data collection for this study, several changes were made to this observation/feedback model. These changes have addressed some of the concerns brought forward by both teacher and dean participants who participated in my study. Prior to these changes, as indicated in my study, deans were expected to observe each teacher and meet with them in a one-on-one conversation each week. Goals for teacher observations and growth were largely derived from the skills and strategies outlined in the Teacher Observation Protocol. Changes to this model now include a classroom framework or rubric that addresses four areas: (a) classroom culture, (b) planning, (c) teaching and, (d) assessment. Each of these areas has indicators or descriptions of what would constitute an ineffective, developing, effective, or exemplary teacher. Deans are receiving training on how to conduct observations using this framework and how to work with teachers to set teacher growth plans that will move them along this continuum in each of the four areas. This rubric along with the evidence collected during observations then becomes instrumental in completing each teacher’s end of year evaluation.

In my study, deans were expected to observe every teacher every week. With the changes to the model, it is now recommended that deans differentiate the level of support and frequency of observations and subsequent feedback sessions based on the
individual needs and growth plans of their teachers. While one teacher may have a weekly one-on-one conversation based on evidence collected during a weekly observation on teaching or planning, another teacher may spend time with his or her dean observing other teachers teach and discussing how they might take what they see in that observation and apply it to their own practices. Still other teachers may be put on a teacher leadership path where they and their dean create instructional coaching sessions for other classroom teachers. These changes could potentially address the concern several teachers voiced that their observations be differentiated based on experience and skill level. It also could potentially address the need for deans to work with teachers to create goals that are specific to each teacher and to deliver feedback that is meaningful and actionable rather than checking off isolated skills from a checklist. Additionally, deans are receiving ongoing training on giving reflective feedback and holding one-on-one conversations with teachers where the emphasis is on coaching and deep conversations about instruction and student achievement.

A follow up study conducted after several semesters of implementing this classroom framework and differentiated observations and coaching could address whether or not these changes result in teachers feeling more supported in their work in the classrooms, determine whether or not relationships between teachers and deans feel more genuine and authentic, and see if teachers are expressing that the work that they do with their dean is truly impacting their growth as teachers. Additionally, deans could determine whether or not these changes to the model changes or deepens their coaching conversations with teachers, develops their understanding and ability of how best to set individual teacher coaching goals that will positively impact teacher growth and
development, improves their ability to give feedback that makes an impact on instruction, and impacts their perceptions of their own effectiveness and growth as instructional leaders.
References


Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Letter
Dear ______________.

My name is Kathleen Grinwis. I am a doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University currently completing the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. As part of my program, I am seeking teachers and deans who would be willing to learn more about participating in a qualitative research study on the experience of giving and receiving ongoing and frequent observations and feedback through the observation/feedback model that is in place at your school. The information I learn from this study may give others and me information about how this model is helping teachers and deans improve their practices in the classroom and grow as professionals. You will benefit from participation in this study as your involvement will lead to a greater understanding of the impact of this model on developing teacher and leader efficacy and success in the classroom. Your voice may help guide any changes or adjustments system-wide that may come about from this research.

Participating in this study will include three individual interviews with me that should last approximately 45-60 minutes. These interviews will occur over a 10-12 week time period in the Winter and Spring of 2015. These interviews will be conducted before or after school in a location that is convenient to you. It is also possible that the second and third interview could be conducted through an online meeting such as Skype or FaceTime if that is more convenient I will be recording these conversations as well as taking written notes. You will be given an opportunity to review and approve all recorded transcripts prior to the completion of this study.

Your participation in this study will include contributing to a greater understanding of the impact of this model on developing teacher and leader efficacy and success in the classroom. Your voice may help guide any changes or adjustments system-wide that may come about from this research.

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and there is absolutely no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. Nothing that you share with me throughout the process of this study will be shared with anyone else, including your direct manager, your principal, or any other employee of National Heritage Academies. In no way will your participation or any of the information you share jeopardize your continued employment in your school or any other NHA school. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential in all reporting. Information given by you throughout the interview process will be referenced by a pseudo name. All transcripts and information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home.

If you are interested in learning more about participating in this study, please contact me by emailing me at 97.kgrinwis@heritageacademies.com or by mail to 3477 Lakeshore Dr., Waterford, MI, 48329. You may also call me at 616-304-6601. Once I receive your name as an interested participant, I will set up a meeting for you and other participants to learn more about the study and to review the consent document before making your final decision to participate.

I thank you in advance for your consideration and help!

Sincerely,

Kathleen Grinwis
Appendix B

Participant Consent Form
Western Michigan University  
Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership

**Principal Investigator:** LouAnn Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D.  
**Student Investigator:** Kathleen A. Grinwis, MA  
**Title of Study:** The Experience of Teachers and Deans in an Observation/Feedback Model

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "The Experience of Teachers and Deans in an Observation/Feedback Model." This study is being conducted by Kathleen Grinwis, Principal of Oakside Scholars Charter Academy, and a doctoral student in the Education Leadership doctoral program at Western Michigan University, under the supervision of Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer, her dissertation committee chair. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**  
The purpose of this research study is to explore how classroom teachers and their deans make meaning of an intensive observation and feedback process. I am interested in gaining a better understanding of how such a program impact both a teacher's and a dean's overall sense of efficacy or confidence in their abilities, the potential changes to their developing classroom and leadership practices, and the developing relationship between teachers and deans.

**Who can participate in this study?**  
For the purposes of this study, teachers and deans who are currently working at a school in which the “Dean Model” of observation and feedback is being utilized may participate in this study.

**Where will this study take place?**  
For purposes of this study I am inviting teachers from a National Heritage Academies school to participate. The researcher is NOT an employee of the school in which any participating teachers or deans are currently employed. Individual interviews will take place at a location that is convenient to the participant and allows for confidentiality.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**  
It will take approximately 45-60 minutes for each interview. The total time commitment for all interviews will be no more than three hours. Interviews will take place after school at an agreed upon location. These interviews will be
recorded by a tape recorder and I will also be taking written notes. If needed, a follow up meeting may occur which will allow me to check for the accuracy of my notes and ask any follow up questions.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
You will be asked to participate in three interviews over the course of 10-12 weeks. Each interview will last between 45-60 minutes. Interviews will conducted individually and will be a private conversation between you and myself as the researcher at a time and location that is convenient to you. You will also be invited to share the observation feedback forms that you receive from your dean during your weekly O3. Sharing this form is completely voluntary. No identifying information from your feedback/observation form will be shared with anyone else or included in this study. You will be given an opportunity to review the written transcripts of each interview to check for accuracy. What information is being measured during the study?
The information being collected or measured in this study is information about your experience as a teacher or dean participating in the observation/feedback/evaluation model currently in place at your school. Specifically, you will be asked about your experiences and how this model has changed or not changed your teaching or leadership practice.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating, or while the research is taking place. I will be happy to share the results with you at the end of the study. All information collected from you is confidential. Absolutely no information will be shared with your principal, your dean, or any other employee of National Heritage Academies. No information shared with your researcher will be used for the purpose of any teacher or dean evaluations. In no way, will your participation impact your continued employment with this organization. Your name or other identifying features will not be used in any analysis or in any reporting of the research. Pseudonyms will be used for participants (i.e. Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Dean 1, Dean 2, and so on) and general terms will be used in reporting results (i.e. “Two teachers commented...,” “Five Deans reported that...,” etc.). Written transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the researcher upon the completion of each interview and for one year following the completion of the study. All transcripts of interviews and other data collected will be retained for at least three years in a locked file on the campus of Western Michigan University.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
There are several expected benefits from participating in this study. Potential benefits to you as a participant in this study include contributing to a greater understanding of the impact of this model on developing teacher and leader efficacy and success in the classroom. Your voice may help guide any changes or adjustments system-wide that may come about from this research. Results of this
The study can serve to further the understanding of this process of frequent and ongoing observation and feedback sessions. It will also give valuable information regarding the program’s impact on the development of new teacher and leader behavior and practices. The research will also look at the changes in teacher practices that may or may not occur as a result of these ongoing and frequent observations and feedback sessions.

K-12 administrators will benefit from this study as they work to develop teachers and leaders who are effectively closing the achievement gap. Those administrators currently participating in this model of observing and giving feedback to classroom teachers will benefit as they gain a better understanding of how educators experience both adjusting and affirming feedback and how this feedback changes and develops more effective instructional practices. They will also benefit as they gain a better understanding of their own development as instructional leaders.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
Other than time, there are no costs associated with participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
Only the principal investigator and the co-investigator will have access to the information collected during this study. Absolutely no information about the individual participants will be shared with any employees of National Heritage Academies.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences whatsoever if you choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, LouAnn Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D at (269) 387-3596 or l.bierlein.palmer@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and
signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

_________________________________  _____________________
Appendix C

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions
An Intensive Observation/Feedback Model

The overarching research question for this study is to explore how teachers and deans as their leaders make meaning of an intensive observation and feedback process.

1) How do teachers engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process describe:

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<th>a) changes in their teaching practices after receiving frequent and ongoing observations and feedback</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Can you tell me what it was like the first few times you were observed?</td>
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<td>- Tell me about what it was like the first few times you received feedback.</td>
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<td>- How, if at all, did these initial observations and conversations make you think about your practices as a teacher?</td>
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<td>- Can you tell me about a particularly memorable observation and subsequent feedback session that you have experienced so far this year?</td>
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<td>- What made it memorable?</td>
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<td>- Did anything in your practice change because of it?</td>
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<td>- How have you grown or changed as an educator over the past several months? What impact do you think your work with your dean has had on your growth or effectiveness in the classroom?</td>
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<td>- Tell me more about some specific practices of changes you’ve put in place in your classroom as a result of your work with your dean.</td>
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<td>- Is there anything you’ve stopped doing or started doing after receiving feedback?</td>
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<td>- How does your dean help you decide which professional goals to focus on?</td>
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<td>- How often throughout the past weeks/months have you reviewed or changed your goals?</td>
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<td>- Who decides, you, the dean, or both what these goals are going to be and when they have been met?</td>
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<th>b) changes in their perceived teacher-efficacy as this process unfolds</th>
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<td>- When you think about your teaching practices, what are some ways in which you go about setting professional goals for yourself?</td>
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<td>- How do you as a teacher measure whether or not the observations and feedback you are receiving are helping you grow as a teacher?</td>
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<td>- How often do you talk to your dean about issues related to challenges with dealing with parents, your relationships with other teachers, student engagement and motivation?</td>
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<td>- If you have these conversations, how do they help to increase your confidence in the classroom?</td>
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<td>- Talk to me about your practices in getting through to your most difficult students.</td>
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<td>o - How much can you do to help your students value learning?</td>
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<td>- How much can you do to help your students believe they can do well in school work?</td>
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<td>- How much can you motivate students?</td>
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<td>- How has the observation/feedback model and your work with your dean help you with these...</td>
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and other challenging situations in your classroom?
- How comfortable are you in asking for support, help, advice from your dean on various topics and your own professional growth as a professional? What if anything increases or decreases your confidence in going to your dean for ongoing support?

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<th>2) How do deans engaged in an intensive observation and feedback process describe</th>
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<tr>
<td>c) their relationships with their dean and find value from this observation and feedback process</td>
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| - What are some of the practice or experiences you have had with your dean as you began to get to know each other this year?  
- How is your relationship with your dean different now than it was when you first started working together?  
- When you think about your dean do you view them mostly as a coach, an evaluator or a manager/boss?  
- What are some words or phrases you would use to describe your developing relationship with your dean?  
- What do you value most about this relationship with your dean? Least?  
- Is there anything about this teacher/dean relationship that has surprised you?  
- What makes it work for you?  
- What might you like to see improved?  
- What advice would you give a brand new dean or a brand new teacher as they enter into the teacher/dean relationship? |

<table>
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<th>a) their development as instructional leaders as they implement this model</th>
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| - Tell me why you wanted to become a dean. Has anything about the process of being a dean been a surprise to you?  
- What is the main goal or reason for the observation/feedback process you are currently experiencing?  
- What was it like the first few times that you observed your direct reports? How did you decide what it was that you would be looking for?  
- What was it like the first few times you gave feedback to your teachers? How did these initial observations and conversations make you think about your practices as a leader?  
- Talk about a particularly memorable observation and subsequent feedback session that you have experienced so far this year. What made it memorable? Did anything in your practice change because of it?  
- What kinds of things do you do to prepare yourself for your weekly observations and meetings with your teachers?  
- How do you go about deciding which feedback would be most beneficial to deliver?  
- Reflect back on your practices and your thoughts about your effectiveness as a leader at the beginning of the year. Share with me how you believe you have grown and/or changed as a leader over the past several months. What if any impact do you think that your work with your teachers has had on your own professional growth? |
| b) the changes in their perceived leader-efficacy as they participate in this process | • When you think about your role as a leader, what are some of the ways in which you go about setting professional goals for yourself?  
• How often throughout the past several weeks/months have you reviewed or changed your own professional development goals? How do you decide what is most important to focus on?  
• Where does this model of observation/feedback fit into your goal setting process?  
• Can you tell me more about your current professional development goals as a leader? How Did you decide upon those goals?  
• In what ways do you believe that you are currently growing or changing as a leader? How does the observation/feedback model impact those changes?  
• How do you as a leader measure whether or not the observations and feedback you are Delivering are helping you to grow your teachers as well as helping you to grow as a leader?  
• How confident are you in helping a teacher deal with challenging parent relationships, Behavioral issues, staff relationships, student engagement and motivation?  
• What do you do when you don’t know how to help a teacher or are unsure about what kind of support to give?  
• What changes in your beliefs about your own effectiveness as a dean have come about as a Direct reflection of your work with your teachers?  
• Are there any areas where your direct work as a supervisor with your teachers increased your confidence as a leader? Are there areas in which you feel this work together has made you feel less confident? |
| c) their developing relationships with the teachers with whom they make frequent observations and give ongoing feedback | • How have you gone about beginning to build relationships with your direct reports?  
• Can you tell me about some of the successes and some of the challenges?  
• What are some words or phrases you would use to describe your developing relationship with your teachers?  
• What do you do if your teachers do not agree with or understand the feedback you have Given them in your observation/feedback sessions?  
• Have you ever received feedback from your teachers that has challenged you? If so how did You process this feedback and in what ways did it impact you as a leader?  
• What do you value most about this relationship with your teachers? Least?  
• Is there anything about this teacher/dean relationship that has surprised you?  
• What makes it work for you?  
• What might you like to see improved?  
• What advice would you give a brand new teacher and a brand new dean as they enter into the Teacher/dean relationship? |
Appendix D

Teacher and Dean Interview Protocols
Interview One – 45 minutes

The purpose of this first interview is to collect background information and to ask questions about previous experiences using this observation/feedback model from both the teachers and the deans. It will serve as an initial measure of current thinking about their efficacy as teachers or leaders as well as provide for an opportunity to explore each participant’s professional goals that they hope to achieve as a result of their participation in the teacher/dean relationship.

Interview Questions for Teachers.

1. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself? How many years have you been teaching? What grades or subjects are you currently teaching? Can you tell me a little bit about the school where you are currently teaching?

2. In our time together, we are going to take a look at the observation/feedback model and the work teachers and deans do together. From your understanding, what is the main goal or reason for the observation/feedback process that you are currently experiencing?

3. Can you tell me what it was like the first few times that you were observed?

4. Tell me about what it was like the first few times you received feedback? How, if at all, did these initial observations and conversations make you think about your practices as a teacher?

5. Can you tell me about a particularly memorable observation and subsequent feedback session that you have experienced so far this year? What made it memorable? Did anything in your practice change because of it?
6. What are some of the practices or experiences you have had with your dean or as you began to get to know each other this year?

7. When you think about your teaching practices, what are some of the ways in which you go about setting professional goals for yourself? Where, if at all, does this model of observation/feedback fit into your goal setting process? How does your dean help you decide which professional goals to focus on? Can you tell me more about your current goals?

8. What else would you like me to know about your experiences thus far with the observation/feedback model at your school?

Interview One Questions for Deans

1. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself? How many years have you been teaching? How about as a dean? What grades or subjects are you currently supervising? Can you tell me a little bit about your school?

2. Tell me a bit about why you wanted to become a dean. Has anything about the process of being a dean been a surprise to you so far?

3. From your understanding, what is the main goal or reason for the observation/feedback process that you are currently experiencing?

4. How have you gone about beginning to build relationships with your direct reports? Can you tell me about some of the successes and some of the challenges?

5. Can you tell me what it was like the first few times that you observed your direct reports? How did you decide what it was that you would be looking for?
6. Tell me about what it was like the first few times you gave feedback to your teachers? How, if at all, did these initial observations and conversations make you think about your practices as a leader?

7. Can you tell me about a particularly memorable observation and subsequent feedback session that you have experienced so far this year? What made it memorable? Did anything in your practice change because of it?

8. When you think about your role as a leader, what are some of the ways in which you go about setting professional goals for yourself? Where, if at all, does this model of observation/feedback fit into your goal setting process? Can you tell me more about your current professional development goals as a leader? How did you decide upon those goals?

9. What else would you like me to know about your experiences thus far with the observation/feedback model at your school?

Interview Two – 45 minutes.

The purpose of Interview Two is for both teachers and deans to reflect on their personal experiences and to share how they are making meaning of the observation/feedback process and their developing relationships. This interview concentrates on the present details of their experiences as they are living them currently.

Interview Two Questions for Teachers –

1. Can you tell me about a particularly memorable or challenging observation and subsequent feedback session that you have experienced since we last met? What made it memorable or challenging? Did anything in your practice change because of it?
2. Tell me more about how the weekly observations and feedback you are currently receiving from your dean are impacting your daily work with your students? What kinds of things do you do to prepare yourself for your weekly meetings with your dean? How do you process the feedback you receive each week from your dean?

3. In what ways do you believe that you are currently growing or changing as a teacher in your work with your students? Tell me, if at all, how the observation/feedback process impacts these changes. How do you as a teacher measure whether or not the observations and feedback you are receiving are helping you to grow as a teacher?

4. Help me to understand the process you go through when you talk about your professional development goals with your dean. How often throughout the past several weeks/months have you reviewed or changed these goals? Who decides, you, the dean, or both what these goals are going to be and when they have been met?

5. How often do you talk to your dean about issues related to challenges with dealing with parents, your relationships with other teachers, student engagement and motivation, or other related topics? If you do have these conversations, how, if at all, do they help to increase your confidence in the classroom?

6. What are some words or phrases you would use to describe your developing relationship with your dean.
Interview Two Questions for Deans –

1. Can you tell me about a particularly memorable or challenging observation and subsequent feedback session that you have experienced with one of your teachers since we last met? What made it memorable or challenging? Did anything in your practice change because of it?

2. Tell me more about the weekly observations and feedback you are currently conducting as a dean. How are these practices impacting your daily work with your teachers? What kinds of things do you do to prepare yourself for your weekly observations and meetings with your teachers? How do you go about deciding which feedback would be most beneficial to deliver?

3. In what ways do you believe that you are currently growing or changing as a leader in your work with your students? Tell me how the observation/feedback process impacts these changes. How do you as a leader measure whether or not the observations and feedback you are delivering are helping you to grow your teachers as well as helping you to grow as a leader?

4. As a new leader impacting and guiding teachers, how often throughout the past several weeks/months have you reviewed or changed your own professional development goals? How do you decide what is most important to focus on?

5. How confident are you in helping a teacher deal with challenging parent relationships, behavioral issues, staff relationships, student engagement and motivation, and other related topics? What do you do when you don’t know how to help a teacher or are unsure about what kind of support to give?
6. What are some words or phrases you would use to describe your developing relationship with your teachers?

Interview Three – 45 minutes

The purpose of the third interview is to ask each participant to reflect on the meaning of his or her experience in this observation/feedback model. Teachers and deans will be asked to discuss what, if any, value this model has had for their professional growth as teachers or deans.

Interview Three Questions for Teachers.

1. Over the past several months you have worked closely with your dean in this observation/feedback model. I’d like you to reflect back on your practices and your thoughts about your effectiveness as a teacher at the beginning of the year and share with me how you believe you have grown and/or changed as an educator over the past several months. What, if any, impact do you think that your work with your dean has had on your growth.

2. Can you tell me more about some specific practices or changes you’ve put in place in your classroom as a result of your work with your dean? Is there anything that you’ve started doing after receiving feedback? Anything you’ve stopped doing?

3. Tell me about the most helpful or valuable feedback you received from your dean throughout this school year. Why was this helpful or valuable to you?
4. What do you do if you do not agree with or understand the feedback you have received from your dean?

5. What, if any, changes in your beliefs about your own effectiveness as a teacher have come about as a direct reflection of your work with your dean? Are there any areas in your work with your students where you believe feedback from your dean has made a positive impact?

6. How comfortable are you in asking for support, help, or advice from your dean on topics ranging from classroom management, student engagement, dealing with parents, relationships with other teachers and staff members, and your own growth as a professional? What if anything increases or decreases your confidence in going to your dean for ongoing support?

7. What, if anything, do you value most about this relationship with your deans? Least? Is there anything about this teacher/dean relationship that has surprised you? What, if anything makes it work for you? What might you like to see improved?

8. What advice would you give a brand new dean or a brand new teacher as they enter into the teacher/dean relationship?

Interview Three Questions for Deans:

1. Over the past several months you have worked closely with your teachers in this observation/feedback model. I’d like you to reflect back on your practices and your thoughts about your effectiveness as a leader at the beginning of the year. Please share with me how you believe you have grown and/or changed as a
leader over the past several months. What, if any, impact do you think that your work with your teachers has had on your own professional growth.

2. What do you do if your teachers do not agree with or understand the feedback you have given them in your observations/feedback sessions? Have you ever received feedback from your teachers that has challenged you? If so, how did you process this feedback and in what ways, if any, did it impact you as a leader?

3. What, if any, changes in your beliefs about your own effectiveness as a dean have come about as a direct reflection of your work with your teachers? Are there any areas where you your direct work as a supervisor with your teachers increased your confidence as a leader? Are there areas in which you feel this work together has made you feel less confident?

4. How comfortable are you in giving support, help, or advice to your teachers on topics ranging from classroom management, student engagement, dealing with parents, relationships with other teachers and staff members, are their growth as professionals? What if anything increases or decreases your confidence in giving your teachers ongoing support?

5. What, if anything, do you value most about this relationship with your teachers? Least? Is there anything about this teacher/dean relationship that has surprised you? What, if anything makes it work for you? What might you like to see improved?

6. What advice would you give a brand new dean or a brand new teacher as they enter into the teacher/dean relationship?
Appendix E

Approval Letter from HSIR
Date: February 9, 2015

To: LouAnn Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
    Kathleen Grinwis, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 15-01-23

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “The Experience of Teachers and Deans in an Observation/Feedback Model” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 8, 2016