

## HOW TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT FEEDBACK FROM ADMINISTRATORS

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**Abstract:** The problem investigated for this research study was communication disparity evidenced by how teachers interpret and react to principal's feedback. Principal-to-teacher communication disparity is causing teachers to become dissatisfied and elevating teacher attrition. This study identified and helped to understand how K-12 teachers in a representative school district perceive their principal's evaluations and feedback in the forms of written, verbal, and a combination of the two. The intent of this qualitative inquiry and phenomenological design was to explore the essence of the phenomenon of principal-to-teacher performance evaluation to better understand objective feedback and evaluation. Of the 200 K-12 teachers recruited, 129 completed and submitted an online survey requesting their perceptions of principal feedback (response rate of 65%). Based on the submitted survey, 15 participants were selected to participate in interviews. Selection was based on having an administrative evaluation in the past three years and their willingness to participate in a live interview. Interviews and survey results from this study indicate teachers understood the importance of evaluations and thought their principal's intentions were respectable. More than half believed principal evaluations were unproductive and their manner of communication had an effect on teachers' job satisfaction.

**Keywords/phrases:** teacher discontentment, feedback, communication disparity, teacher retention, job satisfaction, teaching performance assessment

### Introduction

The social dynamic between professionals in schools may not be accurately portrayed. Feedback may not be effective in some instances as some teachers, for various reasons, fear being evaluated (Conley & Glasman, 2008). Many subordinates may be able to relate to a boss being critical of an employee's performance. However, there is also research showing there are administrators psychologically and emotionally abusing teachers (Blasé & Blasé, 2006, Blasé, Blasé, & Du, 2008). In these cases, feedback for those directly and indirectly affected may never be the same, as teachers' trust of administrators will be damaged.

Politicians, taxpayers, and the media are scrutinizing public education more than ever. Some motivations to analyze education include the increased cost of education, the funding of education through taxes, and the increase in home-schooling now deemed acceptable by 43% of the population (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). The passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) in 2002, whose aim is to increase schools' and teachers' accountability, has contributed significantly to putting education under the microscope. The pressure to increase student performance has affected the relationships between teachers and administrators.

Teacher evaluations are not accomplishing what they were designed for; improving teaching and student performance (Shao, Anderson, & Newsome, 2007). Teacher evaluations are causing dissension between teachers and administrators. This dissension will be defined as the phenomenon *communication disparity*. The problem investigated in this research study was how communication disparity between teachers and administrators regarding performance feedback contributes to *teacher discontentment*. The result is teachers are leaving the school they teach in or the teaching profession entirely (Brown & Schainker, 2008).

Fundamental communications between teachers and principals, which have a propensity to be sensitive, are teacher evaluations. Many teacher evaluations are subjective and are heavily influenced by student achievement including standardized test scores (Torff & Sessions, 2009). Furthermore, principals approach teacher evaluations as supervisory duties rather than an evaluation of teacher job performance (Range, Holtz, Scherz, & Young, 2011). Whether these occurrences are intentional or accidental needs further attention to improve teacher-administrator relations, which can improve teacher job satisfaction and lower teacher attrition.

The working and social components of the school setting can be complex and challenging. The working conditions that the leader creates, including psychological and emotional conditions, can dictate whether quality teachers stay or leave a school (Blasé & Blasé, 2006; Conley & Glasman, 2008; Ladd, 2011). This is important to bear in mind for the purpose of this study and improving the quality of communication between teacher and principal. This study was intended to determine the barriers of communication between teachers and administrators in an effort to bridge that gap in the research, and to determine if and what differences between teacher and administrator perceptions exist. Neglecting research in the area of principal-to-teacher

communication may further compromise the relationship between the two and affect future teacher recruitment and retention (Doti & Cardinal, 2005).

### Literature Review

Communication is fundamental to any relationship particularly feedback and evaluations from superior to subordinate. The relationship between administrative leadership and employee commitment is a significant working dynamic every employer should consider (Fugate, et al., 2008). The role of leader and their relationship with the people that they oversee are also critical to the effectiveness of the organization (Yariv, 2009). This is especially true for our public schools as the importance of education has grown exponentially.

Education is currently experiencing difficult challenges as many try to measure and quantify our schools' performance; notably teachers' performance. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is adding to the accountability that we hold for our education system and the teachers facilitating learning. This added pressure is straining an already arduous relationship between principals and teachers, as principals must evaluate teachers' performance more critically and effectively (Namaghi, 2010; Danielson, 2000).

#### *The Purpose of Teacher Evaluations and Feedback*

In the past, teachers perceived evaluations as a method to find fault with teachers in any subjective manner the principal chose. The evaluation was viewed or perceived as a means to reprimand and not as a mechanism to improve teaching (Sullivan, 2012). Evaluation procedures were performed by the principal or superintendent utilizing subjective judgment of the teachers' performance and ability. In the 1950s and 1960s, evaluation was seen more as supervision where if the principal saw the teacher performing teacher acts like writing on the chalkboard, lecturing the class, and using pushpins, they were teaching (Range, 2011; Sullivan, 2012). Teachers perceived any focused conversation and attention regarding their performance, outside of being told "good job", as threatening.

In the 1970s and 1980s, teacher evaluation was substantially modified to be more objective. The focus was shifted away from the prescribed curriculum model and teacher character traits and more to a prescribed teaching model (Kersten & Israel, 2005). Checklists were used to verify the curriculum model and that its various structures were being followed. Indications were that "The building principal was equipped with a checklist to document simultaneous interdependence, student roles, and individual productivity" (Kersten & Israel, 2005, p. 48). Teaching was much more quantifiable and was looked upon as black and white, especially by the teacher unions and administration.

Evaluations and feedback are also designed to show support for teachers (Feeney, 2007). By providing regular attention through evaluations, administrators show that they care about what is going on in their schools and about the individuals inside the schools. Supervision can have highly positive effects on the quality of teaching and schooling (Fraser, 2005). Considering the stakes involved by the NCLB act, supervisory direction should be informed by research. As the emphasis on student standards and standardized testing increases, it is important to identify and research how these and other factors change teachers' working conditions and contribute to teachers' job satisfaction (Ladd, 2012).

Evaluations of teachers could be similar to evaluations of students. Some of the same questions are used when evaluating a teacher as are used to enhance student assessment. "Where am I going? Where am I now? How can I close the gap" (Chappius & Chappius, 2008, p.17)? These questions are essentially what Danielson and McGreal (2000), Jensen and Overman (2003), Namaghi (2010) and others recommended as necessary in teacher evaluation. These questions should also take priority when teachers are formulating goals. The student who desires a grade of an 'A' must design a strategy to receive their desired mark, and so to must a teacher design a strategy to produce their goals. Teachers perceive that the responsibility of the administrator is to provide resources for them to attain their goals (Celebi, 2010).

For teacher evaluation to be effective some crucial areas need to be addressed; a consistent definition of good teaching, a transparent and credible evaluation system, opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about practice, and a focus on what really matters (Danielson, 2011). For novice teachers, the principal's role in establishing a healthy school climate and meeting the perceived personal needs of the novice teachers is a key part of formative evaluation (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010).

However, research on teacher evaluations indicates that very little helpful feedback is offered to teachers and that a teacher evaluation is frequently viewed as little more than a ritual required by state lawmakers (Mahar & Strobert, 2010). Teacher evaluations are not accomplishing what they were designed for; improving teaching and

student performance (Shao, et al., 2007). This is important to bear in mind for the purpose of this study and improving the quality of communication between teacher and principal.

Jensen and Overman emphasize five principles that should be employed when evaluating teachers:

- It should enhance growth and development of the teacher.
- Its main focus should be on teacher effectiveness.
- Evaluation should include a discussion of goals for the future and how they can be achieved.
- It should involve the person being evaluated in penetrating self-analysis.
- Some aspects of the evaluation should be formalized with pre- and post-observation conferences, and these should be carried out in a non-threatening manner (Jensen & Overman, 2003).

#### *Perceptions of the Evaluators Themselves*

There are particular areas of concern regarding evaluators. The first is that evaluators are not prepared to perform effective evaluations of teachers. Evaluators must be able to assess teachers correctly, provide meaningful feedback, and engage teachers in productive dialogue concerning teaching (Danielson, 2011). If the purpose of evaluating and providing feedback to teachers is for teachers to improve, they must have a coach who knows the game. It is not necessary for a principal to be competent or proficient in a subject area, but it is necessary for them to be fluent in pedagogy. This research could uncover any anxiety for the teacher created by this type of situation.

The second area of concern is administrators finding or making time to have productive dialogue pertaining to a teacher's performance (Danielson, 2011). Skills in maintaining a positive and objective conversation focusing on the act or art of teaching, not focusing on the person, are vital for a productive conversation. Teacher's and principal's school schedules should allow time for reflection and dialogue. Time can be saved if a principal is allowed to have brief and informal drop-in observations to gather information to be shared with the teacher (Danielson, 2011).

#### *Teacher Perceptions of Feedback from Administrators*

Relationships are of primary concern when people must communicate with one another. School climates can become very emotional, especially in this time of accountability and reform in education (Arlestig, 2007). Understanding how to measure where people are mentally and emotionally at a particular time can benefit in establishing effective relationships between administrators and teachers. How teachers perceive feedback is central to this specific research. Feedback provided to teachers by school administrators has significant value in job satisfaction (Celebi, 2010; Cohrs, et al., 2006; Ozel et al., 2007). There are certain characteristics needing attention when issuing and receiving feedback that can make the feedback effective and useful for both teachers and administrators.

Perceptions from teachers of their administrators performing evaluations are clear; principals do not perform enough evaluations or focused evaluations. Teachers feel administrators rarely visit teachers' classrooms throughout the school year and when they do they receive little to no useful feedback at all (Celebi, 2010; Papay, 2012). Administrators performing evaluations spend little time on the teacher's lessons but typically show interest in yearly plans, student projects and homework, and classroom management (Feeney, 2007; Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010). Teachers feel that principals do not complete an evaluation regarding the development of their school. Teachers found evaluations and appraisals to be insensitive; instead of being supportive in the teaching methodology (Celebi, 2010). This can happen when the evaluation is being used as a disciplinary protocol.

Several studies have suggested trust as a potential hurdle for an effective employee-employer relationship. Holtzhausen and Fourie (2009) stated "trust has several core dimensions, namely integrity, dependability, and competence that together describe confidence and a willingness to participate in the relationship" (p. 4). Leadership style has a motivational and lasting impression on the employee's experience and job satisfaction. If the leader possesses good structure practices and has good relationship with the employees, the employees' effectiveness will be enhanced (Bhatti, et al., 2012). Trust and other non-visual elements like the organizations values and objectives have contributed to increased job satisfaction for employees (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2009).

Teachers feel school administrators have a responsibility to foster the well-being of faculty and staff. Principals who regulated and observed school conditions, social relationships, means for self-fulfillment, and health status pertaining to teachers were viewed as supportive (Togari, Yamazaki, Takayama, Yamaki, Nakayama, 2008). Teachers perceiving support in these areas and who were enabled to contribute were more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to their organizations (Konu, et al., 2010). To help teachers prepare for feedback and

evaluations administrators could encourage and foster teacher to teacher dialogue. Building relationships and trust is important for any organization as it binds individuals together, but for teachers who share students, it is critical (Mangrum, 2010).

Beyond the non-visual elements is the exchange idea. Here the employee feels obligated to repay the organization for the organization showing faith in them; the employee then expects they will be rewarded for their good deeds, and the cycle continues (Bogler & Nir, 2012). The feelings and obligations felt by the employer and employee after the good deeds are performed back and forth builds trust in one another. Opening dialogue with teachers regarding administrative and organizational issues without adding responsibilities to teachers have been perceived favorably by teachers. Other strategies for building trust and hope include shared strategic planning sessions, teacher involvement in allocation of resources, blueprint planning and design, ongoing assessment, and administrative and organizational support (Hodge & Ozag, 2007). This empowerment bestowed by the administration to the teachers is perceived positively as long as the process is seen to advance the organization (Bogler & Nir, 2012).

In other studies, teacher perceptions of their administrators have been favorable. In Wideen's study, teachers' principals demonstrated support in a number of ways: supplying release time for the teachers by relieving them from some non-teaching duties, finding financial support for their efforts outside of school and in professional development, and taking risks with the teachers by trying out new teaching ideas (Meister, 2010). Subsequently, the teachers reported the perception of being treated fairly and being supported by the principal. The teachers thereafter found a willingness to share in decision-making with the principal (Meister, 2010). However, this study did not investigate whether the administrators had to perform any evaluations or provide feedback on job performance for the teachers reporting principal support.

Feedback was an area of focus in another study. A school improvement initiative program found that 75 percent of teachers said they saw improvement in their teaching when working with a specialized coach (Nelsetuen, Scott, Hanita, Robinson, & Coskie, 2009). The teachers received generous amounts of feedback and were evaluated informally by the coaches. Although the coaches were not administrators, it is noteworthy to address the receptiveness of teachers to new initiatives when administered by individuals with a different title, different goals, and a consistent focus. Teachers perceive feedback as worthwhile and necessary. Teachers also feel collaboration should be an element of feedback and that collaboration is necessary to facilitate change (Nelsetuen, et al., 2009). Noteworthy and beneficial information from this study could be teachers' perception of someone providing feedback as an ally.

Humor has been proven to increase teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction (Hurren, 2006). However, teaching is usually perceived as not a very highly valued activity (Smith & Welicker-Pollak, 2008) and relying on humor too heavily can be damaging to the profession. Emotional intelligence has also played a role in teacher perceptions of feedback and evaluations. Intrapersonal familiarity can help an individual prepare for formal principal evaluations. Emotional intelligence can be conceptualized as a set of natural abilities to manage, assess, and evaluate one's own emotions reducing stress and increasing focus and management for personal excellence (Chopra & Kanji, 2010). Emotional intelligence can be linked to how teachers perceive evaluations from administrators. Emotional intelligence is also a clear indicator of job satisfaction (Yariv, 2009).

Finally, it appears what teachers deem as responsible and desirable traits of a principal are condoned by researchers of supervisory assessments. The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education along with the Wallace Foundation concurred that principals must communicate a shared direction, engage others, create enabling conditions, and maintain systems of exchange within the school (Portin & The Wallace Foundation, 2009). Teachers yearn for support and to grow in their field. Teachers want to see students succeed and are willing to work with others to accomplish educational goals (Redding, 2008).

### Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative method, phenomenological design, was to better understand the essence of the phenomenon of principal-to-teacher performance evaluation resulting in communication disparity. Five research questions guided the inquiry:

*Research Question 1:* What are school teachers' reactions to feedback from administrators regarding their teaching performance?

*Research Question 2:* What factors contribute to how teachers feel about feedback from administrators?

*Research Question 3:* How do teachers consider the intentions of an administrator and their feedback?

*Research Question 4:* How do teachers react to feedback from administrators to improve their teaching?

*Research Question 5.* What types of communication do teachers prefer when receiving feedback from supervisory administrators?

#### **Materials/Instruments**

To capture a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon being studied, two instruments consisting of three different data sources were utilized. The first instrument contained a forced-choice questionnaire and an open-ended question. A pre-existing questionnaire, *Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support*, a 20-item Likert Rating Scale forced-choice questionnaire (1 = not important at all to 4 = extremely important), developed by Weiss (2001) was used in the initial section of the study. Obtaining specific information to the phenomenon of teachers' personal experiences with administrative communication and feedback was summative and leaned towards a case study approach.

The second instrument was an open-ended survey question regarding teachers' general reactions and feelings about feedback from administrators. The third instrument was an interview to reflect on administrator feedback provided during their teacher evaluations and the communication between each of them and their respective administrator. The questions were designed based on the results from the teacher survey. Main questions and probing sub-questions were developed with the intent to understand the opinions, judgments, perspectives, and values of the participants as it related to the phenomenon being studied, communication disparity. The questions were:

1. Please describe how you felt regarding performance feedback from your administrator.
  - A. What were your perceptions of your evaluation prior to being evaluated?
  - B. What were your thoughts and feelings during your teacher performance evaluation?
  - C. What were your thoughts and feelings after your teacher performance evaluation?
2. Please describe any factors that contribute to how you feel about feedback from administrators.
  - A. Were you prepped or communicated to about the evaluation in any way? If so, by whom and how?
  - B. Were you introduced to or taught about being evaluated by an administrator in undergrad? If so, how?
  - C. Did any prior experiences help you? If so, what experiences helped you?
  - D. Are there any other factors that contribute to your perception of teacher evaluation?
3. Describe how you consider the intentions of an administrator and their feedback.
  - A. What do you believe is the purpose of evaluations?
  - B. What do you believe was the intention of your evaluator?
  - C. Was the evaluator's purpose for the evaluation communicated to you? If so, how?
4. Please describe your reactions and perceptions of feedback from administrators to improve your teaching.
  - A. What was your reaction to the evaluator's feedback regarding your improvement?
  - B. Was the feedback from the evaluator regarding your performance helpful? How?
  - C. What are your perceptions of teacher performance evaluations after having gone through them?
  - D. Did the evaluation cause you to want to leave teaching or relocate?
  - E. Did the evaluator cause you to want to leave teaching or relocate?

5. Please describe what types of communication you prefer when receiving feedback from an administrator.
- A. What type of communication feedback do you prefer?
  - B. Can you explain any concerns about the types of feedback used by administrators?

### **Participants**

The public school district chosen for this study was located in northwestern Vermont and consisted of 200 K-12 teachers, who have been evaluated by an educational instructor within the past three years. A reminder to the teachers to submit the surveys, if they had not already submitted, was sent out two weeks after the survey was initially sent out. This reminder resulted in an increase of the response rate by 27 respondents for a total of 149. Although 149 surveys were returned, 20 were incomplete; obtaining partial data was unacceptable and were discarded (response rate overall was 65%). Five teachers from each of the three grade clusters (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) represented the interviewee group. To maintain confidentiality, participants' nom de plumes were derived from former Boston Celtic basketball players (Bird, Tiny, DJ, Parrish, Heinsohn, etc). Interviews were conducted over a four-week period. The time for each interview ranged from 25 minutes to 45 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

Research question 1 asked what school teachers' reactions were to feedback from administrators regarding their teaching performance. Participants stated that initially feedback from administrators made them nervous, especially the anticipation of being watched and then the angst of what was going to be reported. Eleven out of the 15 (73%) teachers interviewed expressed that they were nervous the first time that they were evaluated, with many still nervous about being evaluated. Many participants in the study (33%) referred to their teacher evaluations as validating. Parrish stated that they believed evaluations of performances are a vital tool to make teachers think critically about themselves. This finding supports what was found in the literature, teachers perceive that it is the responsibility of the administrator to provide resources for them to achieve their goals (Celebi, 2010). The survey respondents concurred this as 78% believe that it is very important to extremely important for the principal to provide current information about teaching and learning.

Teacher evaluations in the past have been perceived as a means to reprimand and not as a mechanism to improve teaching (Sullivan, 2012). Many teachers in this study clearly perceived a principal's evaluation of teaching performance as a checklist item as nine out of 15 (60%) teachers interviewed referred to the teacher evaluation as a checklist that the principal was held accountable to perform. This finding supports that a communication disparity exists between teachers and administrators. Considering how many teachers responded that they were appreciative of the administrator's feedback and how validating the feedback was, it was odd to find the number of teachers contradicting their statements with calling the process a checklist item for the principal. It would appear teachers may revert to the customary slant on administrators and their role of evaluating teaching. After all, there has been a long-established understanding that evaluations also serve to fix a problem and move poor teachers out of the system (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010; Jacobs, 2011).

The high expectations of some teachers being evaluated may again be a tactic to justify their deficiencies. Three teachers interviewed (20%) stated some resentment regarding the feedback that they received due to the evaluator not being able to grasp what they are teaching because they are not familiar in the teachers' subject area. This was also corroborated from a comment from the survey as a respondent stated, "Administrators with little or no classroom experience are hard to take seriously." These findings substantiate a communication disparity between teachers and administrators.

Research question 2 asked what factors contribute to how teachers feel about feedback from administrators? One factor that contributed to how teachers feel about feedback from administrators is if the administrator is compassionate and cares. It is the principal's responsibility to cultivate an encouraging positive atmosphere for the school community (Weathers, 2011). If the teacher knew the principal's primary intention is to do what's best for children and the teacher, then the teacher would have perceived evaluations as more favorable. When speaking of their evaluator, 12 of the interviewees (80%) had good things to say about their administrator's demeanor, using comments like, the principal's desire to improve teaching, strengthen learning, and to give advice for improvement. Four (27%) people interviewed referred to how positive the principal performing the evaluation was throughout the process. Nine teachers (60%) interviewed made known how appreciative they were of and for the feedback from their administrator, which supports past research (Bhatti, et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Weathers, 2011).

Research has shown that teachers have felt principals do not visit teachers' classrooms enough throughout the school-year and when they do the feedback that they receive is minimal and has not been useful (Celebi, 2010; Papay, 2012). Teacher's perceptions of the feedback that they received from administrators in this study varied. From the survey, respondents (78%) showed that it was very important to extremely important that principals provide feedback about their teaching. Ten out of 15 teachers (67%) interviewed said that their current principals' intentions were to improve or validate the teacher's performance. However, concurring to other research is in this study, nine out of 15 teachers (60%) interviewed referred to the evaluations as a form of checklist that the principal must perform. Many teachers alluded that they felt the principal showed more of a desire to get through with the evaluation doing the bare minimum. There was also evidence of too much responsibility outside of teaching being placed on teachers (Berrhill, et al., 2009). Parrish commented that principals should also consider the other duties teachers perform as part of their evaluation.

Leadership style was another factor and had a motivational and lasting impression on the employee's experience and contentment. The findings from this study supported what was found in the literature; if the leader possessed good structure practices and established good relationships with the employees, the employees' commitment and effectiveness would be better (Bhatti, et al., 2012). From the survey, there were comments that allude to principals caring about teachers and children. Teachers wanted the principal in the classroom more often. If this were to happen, the teachers would have viewed the principal's intentions for evaluating in more of a positive manner and would have received the administrator's feedback more constructively. Trust and other non-visual elements like the organizations values and objectives have also contributed to increased job satisfaction for employees (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2009), which was commented on in the surveys. Teacher contentment was illustrated through statements like, "The administrator should bring a positive and collaborative feeling to the school environment, encouraging people to work together," and, "Respect and trust needs to be a key part of any administrator's job."

The trust factor also contributed to how teachers feel about feedback from principals when the teacher knew that their job was not on the line or that they were not in the checklist category of "evaluate to eliminate." In today's epoch of accountability, teachers may be evaluated for purposes of their dismissal. External stakeholders are faulting schools for not competing internationally (Conley & Glasman, 2008), and some administrators are using this to make harsh decisions at teachers' expense. When schools make harsh decisions based on students' lowest scores and low student performance (Johnson, 2012; Blasé & Blasé, 2006), it puts the teachers being evaluated on the defense. This may be the source described by Walton and how she was feeling towards evaluations when she stated, "Evaluations seem subjective. If a principal wants to they can manipulate an evaluation." Although the level of pressure by outside sources such as test scores was not specifically addressed in this study, it could be surmised that these outside pressures do exist. Parrish commented, "I'm concerned about where evaluations may move. We have a lot of poor data, i.e., standardized tests." A respondent from the survey also stated, "Testing should not direct where the school is going."

Depending on their discipline, four teachers (27%) were concerned about being evaluated if they knew that their position may be in jeopardy due to budget constraints. It was apparently normal for some teachers to become anxious about being evaluated, even when they knew that it is their turn in the cycle. A survey respondent stated that they wanted their administrator to "be more accessible and not play favorites" when evaluating teachers. They added that they felt the principal "was not approachable to all," and that "principals should be ready to help all teachers grow to be their best." Another survey respondent added principals should "be equitable and fair in dealing with faculty, (i.e., no favorites)." These comments confirm preconceived notions about how administrators communicate with teachers with past research (Blasé & Blasé, 2006; Blasé, et al., 2008; Conley & Glasman, 2008).

Another factor that contributed to how teachers feel about feedback from administrators is if they were prepped. The teachers stated that the in-service day training was thorough and was followed up at other times during the school year. Four participants (27%) stated that they were prepared by either a thorough undergraduate professor or were prepared through their graduate program. The other 11 teachers interviewed mentioned that they thought their undergraduate program should have provided additional training. Parrish stated that he had had an extensive observation and reflective experience in graduate school, which consisted of a lot of feedback opportunities. The four teachers with some form of preparation for being evaluated seemed to have less of a communication disparity with their administrator. Their comments about the evaluation experience included "validating," "helpful," and that they were "appreciative of the principal's feedback and perspective." These teachers seemed more open to communication from their principal regarding their teaching performance.

A communication disparity between teachers and administrators was revealed by whether the principal had experience in the classroom as a teacher, especially in the content area of the teacher that they were evaluating. Participants stated their difficulty in accepting feedback from an administrator with minimal classroom experience, as evidenced by the respondent who wrote, "Administrators with little or no classroom experience are hard to take seriously." McHale observed the detachment principals have from teaching, and how their job has evolved away from teachers. McHale went on to add how principals don't truly understand what teachers do today and the feedback that they give are not genuine, especially knowing the administrator lacks background in the specific grade levels and subjects. In some cases, the school official will rate an unsatisfactory teacher as satisfactory because the evaluator believes that poor teacher evaluations reflect negatively on their own performance (Celebi, 2010). This may compound the problem and if administrators are insecure about their evaluation of a teacher, it is best for everyone if they honestly address their issue, and then address the teacher's potential ineffectiveness (Celebi, 2010).

Two other factors that negatively impact how teachers felt about evaluations were favoritism and abuse, which lead to teacher discontentment. There is evidence from the literature of principals exercising emotional abuse, abusive disrespect, bullying, harassment, and mistreatment directed at teachers (Blasé & Blasé, 2006). There is ample evidence of teacher maltreatment, and in this study two teachers commented on the survey about principal bullying and being yelled at by a principal. Some reports show abuse to teachers may be as high as 27 percent in the United States (Blasé, et al., 2008). Scores of teachers already fear the uncertainties of being evaluated, fear of evaluation consequences, fear of perceptions of teachers as professionals, and fear their professional standing will be put at risk (Conley & Glasman, 2008). This is unsettling and unfortunate, and certainly contributes to negative atmosphere created around principal evaluating teachers. This study corroborates past research in the area of how teachers feel about administrators evaluating teachers and supports a communication disparity exists between the two.

Research question 3 asked how teachers consider the intentions of an administrator and their feedback. Teachers felt principal's intentions should be to help teachers and children. The interviews confirmed that teachers saw and felt that the intentions of principals were to help teachers and children. Terms gathered from the surveys and interviews included "appreciative," "valid," "useful," and "objective." The survey data indicated teachers considered the intention of administrative feedback is to help teachers. Teachers felt strongly about principals' encouragement of teachers to try new ideas, as 86% of respondents thought this was either very important or extremely important. It was also important to teachers to know that principals are in the education profession for the same reasons that they are, which is for children, as attested by a five of the 15 interviewees (33%). As stated earlier from survey respondents' comments, this relationship requires trust from teachers and principals, and building trust between the two has been viewed as the most important predictor of the teachers' rating of reflection on practice (Bogler & Nir, 2012; Korkmaz, 2007; Ladd, 2011; Range, et al., 2013).

It may seem obvious, but teachers described a large part of a principal's job description includes being the leader of the school. However, teachers see administrators as overseers of the system, not educational leaders. Two teachers interviewed alluded to a quota of evaluations each year that the principal had to meet to keep the superintendent satisfied. Ozel, et al. (2007) found 71.9% of the teachers in their study thought that their principals were managers, not educational leaders, and that many teachers see their administrators as physical equipment managers who deal with regulations. The interviews of this study revealed nine out of 15 teachers (60%) referred to teacher evaluations as a principal's to-do list or a checklist duty, basically managing the day-to-day operations of the school. NCLB has aided in fostering these perceptions, especially with the pressure on administrators to guide their school to reach academic standards related to national tests. This causes teachers to perceive principals more as political figures focusing on educational reforms and agendas, and not prioritizing teacher well-being (Konu, 2010; Leech, 2008). This may explain why teachers see principal's evaluations of teachers as taking care of their checklist. This seems to create teacher discontentment as evidenced by Heinsohn's remark about feeling that the principal "had no idea what I was teaching," and Ainge's response to his reaction about the feedback that he received as "nothing specific; unimpressed."

In the past, checklists were used to authenticate that the school districts' curriculum model was being followed. The building principal was equipped with a checklist to document simultaneous interdependence, student roles, and individual productivity (Kersten & Israel, 2005). Teaching was quantifiable and was looked upon as black and white, especially by the teacher unions and administration. Ten out of 15 (67%) teachers interviewed said that their current principals' intentions were to improve or validate the teacher's performance. Four of those 10 (27%) teachers added that the process was more of a "checklist" or "to-do list." This is clear evidence that a communication disparity exists between teachers and principals. The other five (33%, or 60% of the total) teachers alluded to the principal's intentions as "getting through a list." These interpretations from teachers are

seen all over the world where teachers feel that their principal is evaluating them in the form of a checklist (Celebi, 2010). It can be concluded that the intentions of administrators' feedback are viewed differently than what evaluations are intended to be and that this communication disparity can lead to teacher discontentment.

It is evident that the teacher's union plays a role in the principal's intentions. Three (20%) teachers mentioned that the teacher's union in one form or another in conjunction with their evaluator's list. Maravich mentioned that the union "keeping the administrators in line to the protocols of the evaluation process." There were three survey respondents who mentioned that the effect of unions on the management of the school. Principals have been known to turn a blind eye towards ineffectiveness from teachers until the behavior becomes continual and is noticed by others. Then, the principal will act on the teacher behavior, as it stands to affect the health of the organization or the principal's reputation and influence (Korkmaz, 2007). Further evidence of teacher discontentment was found in the surveys where a number of respondents made comments like, "Principals should be fair and consistent." Walton stated, "Administrators are afraid of the union. They just want to make everyone happy. The bar does change for different teachers. They know who will and won't challenge them; it's subjective."

Research question 4 asked how teachers react to feedback from administrators to improve their teaching. Participants' reactions to feedback from administrators to improve their teaching are either acceptance of the principal's findings and suggestions, or non-acceptance. Many of the teachers interviewed (73%) and the survey respondents (91%) felt a sincere intention from the evaluator to help children learn and help the teachers improve their teaching. Five out of the fifteen (33%) teachers interviewed and two survey respondents used the term "validate" in their description of the intentions of the administrator's feedback and their reactions to the feedback. When teachers' disposition is positive and accepting, the research has shown that the teacher community within schools has a positive effect on student achievement, teacher instructional practices, organizational learning and teacher commitment (Weathers, 2011). Eleven of the fifteen (73%) teachers interviewed reacted favorably to their administrator's feedback to improve their teaching. One survey respondent conveyed, "I am very satisfied with the quality of feedback and guidance we receive." Another wrote, "I appreciate the support and encouragement from my principal." Their acceptance and willingness to use the feedback is encouraging for their school and learning community.

There is, however, another side to the coin. McHale stated that the feedback to improve their teaching was valuable but because there was no follow-up the changes suggested were short lived and they reverted to past practice. Heinsohn stated that he received no specific feedback that he could use to improve his teaching. Research on teacher evaluations explains minimal useful feedback is presented to teachers and that a teacher evaluation is frequently viewed as little more than a ritual required by state lawmakers (Frase, 2005; Mahar & Strobert, 2010). Walton stated,

Being evaluated at the end of the day, at the end of a long week, right before a vacation can be a blessing or a curse; either the principal will be wrung out, so they'll rifle through the evaluation and give you a pass. Or they will be in a terrible mood and pissed off because they have to do this evaluation and bring the hammer down on you.

Bullying and harassment from administrators does occur in our schools. A set of follow-up questions showed a different reaction by teachers and revealed clear teacher discontentment directly related to communication disparity between teachers and principals. The questions were directed at whether an evaluation or an evaluator was the source of the teacher wanting to relocate themselves and continue teaching or change professions entirely. These questions divulged three out of the 11 teachers who responded (27%) thought about relocating their careers, and one out of the 11 teachers (9%) thought about leaving the teaching profession following their evaluation experience. In each situation, the evaluation itself and the evaluator was the source of the teachers feeling a change was necessary. Maravich stated that it was after her first evaluation and they were "critiqued pretty hard." This can cause emotional exhaustion, which may affect teacher focus and commitment, enthusiasm, and possibly cause teachers to leave the profession (Berryhill, et al., 2009).

Authoritarian style principals are controlling, commanding, and do not show a willingness to share power (Dambe & Moorad, 2008). Power can be exerted through evaluations and these have been used as scare tactics with principals being accused of bullying and harassment (Blasé, et al., 2008). Evidence from this study reveals unproductive styles and forms of leadership leads to communication disparity between teachers and principals leading to teacher discontentment. Comments from the survey respondents included statements disapproving of and forbidding principals to bully. One survey respondent commented, "I've seen good teachers driven into the ground by poor admins who refused to compromise or take suggestions. They should not bully (yes, I have seen

this in several admins over the years)." It is clear bullying and harassment from administrators occurs. This may cause teachers to at least consider leaving the school that they are teaching in or the teaching profession.

The findings from the teachers whose reactions were of non-acceptance of the feedback that they received contained more conviction. Issues of non-trust and skepticism of the principal's capabilities surfaced. Heinsohn felt that his principal was not familiar with his subject area, and further noted that a lot of the feedback addressed general classroom management and acknowledgment of "localized dynamics" or the obvious occurrences. Heinsohn felt that there was no specific feedback that he could use to improve his teaching. Walton found that the time of day which the evaluation occurred impacted how thorough and genuine an evaluation was. Walton stated,

Being evaluated at the end of the day, at the end of a long week, right before a vacation can be a blessing or a curse; either the principal will be wrung out, so they'll rifle through the evaluation and give you a pass. Or they will be in a terrible mood and pissed off because they have to do this evaluation and bring the hammer down on you.

These findings corroborate past research on teacher job dissatisfaction causing issues in recruitment and retention (Arlestig, 2007; Bird, et al., 2009; Blasé, et al., 2008; Gilley, et al., 2008; Ladd, 2011; Moos, et al., 2008; Oliva, et al., 2009; Ozel, et al., 2007). Although, this study specifically addressed communication disparity between teachers and administrators regarding performance feedback, the findings show a principal and their evaluation of a teacher can be a factor in teacher discontentment.

Research question 5 asked what types of communication teachers prefer when receiving feedback from supervisory administrators. One theme emerged from the participant's responses and that was verbal and written responses were preferred. Although the survey did not yield results to this question, three of the teachers (20%) interviewed preferred verbal, one teacher (7%) preferred written, and 11 teachers (73%) preferred both verbal and written. Heinsohn emphasized face-to-face conversation, saying that this did not always happen, and that the telephone had been used for discussion. Havliceck stated that they had been given only written feedback earlier in their career and that they did not like this because there was no face time to ask questions and seek explanations. Tiny thought a discussion of job performance was good, but that this had to be followed up with written feedback on the spot, because they were left with some serious concerns without a reference. Tiny stated,

"We can sit down and talk about my teaching, but as soon as you tell me one thing I need to address that is all I'm thinking about. Everything else you say means nothing to me because I'm thinking about that negative piece you found."

## Recommendations

Based on the results of this study and the review of the literature, the insights from this qualitative phenomenological study did not appear to be unique to this particular school district. Therefore, the lived experiences of participants in this study may be extended to any school district in the United States that requires administrators to evaluate their teachers. The findings can be of value to undergraduate and graduate institutions preparing students to become teachers. The findings can also serve those with the authority to be policy and decision-makers tasked with finding current and future strategies for evaluating teachers. As these policy and decision-makers develop strategies and rationales for evaluating teachers, they may miss opportunities for important insights from an important population of this process: teachers. It is critical to include teachers in designing and devising teacher evaluation plans, policies, and procedures (Danielson, 2007; Derrington, 2011; Sullivan, 2012). Future qualitative studies on communication disparity open opportunities to explore the lived experiences of their student teachers and other additional findings. More specific recommendations will now be focused in two areas: recommendations for schools, teachers, and administrators, and recommendations for teacher preparatory programs. These recommendations are intended to improve the communication disparity that exists between teachers and administrators regarding teacher evaluations and performance feedback that contributes to teacher discontentment.

## Conclusions

A review of literature about the purpose of feedback, teacher perceptions of feedback, teacher perceptions of evaluators, supervisor and administrator perceptions of teacher evaluations, unproductive measures of teacher evaluation improvement, the effect of change in schools, and concerns about teacher recruitment and retention were used to validate the findings from this study. Based on the research conducted by Ladd (2011), further efforts to understand teachers' perceptions of their working conditions are needed. What principals say and how they say it has an enormous impact on teachers' sense of value within the school (Albertson, 2009). How teachers perceive feedback from administrators is essential considering the high number of teachers either leaving their districts or leaving the teaching profession (Bird, et al., 2009; Gilley, et al., 2008; Ladd, 2011;

Moos, et al., 2008; Oliva, et al., 2009).

This study was developed to fill a void in the research by documenting the first hand lived experience of teachers receiving feedback from an administrator in a teacher evaluation format. This study will contribute to the field of study, specifically educational leadership, in regards to the phenomenon of principal-to-teacher performance evaluation resulting in communication disparity. This study will also aid in further research in the areas of teacher attrition, teacher morale, and teacher job satisfaction.

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