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Perceived Effects of LAUSD's New Teacher Growth

and Development Cycle on Teacher

and Administrator Practice

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Douglas Renato Meza

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Perceived Effects of LAUSD's New Teacher Growth

and Development Cycle on Teacher

and Administrator Practice

by

Douglas Renato Meza

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Jose Felipe Martinez, Chair

The objective of this study was to document teachers' and administrators' perceptions of how, if

at all, LAUSD's new Teacher Growth and Development Cycle (TGDC) changed their practice in

ways that can be expected to lead to improved student learning. Specific emphasis was placed

on how the TGDC, the comprehensive observational system (teacher self-assessment, lesson

plan, pre-conference lesson plan feedback, pre-observation conference, observation, post-

observation conference) allowed teachers and administrators to reflect on and improve their

individual practice, and the quality of learning in the classroom. The sample included a

combination of nine teachers and three administrators from two independent small urban high

schools located on one site. In-depth qualitative interviews generated data on what teachers and

administrators self-reported to be the changes in their practice and perceptions as a result of their

experience navigating through this new teacher evaluation system. The findings of the study demonstrate how the evaluation system, when implemented in ideal conditions, where there is strong leadership, a positive school climate, and a focus on professional learning, can facilitate a reflective process for participants that can lead to improved teacher and administrator practice.

The dissertation of Douglas Renato Meza is approved.

Robert Cooper

Meridith Phillips

Linda Rose

Jose-Felipe Martinez, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

DEDICATION

First and foremost, for my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ- without you, none of this would have

been possible.

For my family- thank you for all of your love and support. Whether you know it or not, all of

have you have inspired me to continue striving for success.

For my son Ezra Gregory Meza- your have been my greatest source of inspiration throughout

this entire process. Dream great dreams for all of us.

Lastly for my wife, partner, and best friend Emily Ruth Meza – you have been my rock through

this long and difficult journey. Thank you for all of your sacrifices and unconditional support. I

appreciate you more than you know. Babe, we did it!

To all of you, I dedicate this work.

When the world says, "Give up,"

Hope whispers, "Try it one more time."

~Author Unknown

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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VITA

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Chapter 1

Statement of Problem

As the provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation on accountability approaches the deadline of Summer 2014, a national movement is underway to amend the U.S.'s educational accountability system (Ravitch, 2010). This new movement is changing its focus from evaluating a school's ability to meet the benchmarks set by NCLB to creating a system of evaluation that can inform, support, and hold teachers accountable for their students' academic performance (Baker et al., 2010; Pianta & Hamre, 2009). The rationale behind these educational policies is based on the belief that comprehensive teacher evaluation systems can help improve teacher practice, which in turn will lead to increased student outcomes. This study will document teachers' and administrators' perceptions of how a district's new teacher evaluation system has influenced their practices in classrooms and schools.

History of a Stagnant Teacher Accountability System

The discussion in the U.S. over how to identify and classify teachers' effectiveness has been occurring since the 17th century. Shinkfield and Stufflebeam (1995) recount how, in 1659 Charles Hoole, an English teacher, published pamphlets that shared statements about his effectiveness as a teacher. A similar dialogue regarding teachers' effectiveness began with Compulsory Education in Massachusetts in 1852 (Ellet & Teddlie, 2003).

The ability to create a system that is effective at identifying and improving the quality of teaching in the nation's schools has been a struggle for educators for decades. In a 1936 New York Times article, "Security of the Teacher in His Job," Victor H. Bernstein, (as cited in Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009) shared the challenges experienced by educators in the mid-1930s:

The record of a teacher's work, which is kept by the principal and which might be produced to show incompetence, is a weak instrument for the purpose. Standards vary greatly from school to school. One principal's "satisfactory" might be equivalent to another's "unsatisfactory." School authorities, in recognition of this, are evolving a new system of rating. (p. 2)

In the 1960s, formal teacher evaluation systems became widespread in U.S. school districts. A 1964 survey by the National Education Association (NEA) indicated that half of all school districts used a formal written evaluation system where the principal and other administrators were responsible for the process. By 1969, the percent of school districts that had adopted a formal evaluation system for teachers had increased to 90% (Kenny & Schmidt, 1994).

In Danielson and McGreal's (2000) analysis of the history of teacher evaluations, they conclude that minimal changes have been made to the formal evaluation process presently used by many school districts since the 1970s. They report that evaluation systems typically focus on a handful of generic observations where administrators get a snapshot of a teacher's classroom practice. These short observations do not provide administrators with enough information to assess a teacher's skill level.

Present educators continue to struggle to create a system of evaluation that allows a systematic way of assessing the practice and quality of classroom instruction while recognizing and addressing challenges in the teaching profession (Weisberg et al., 2009). Poor teacher practice is not improved through short and sporadic evaluations conducted by untrained administrators. As Weisberg et al. report in their 2009 study of teacher evaluation practices in 12 districts, the focal point of effective teacher evaluation is to facilitate improvement of teacher practice and effectiveness, not just document poor performance as a way to move for teacher

dismissal. However, educators lack assessment tools and policies that focus on measuring the quality of classroom practice. (Matsumura, Crosson, Wolf, Levision, & Resnick, 2006).

Evaluating Teacher Performance

As a result of the variations in states' teacher evaluation systems, many of the new educational policies that look to improve the nation's educational system are focusing on teacher effectiveness and growth. President Obama allocated $4.35 billion under The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, to fund the Race to the Top (RTT) initiative to support investments in innovative strategies by various states that lead to improved results for students and long-term gains in schools. The 43 states that applied for this federal funding, one being California, were required to submit an application that outlined present and future plans for improving student achievement based on RTT's specific criteria (Duncan, 2009).

One of RTT's criteria is Improving Teacher and Principal Effectiveness Based on Performance. This criteria requires each state, in collaboration with its participating Local Education Agency (LEA), or district, to have a high-quality plan that includes designing and implementing a rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals. The plan must include conducting annual evaluations of teachers and principals that include timely and constructive feedback, as part of such evaluation systems. The evaluations must differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor, along with other measures (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education (2009) defines Student Growth as the change in student achievement for an individual student between two or more points in time.

Value Added Models. The mandatory use of Student Growth data as a component of teacher evaluations under RTT led many states to devise tools to quantify teacher effects on

student achievement over time. Of the 43 states that applied for RTT, most proposed the use of a type of Value Added Model (VAM) to identify the contribution of individual teachers to Student Growth (Ed Source, 2011). VAMs are statistical tools used to assess the effectiveness of individual teachers relative to others in the same district (or in some cases the same school) as measured by student achievement in state standardized tests. The focus of VAM is not on students' absolute level of achievement, but the amount of progress that students make in a given year (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Multiple measures. Along with Student Growth measures, RTT requires additional measures when creating a teacher evaluation system. The Student Growth measure, along with additional measures, is referred to as multiple measures. Additional measures may include, but are not limited to, multiple classroom observations, evidence of leadership roles that increase the effectiveness of other teachers in the school, stakeholder surveys, and/or student portfolios (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Many researchers are in consensus that no one single data point can paint a complete picture of a teacher's performance; therefore, evaluation systems should use multiple measures to determine whether teachers have met performance expectations. Goe and Croft (2009) argue that using multiple measures provides a comprehensive way to understand and determine teacher effectiveness. They believe each measure should have a specific weight, so that teachers and instructional managers understand how each component will factor into the final evaluation rating.

Teacher evaluation in the Los Angeles Unified School District. In April 2010, The Teacher Effectiveness Task Force (TETF), a multi-stakeholder body including parents, students, teachers, school leaders, district leaders, union members and community partners, presented their

final report to the district's school board. This task force was asked to provide the district with recommendations for improving teacher effectiveness by reviewing current practices and relevant research on employee evaluation, support mechanisms, tenure, compensation, and legislation. The TETF released a comprehensive set of interconnected recommendations that included changes to the district's policies on evaluation, compensation, career pathways, and tenure, and support for educators' professional development. The core strategy for achieving this is the interconnection between multiple measures performance reviews that provide clear and useful information to employees about their performance, and an individualized approach for supporting and developing all employees. These recommendations resulted in the district's new Multiple Measures Evaluation System, which it named the Educator Growth and Development Cycle (EGDC; Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], n.d.a).

The EGDC encompasses four performance measures aligned with professional development structures which are: contribution to student outcomes (Academic Growth over Time [AGT]), stakeholder feedback, contributions to school community, and observation of teacher practice (Teacher Growth and Development Cycle [TGDC]). How much weight each of these measures will carry in assessing overall teacher effectiveness is yet to be determined, but observation of teacher practice is expected to carry the most weight (LAUSD, n.d.a).

The *Contribution to Student Outcomes* performance measure tries to quantify how much an individual teacher has impacted students' learning outcomes by calculating their AGT estimates. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) worked with the Value-Added Research Center (VARC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to create a comprehensive approach based on a value-added methodology. The district's AGT estimates calculate how much students have progressed on standardized test from one year to the next by comparing each

student's performance to his/her own expected performance, while controlling for external factors which often influences students' test results (LAUSD, n.d.b).

The second performance measure in the district's Multiple Measures Evaluation System is the *Stakeholder Feedback Survey*, which includes surveys of parents/guardians and students regarding classroom experiences and perceptions of their schools. The surveys are administered to all students and parent/guardians whose teacher is participating in the TGDC in grades four through 12. Currently, the survey results are no-stakes and all responses are confidential. Teachers receive reports with information on how students and parents responded to the survey questions and are encouraged to use the results to help inform their growth and development as it relates to their communication with families and building a positive classroom environment that promotes a culture for learning (LAUSD, n.d.b).

The third performance measure is *Contributions to School Community*. While still in its pilot stage, this measure is intended to support and extend the vision of local school empowerment by giving schools a tool with which to emphasize the work of school teams as units of change for school improvement. It hopes to facilitate the recognition of teachers as leaders both inside their classroom and in their school community (LAUSD, n.d.b).

The final measure in the EGDC is the *Observation of Teacher Practice,* which the district refers to as the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle (TGDC). The TGDC is a system for conducting classroom observations that has six major components: teacher self-assessment, lesson plan, pre-conference lesson plan feedback, pre-observation conference, observation, and post-observation conference. The district has identified this measure as the most important performance measure and is requiring observers (e.g., administrators, district personnel, teacher leaders) to go through a rigorous training process to prepare them for systematic observations

using the new Teaching and Learning Framework (TLF). The TLF is based on Charlotte Danielson's (1996, 2007) Framework for Effective Teaching and provides the foundation for what the district has described as effective teaching practices. The framework acts as a guide for teachers to analyze, reflect upon and improve their teaching practice independently, with colleagues, and/or with their administrator as they participate in the TGDC (LAUSD, n.d.b).

During the 2012-2013 school year, LAUSD introduced the tools of the EGDC to all teachers and school leaders in a no-stakes environment. Every principal and a minimum of one volunteer teacher at every of the 1,300 schools in the district put into practice the performance measures of the EGDC with an emphasis on completing two cycles of the TGDC (LAUSD, n.d.b).

The Need for This Study

LAUSD is set to use the TGDC component of the EGDC as its formal teacher evaluation system during the 2013-2014 school year, although no research has been conducted on the effects of the TGDC on improving teaching practice. This study will provide teachers' and administrators' personal narrative of their experiences with, perspectives on, and reactions to the new evaluation system. Specifically, the goal was to uncover how teachers and administrators experienced this new more robust classroom observational system in the second largest school district in the country to better understand how, if at all, teachers and administrators changed their practices as they worked to improve the quality of instruction in order to yield improved student performance.

This study sought to investigate how the TGDC changed teacher and administrator perception and practice. I focused on analyzing what teachers and administrators self-reported to be the changes in their practice and perceptions as a result of their experience navigating through

this new teacher evaluation system. Specific emphasis was placed on how the TGDC, the comprehensive observational system (teacher self-assessment, lesson plan, pre-conference lesson plan feedback, pre-observation conference, observation, post-observation conference) allowed teachers and administrators to reflect on and improve their individual practice, and the quality of learning in the classroom. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What changes in practice, if any, did teachers report as a result of participating in LAUSD's new Teacher Growth and Development Cycle?

    a. What changes in Lesson and Unit Structure (Focus Element), if any, did teachers participating in this new classroom observation system report?

    b. What changes in Quality and Purpose of Questions (Focus Element), if any, did teachers participating in this new classroom observation system report?

    c. What changes in other area(s) of instruction, if any, did teachers participating in this new classroom observation system report?

    d. What did teachers attribute the changes to their practice mentioned above, if any, to (i.e., observational feedback, AGT results, teacher generated assessments, district periodic assessments, incentives)?

    e. How did teachers describe the type of feedback they received from their administrators throughout the entire Teacher Growth and Development Cycle?

2. What changes in practice (i.e., frequency of observations, collection of quality observational data, actionable feedback) if any, did administrators report as a result of participating in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle?

Chapter 2

Literature and Theoretical Framework

In April 2010, LAUSD's TETF, a multi-stakeholder body, presented its final report to the district's school board on improving teacher effectiveness based on current research and best practices. The task force recommended changes in district policies on evaluation, compensation, career pathways, tenure, and support for educators' professional development. These recommendations resulted in the district's new Multiple Measures Evaluation System for teachers, or Educator Growth and Development Cycle (EGDC). The EGDC encompasses; Observations of Teacher Practice, Stakeholder Feedback, Contributions to Student Learning Outcomes, and Contributions to School Community. Of these, LAUSD has identified Observation of Teacher Practice and Contribution to Student learning Outcomes as the two major performance measures for teachers (LAUSD, n.d.b).

LAUSD's Observation of Teacher Practice performance measure, or TGDC, uses a standards-based observational protocol using rubrics developed from LAUSD's TLF. The TLF is based on Charlotte Danielson's (1996, 2007) Framework for Effective Teaching, which articulates expectations for effective teaching practices and provides a common foundation for lesson design, teacher performance review, and professional development. Trained and certified administrators and teacher leaders conduct the classroom observations. Additionally, Contributions to Student Outcomes reflect a measurement of each individual teacher's contribution to student learning over a given year. These contributions are calculated using a type of VAM to produce estimates that LAUSD refers to as AGT (LAUSD, n.d.b).

This study documented how teachers and administrators described their experiences participating in LAUSD's new Multiple Measure Evaluation System, specifically how, and if,

the TGDC component of the EGDC affected their practice. I collected qualitative data on what teachers and administrators self-reported as changes to their practice as a result of this new classroom observational process. I wanted to learn how, and if, the district's new TGDC is being used as a tool to improve the quality of instruction, which the district hopes should result in improvements in student performance.

In this chapter I synthesize research in the area of teacher evaluation directed towards improving student performance, which changes the focus from highly qualified teachers (HQTs) in previous policy reform efforts, to highly effective teachers (HETs). In addition, I give a historical overview of our nation's teacher evaluation practices as well as analyze research that discusses the more recent use of student test scores as part of teacher evaluations. Lastly, I synthesize empirical research on effective use of standards-based observations evaluations, as well as effective multiple measures evaluation systems.

National Context of Low Student Performance in Public Education

A Special Report released by the Lumina Foundation for Education (Matthews, 2009) asserts that there will be a shortage of 16 million college-educated adults in the American workforce by 2025. Currently, our nation's educational system is graduating about 71% of all high school students. When looking at African American and Hispanic students, the graduation rate is closer to 50%. The inability of students to graduate from high school can have life-long social and economic effects. In 2009, a high school dropout had an average yearly income of $25,000; conversely, a person with a high school diploma had an average income of $43,000. Over a person's lifetime, this translates into a difference of approximately $630,000 in total earnings (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011).

The economic impact of high school and college graduates also extends beyond individuals. If U.S. high schools and colleges raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of White students by 2020, personal income could add more than $310 billion to the U.S. economy (Amos, 2008).

Researchers have claimed that highly effective teachers can help rectify the nation's educational and economic trends. Hanushek (2010) argues that teachers are the most important aspect of a school that effects student achievement. A study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011) found that students assigned to teachers classified as high on the value-added scale were more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries, live in higher socio-economic status (SES) neighborhoods, and save more for retirement.

As the U.S. pays increasing attention to educational outcomes, policymakers have undertaken a wide range of reforms to improve schools, including new standards, new curriculum, new tests, redesign schools, and new instructional strategies. President Obama has spearheaded many of these reforms by proclaiming his commitment to increasing accountability at every level of the U.S. educational system, beginning in the classroom. Linda Darling-Hammond (2009) argues that research has shown that for any reform effort to be successful there needs to be a highly skilled and effective teacher behind it.

Highly Qualified vs. Highly Effective

NCLB of 2001 attempted to close the achievement gap by increasing accountability, flexibility, and choice. One major component of NCLB is to provide every student with a HQT by the end of 2006-2007 school year (Barry, 2010; Berry, Fuller, Reeves, & Lair, 2007; Mangiante, 2010). A HQT is a teacher who holds a bachelor's degree, has earned full state

certification, or is enrolled in an state-approved alternative certification program, and has passed

his/her state's rigorous subject matter exams (Mangiante, 2010). Although federal law

underscores the need for states to guarantee that every student has access to a highly qualified

and experienced teacher, some government officials and educators question whether NCLB's

goal of providing students with a HQT guarantees that students will receive quality teaching

(Goe, 2007). In Goe's 2007 research synthesis on the link between teacher quality and student

outcomes, she questions the sufficiency of "paper qualifications and teaching experience" (p. 1).

She argues that although appropriate degrees, certification, and experience are important, they do

not guarantee quality teaching. Such concerns have led researchers to move away from defining

HQTs to describing what good teaching is and looks like. Berry (2010) underscores "the logical

evolution of how we examine how to improve teaching and learning" (p. 3) by diverting the

spotlight from the concept of an HQT to focus on a highly effective teaching.

The shift from highly qualified to highly effective teachers gained momentum in 2009,

when President Obama used $4.35 billion allocated under the American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act to fund the RTT Initiative (Duncan, 2009). A major component of RTT

emphasizes improvements in teacher effectiveness in terms of what teachers are able to do to

improve student achievement (Ed Source, 2011; Mangiante, 2010). In the U.S. Department of

Education's (2009) *Race to the Top Executive Summary*, an effective teacher is defined as one

whose students achieve high rates of student growth, e.g., one and one-half grade levels in an

academic year using a Student Growth measure.

As a result of this new focus on effective teaching, current research has worked to

identify and define the specific teachers' classroom practices that are most likely to improve

student learning. Although teacher quality is almost universally believed to be the most

important school-based factor in student learning, researchers disagree on specific teacher practices that are linked directly to improved student performance (Berry et al., 2007; Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, & Robinson, 2004; Goe, 2007; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Harris & Sass, 2011). As a result of this lack of universally agreed upon set of teaching practices that lead to increase student performance, teachers contend that they should not be held to accountable for student performance.

Debate Over Teacher Influence on Student Performance

In Darling Hammond's (1999) analysis of state policies on education, she shares the argument made by some researchers that educators should not bear the brunt for why students do not succeed in school. Those researchers feel that closer examination is needed regarding factors outside of the teacher's control that might be influencing students' achievement (e.g., lack of resources, overcrowding, student's lack of motivation). Such rationales have their roots in Coleman, Campbell, and Hobson's (1966) *Equality of Educational Opportunity* study. The report was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1966 to assess the availability of equal educational opportunities to children of different races, colors, religions, and national origins. This study was conducted in response to provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Coleman et al. concluded, "schools bring little influence to bear upon a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context" (p. 325). They argued that a student's attitude has a stronger relationship to achievement than all the school factors. In 2012, some educators still share Coleman et al.'s opinion and argue that a student's attitude, which might be a resistance to learning, may be rooted in that student's home or family, ethnic or cultural background, or school itself, and that teachers cannot possibly combat such barriers and therefore cannot be held accountable for student performance.

In the decades since the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), policymakers, educators, and researchers have deliberated over whether a school and its teachers have the ability to influence student achievement. Research since the Coleman Report has shown that teachers do influence student performance. In an analysis of nearly 900 Texas school districts and data on the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) standardized test administered from grades 3 through 11, Ferguson (1991) found that highly effective teachers drastically affect student gains. Ferguson makes the claim that good teachers are the most important factors in good education.

More recently, Chetty et al. (2011) analyzed teachers' long-term impact on student outcomes in adulthood. They studied whether teachers' impact on students' test scores in VAMs are a good measure of teachers' quality. The study analyzed school district data from grades three through eight for 2.5 million children linked to tax records on parent characteristics and adult outcomes. They found that students assigned to teachers classified as high on the Value-added scale are more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries, live in higher SES neighborhoods, and save more for retirement.

In 2004, Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges analyzed data from a 4-year experiment in which teachers and students from 79 elementary schools in 42 school districts in Tennessee were randomly assigned to classes to estimate teacher effects on student achievement. Their estimates of teacher effects on student achievement were similar to previous studies, ranging from 11-13% of the variance in math and from 9-11% of the variance in reading. They found a substantial relation of teacher experience with student achievement, but the relation was only statistically significant in second-grade reading and third-grade mathematics achievement.

A second finding was that teacher effects are much larger in low-SES schools. This suggests that the distribution of teacher effectiveness is much more uneven in low-SES schools than in high-SES schools. They argue that, in low-SES schools, it matters more which teacher a child receives than it does in high-SES schools. The larger variance in teacher effectiveness in low-SES schools suggests, however, that interventions to replace less effective teachers with more effective teachers (or turning one into the other) may be more promising in low-SES schools than in high-SES schools (Nye et al., 2004). Many policies attempt to improve achievement by substituting one school for another (e.g., school choice) or changing the schools themselves (e.g., whole school reform). The rationale for these policies is based on the fact that there is variation in school effects. If teacher effects are larger than school effects, then policies focusing teacher effects as a larger source of variation in achievement may be more promising than policies focusing on school effects.

The Push for a New Way of Evaluating Teachers

The new federal RTT legislation stipulates that teacher effectiveness be determined by student growth measures and supplemented with multiple observation-based assessments. RTT suggests the use of teachers' effectiveness ranking as a means to evaluate teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The U.S. Department of Education's new focus on teachers' influence on student performance challenges all states and districts to create a teacher evaluation system that quantifies the amount of influence that a teacher has on his/her individual students' performance. However, many states and districts are attempting to calculate a teacher's effectiveness, while lacking statewide longitudinal data systems that link teachers with their students' achievement (Berry at el., 2007; Kane, Taylor, Tyler & Wooten, 2010).

Despite the challenges with standardized test scores, many states are using student achievement gains on standardized test scores as a major measure of teacher effectiveness (Ed Source, 2011). However, not all grades and subjects are mandated to participate in annual testing. According to Baker et al. (2010), less than a quarter of K-12 teachers teach grades and subjects where such measures are possible. In the absence of evidence of effective teaching practices, such measures offer little guidance on the nature of teacher training and development (Baker et al., 2010; Weisberg et al., 2009). Test-based measures allow one to identify effective teachers without identifying the instructional practices that made them effective, which doesn't allow for replicating teachers' success. If teachers are not provided with clear indicators about legitimate ways by which to improve their practice, the danger is that teachers will focus instead on teaching test-taking skills at the cost of teaching other, more difficult to measure skills (Scherrer, 2011).

The Historical Perspective on an Ineffective Teacher Evaluation System

As teacher effectiveness has drawn national attention, focus has shifted to the practices used to evaluate teachers. A report by Ed Source (2011), a non-partisan nonprofit organization, describes the large amount of criticism of the *typical* teacher evaluation system in place today. The report shares the American Federation of Teachers' opinion that "with rare exceptions, teacher evaluation procedures are broken**,** cursory, perfunctory, superficial, and inconsistent" (p. 1). Additionally, the National Council on Teacher Quality (as cited in Ed Source, 2011), which advocates for reforms in a broad range of teacher policies, gave the nation a grade of D in identifying effective teachers in its ratings of state-level teacher policies. The report describes most teacher evaluation systems as suffering from a large number of design flaws.

But the issue with effective teacher accountability has puzzled educational leaders for decades. Dating back to the 1930s, educators sought instruments to assess teaching ability. Teaching standards varied greatly from school to school and there was no consistent definition of satisfactory or unsatisfactory teaching practices (Bernstein, 1936).

Not until the 1960s did school districts begin using a formal evaluation system for teachers. In 1964, half of all schools districts used a formal written evaluation system conducted by an administrator. By 1969, 90% of all school districts adopted a formal evaluation system for teachers (Ellet & Teddlie, 2003).

A review of present teacher evaluation practices used in many districts show minimal changes to the formal evaluation process since the 1970s. Current evaluation systems tend to focus on superficial observations by administrators that do not critically analyze a teacher's instruction. Most administrators' observations provide little insight and feedback into teachers' skill level (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (as cited in Ed Source, 2011), probationary teachers across the country are typically evaluated twice a year, while permanent teachers are generally evaluated once every 3-5 years, and more often if they receive an unsatisfactory rating.

In 2009, The New Teacher Project collected surveys on teacher evaluations and teacher dismissals from 15,000 teachers and 1,300 administrators spanning 12 different districts and four states. They found that of the teachers surveyed, three out of four received no specific feedback about how to improve their practice from their evaluation process. Of the teachers having 4 years or less of experience, only 43% stated they were given feedback on a specific aspect of their instruction that needed improvement. Most of the current evaluations are short and infrequent and are conducted by untrained administrators (Weisberg et al., 2009).

In California, the Stull Act of 1971 outlines the process for teachers' and principals' evaluations, bridging the gap between the state's interest in providing students with an HQT and employees' rights. This policy gives employees the right to respond to their evaluations and to work without fear of unwarranted dismissal. The Act does not outline all of the important details involved in teacher evaluations; rather, this work is left to districts and teacher and administrators' unions (Ed Source, 2011, p 4).

Value Added Models

The VAM, also known as a Value Added Assessment (VAA), refers to a family of statistical models that measure the amount of learning that a given teacher, school, or district *adds* to his/her students' learning during a given school year (Goe, 2008). Teachers' effectiveness ratings are statistically estimated using multiple years of data that calculate the change in students' performance during the specific time that students are assigned to a specific teacher. For example, a teacher who helps low-performing students surpass their expected growth trajectory would be rated as effective. In contrast, a teacher whose students continue their expected learning trajectories would be rated as average, even if his/her students are high performing on end of the year standardized test (Carey, 2009).

Researchers and government officials that support VAM seek increased accountability for teachers in order to improve student academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Sanders and Rivers (1996) conducted a study in two large Tennessee school districts where data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) was analyzed to study teacher effects in mathematics from grades three through five. They found that students who were assigned to ineffective teachers for several consecutive years had significantly lower achievement and lower gains than those who were assigned to highly effective teachers. They

found that the effects of teachers on student achievement are both additive and cumulative, meaning that teachers' effects can be seen at the end of one year, as well having residual effects in the following years. They also found that as teacher effectiveness increases, lower achieving students are the first to benefit.

While most educators agree with the notion that better teachers improve student learning, many experts believe that caution should be exercised in using student achievement gains and VAMs to assess teachers' effectiveness, especially in the context of a high-stakes accountability system (Newton, 2010). One argument against using a type of VAM evaluation system for determining teacher effectiveness is the fact that some value added systems do not take into consideration the SES, ethnicity, parent involvement, and other background influences that might affect students' performance in school. Many opponents of holding teachers and administrators accountable for student performance argue that it is unfair not to take into consideration societal factors when calculating students' academic growth (Ballou, Sanders, & Wright, 2004).

A second argument voiced by opponents of the VAM method is the question of validity of these standardized assessments. Validity refers to whether test scores actually measure what they are intended to measure. In general, state content standards are broad and often unclear (Baker et al., 2010). California's standardized test tends to focus on standards that can be assessed with multiple-choice questions. This limited way of assessing student learning has raised the concern that teachers may *teach to the test* and limit the depth of learning rather than teach the full curriculum (Braun, 2005).

A third limitation in using standardized assessments is the reliability of the test scores. Reliability refers to the confidence that the test score will be the same across repeated administrations of the test. Ideally, if the same groups of students take the same test 2 days apart,

one would expect each student to score identically on both tests. Unfortunately, due to differences in environmental variables such as fatigue or lighting, or student error in responding, no two tests will consistently produce identical results (Steele, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2011).

A New Comprehensive Way of Evaluating Teachers

Although there is some research that illustrates the benefits of VAM, researchers have raised a number of questions about whether student achievement data can be used fairly or accurately for purposes of teacher evaluation. Others have noted that achievement data alone cannot provide teachers with the information they need to improve their practice. The federal government and many states have realized these limitations and have urged that student test score data should be just one of multiple measures used to evaluate teachers (Heneman, Milanowski, Kimball, & Odden, 2006). As a result of this call for multiple measures for evaluating teachers, many states are incorporating an evaluation system that is comprised of three major elements: some type of VAM; a collection of evidence about teacher planning, instruction, and work with parents and students; along with a revamped classroom observational protocol (Baker et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2009).

AGT. LAUSD's attempt to calculate teachers' and schools' contribution to student learning resulted in their AGT analysis. LAUSD, in collaboration with the VARC of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin, a national leader in the development and production of value-added metrics, developed the district's AGT system.

AGT analysis employs statistical techniques to isolate the component of measured student knowledge that is attributable to schools, teachers, or classrooms from other factors. The factors or variables chosen by the district are prior CST scores, grade level, gender,

race/ethnicity, low-income status, Special Education Designation status, ELL status, continuous enrollment, and homelessness.

LAUSD's AGT model uses students' standardized test scores (California Standards Tests [CSTs]) combined with student demographic data to create individual growth predictions. The predicted results for each student and/or group of students are then compared to the actual results in order to calculate the value-added estimate, which can be calculated for individual teachers, grade-level teams, schools or specific student populations (e.g., students with disabilities, English Language Learners). This provides a more complete picture of student learning because it compares a student's performance to his/her own expected performance (LAUSD, n.d.b).

Classroom observations. Although research has not identified a single perfect way to evaluate teachers, experts argue that a comprehensive teacher evaluation system must include a classroom observation system based on clear, objective standards of practice, conducted by multiple trained evaluators on multiple observations. Progress has been made over the last 2 decades in improving classroom observational practices. Observations can be used as both a formative and as a summative assessment tool. When used in formative evaluations, the observer can track a teacher's growth and suggest needed professional development and then later observe whether changes in teaching have been made (Ed Source, 2011). Research has shown that observational evaluations can yield a deeper understanding of teacher effectiveness outcomes based on what a teacher does in the classroom to increase student learning (Mangiante, 2010).

One such practice is the creation of a standards-based observational system. In order to evaluate the knowledge and skill base of teachers, states and districts have adopted frameworks or developed their own professional teaching standards to assess teacher performance. One such framework is the research-based Framework for Effective Teaching created by Charlotte

Danielson (1996, 2007). Danielson's framework, which includes descriptors of practice with levels of performance, has been adopted by some school districts as criteria for developing professional goals and assessing teacher effectiveness (Mangiante, 2010).

Benefits of a Standards-based Evaluation System

In 2011, Taylor and Tyler studied the effects of evaluation systems on teacher performance for public school teachers in Cincinnati. Taylor and Tyler used data from the Teacher Evaluation System (TES), a standard-based evaluation system that compiles data from classroom observations. The observers use a scoring rubric, based on Charlotte Danielson's (1996) *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*. The TES evaluation process is a year-long process where teachers are typically observed and scored four times: three times by an assigned experienced peer evaluator, a teacher who is external to the school, and once by a school-site administrator. Taylor and Tyler's objective was to estimate the extent to which a teacher's participation in TES improves his/her performance or effectiveness in promoting student achievement growth.

Taylor and Tyler (2011) found that high-quality, classroom-observation-based evaluations improved teacher performance both during the period of evaluation and in following years. Specifically, students assigned to a teacher after he/she participated in TES score about 10% of a standard deviation higher in math than similar students taught by the same teacher prior to TES participation.

Along with the study in Cincinnati, Sartain et al. (2011) report the findings from the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR), which studied the findings from the Excellence in Teaching Pilot, a 2 year pilot of a new standards-based teacher observation evaluation system. In 2008, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) launched the Excellence in Teaching

Pilot, an initiative focused on instructional improvement through the use of an evaluation rubric based on Charlotte Danielson's (1996, 2007) Framework for Effective Teaching. Danielson's framework is a tool that attempts to define the observable components of effective teaching. The rubric clearly defines the components of effective teaching. This rubric guided classroom observations and conferences between principals and teachers.

The first year of the pilot, 2008-2009, included 44 elementary schools. Participation was scaled up to 101 elementary schools in 2009-2010. In this study, the researchers empirically tested the relationship between teaching practice (as measured by the Danielson framework ratings) and student learning (using VAMs). If the Framework and the value-added indicators were valid, then the researchers expected, for example, that the teachers with the highest classroom observation ratings would be the same teachers with the highest value-added indicators (Sartain et al., 2011).

A review of the data found that the classroom observation ratings were a valid measure of student learning. That is, students showed the greatest growth in test scores in the classrooms where teachers received the highest ratings on the Danielson framework, and students showed the least growth in test scores in classrooms where teachers received the lowest ratings. A second finding was that classroom observation ratings were reliable measures of teaching practice, indicating that principals and trained observers who watched the same lesson consistently gave the teacher the same ratings (Sartain et al., 2011).

Observer training. Utilizing standards-based observational protocols requires a new type of administrator (Danielson, 2010). Both Cincinnati and Chicago require their classroom observers, most of them administrators, go through an extensive training process. Charlotte Danielson (2010), whose Framework for Effective Teaching is the foundation for many of the

standards-based observational protocols, makes the argument that a credible system of teacher evaluation requires higher levels of proficiency of evaluators than the old checklist, "drive-by" (p. 4) observation model. Evaluators need to be able to assess accurately, provide meaningful feedback, and engage teachers in productive conversations about practice.

In the Sartain et al.'s (2011) report from the Excellence in Teaching Pilot in CPS, principals in the pilot used the Framework for Effective Teaching to guide their classroom observations as well as the required pre-observation and post-observation conferences. Teachers and administrators described the conferences as being more reflective and having a greater focus on instruction and improvements. The framework also allowed the principals and teachers to use a common language, which made the dialogue more evidence-based, reducing subjectivity.

Using observations as a tool to support teachers. In Goe, Holdheide, and Miller's (2011) report from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, the authors argue that using evaluation results to support professional learning is likely the most significant phase of the evaluation cycle. The authors believe that an evaluation system's capacity to reliably identify highly effective and ineffective teachers is important. However, ensuring that teacher ratings can reliably detect teacher strengths and weaknesses is essential for targeting professional development accurately. Evaluation results can then be used to identify individual, school, and district-wide needs. Providing job-embedded, ongoing, individualized professional learning and support is necessary for teacher evaluation to have positive impacts on teacher practice.

As professional development is incorporated into the evaluation cycle, stakeholders need to evaluate outcomes to determine whether the efforts have improved teaching practice. This process goes beyond a simple evaluation of the professional learning activity, moving toward a continual, longitudinal reflection and analysis of teacher participation, support, and outcomes

related to student achievement (Goe et al., 2011). Charlotte Danielson (2010) makes the point that a commitment to professional development is important, not because teaching is of poor quality and must be "fixed," but rather because teaching is "so hard" (p. 37) that it can always be improved.

Challenges with Classroom Observations

Even with the benefits of this new form of standardized way of performing classroom observations, some of the same challenges persist. One constant challenge is that poorly trained observers can lead to inaccurate results. Although all observers must go through a rigorous training process, some observers might not have reached a level of proficiency that is required to accurately assess teachers' performance, provide meaningful feedback, and engage teachers in meaningful feedback that leads to improved teacher practice. Many observers require multiple opportunities to practice the observational protocol and to calibrate their scoring (Danielson, 2010).

A second major challenge with this new standardized form of classroom observations is finding the time to conduct these observations. These observations are a lot more extensive than the old way of conducting classroom observations. Everyone involved must be committed to ensure that these observations do not revert to the "drive-by" (Danielson, 2010, p. 4) way of performing classroom observations of the past.

LAUSD's TLF

In November 2010, LAUSD partnered with Teaching & Learning Solutions, Inc. (TLS) to develop a TLF that would provide a common language when discussing the district's instructional practices. As the foundation for instructional practices in LAUSD, the TLF acts as a

guide for teachers to analyze, reflect upon, and improve their teaching practice independently, with colleagues and/or with their administrator as part of the EGDC.

The TLF is based on Charlotte Danielson's (1996) book, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*. The TLF highlights the researched-based strategies that have been proven to be effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners including English learners and students with special needs. Danielson's framework is the foundation for frameworks adopted in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Florida. The district's TLF hopes to speak not to what the district teaches, but instead to how it teaches.

The TLF is organized into three levels: standards, components, and elements. Each level moves to a finer grain of detail regarding instruction and practices. The framework consists of five standards, 19 components, and 63 elements (see Table 1). The standards are broad categories that define teaching practices. The five standards are: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Delivery of Instruction, Additional Professional Responsibilities, and Professional Growth. Within each Standard are descriptors called Components. The components are identified with the letters a, b, c, etc. Within each component, there are more specific descriptors called elements; each component is divided into two or more elements. Each element has descriptive language that defines practice at four levels of performance (Ineffective, Developing, Effective, and Highly Effective; LAUSD, n.d.b).

For the 2012-2013 school year, LAUSD placed an emphasis on 21 of the 63 elements. These 21 elements are referred to as Focus Elements (see Table 2). The Focus Elements are predominately in Standard 1: Planning and Preparation, Standard 2: Classroom Environment, and Standard: 3 Delivery of Instruction. The emphasis is placed on these three standards because they are the focus for observers conducting classroom observations as part of the TGDC. Trained

administrators will be responsible for collecting objective evidence during their classroom

observations. Afterwards, administrators are responsible for aligning the evidence that is

collected to the TLF's rubrics. The TLF's rubrics give a brief explanation of each element, along

with a detailed description of each of the four performance levels for that element (see Table 3;

LAUSD, n.d.b).

Table 1

LAUSD Teaching and Learning Framework

LAUSD TEACHING AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

STANDARD 1: PLANNING AND PREPARATION	STANDARD 2: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT
a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy	**a. Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport**
1. Knowledge of Content and the Structure of the Discipline	*1. Teacher Interaction with Students*
2. Knowledge of Content-Related Pedagogy	2. Student Interactions with One Another
b. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students	*3. Classroom Climate*
1. Awareness of Students' Skills, Knowledge, and Language Proficiency	**b. Establishing a Culture for Learning**
2. Knowledge of How Children, Adolescents, and Adults Learn	1. Importance of the Content
3. Knowledge of Students' Special Needs	*2. Expectations for Learning and Achievement*
4. Knowledge of Students' Interests and Cultural Heritage	3. Student Ownership of their Work
c. Establishing Instructional Outcomes	4. Physical Environment
1. Value, Sequence, Alignment, and Clarity	**c. Managing Classroom Procedures**
2. Suitability for Diverse Learners	*1. Management of Routines, Procedures, and Transitions*
d. Designing Coherent Instruction	2. Management of Materials and Supplies
1. Standards-Based Learning Activities	3. Performance of Non-Instructional Duties
2. Instructional Materials, Technology, and Resources	4. Management of Parent Leaders, other Volunteers and Paraprofessionals
3. Purposeful Instructional Groups	**d. Managing Student Behavior**
4. Lesson and Unit Structure	1. Expectations for Behavior
e. Designing Student Assessment	*2. Monitoring and Responding to Student Behavior*
1. Aligns with Instructional Outcomes	
2. Criteria and Standards	
3. Design of Formative Assessments	
4. Analysis and Use of Assessment Data for Planning	

STANDARD 5: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH	STANDARD 3: DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION
a. Reflecting on Practice	**a. Communicating with Students**
1. Accurate Reflection	*1. Communicating the Purpose of the Lesson*
2. Use of Reflection to Inform Future Instruction	2. Directions and Procedures
3. Selection of Professional Development Based on Reflection and Data	3. Delivery of Content
4. Implementation of New Learning from Professional Development	4. Use of Academic Language
b. Participating in a Professional Community	**b. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques**
1. Collaboration with Colleagues	*1. Quality and Purpose of Questions*
2. Promotes a Culture of Professional Inquiry and Collaboration	*2. Discussion Techniques and Student Participation*
STANDARD 4: ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES	**c. Structures to Engage Students in Learning**
a. Maintaining Accurate Records	*1. Standards-Based Projects, Activities, and Assignments*
1. Tracks Progress Towards Identified Learning Outcomes	*2. Purposeful and Productive Instructional Groups*
2. Tracks Completion of Student Assignments in Support of Student Learning	3. Use of Available Instructional Materials, Technology, and Resources
3. Manages Non-instructional Records	4. Structure and Pacing
4. Submits Records on Time	**d. Using Assessment in Instruction to Advance Student Learning**
b. Communicating with Families	*1. Assessment Criteria*
1. Information About the Instructional Program	2. Monitoring of Student Learning
2. Information About Individual Students	*3. Feedback to Students*
3. Engagement of Families in the Instructional Program	4. Student Self-Assessment and Monitoring of Progress
c. Demonstrating Professionalism	**e. Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness**
1. Ethical Conduct and Compliance with School, District, State, and Federal Regulations	*1. Responds and Adjusts to Meet Student Needs*
2. Advocacy/Intervention for Students	2. Persistence
3. Decision-Making	

Highlighted elements are identified as the Focus Elements for the 2012 – 2013 School Year.

Note. Adapted from *Talent Management Division,* n.d., by the Los Angeles Unified School District. Retrieved from http://talentmanagement.lausd.net

Table 2

Focus Elements for 2012-2013

Standard 1:Planning & Preparation 1d. Designing Coherent Instruction 1. Standard-Based Learning Activities 3. Purposeful Instructional Groups 4. Lesson and Unit Structure 1e. Designing Student Assessment 1. Aligns with Instructional Outcomes 2. Criteria and Standards 3. Design of Formative Assessments 4. Analysis and Use of Assessment Data for Planning	Standard 2: Classroom Environment 2a. Creating and Environment of Respect and Rapport 1. Teacher Interaction with Students 3. Classroom Climate 2b. Establishing a Culture of Learning 2. Expectations for Learning and Achievement 2c. Managing Classroom Procedures 1. Management of Routines, Procedures, and Transitions 2d. Managing Student Behavior 2. Monitoring and Responding to Student Behavior
Standard 5: Professional Growth 5a. Reflection on Practice 2. Use of Reflection to Inform Future Instruction ――――――――――――――― Standard 4: Additional Professional Responsibilities	Standard 3: Delivery of Instruction 3a. Communicating the Purpose of the Lesson 1. Communicating the Purpose of the Lesson 3b. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques 1. Quality and Purpose of Questions 2. Discussion Techniques and Student Participation 3c. Engaging Student Learning 1. Standards-Based Projects, Activities, and Assignments 2. Purposeful and Productive Instructional Groups 3d. Using Assessments in Instruction 1. Assessment Criteria 3. Feedback to Students 3e. Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness 1. Responds and Adjusts to Meet Student Needs

Note. Adapted from *Talent Management Division,* n.d., by the Los Angeles Unified School District. Retrieved from http://talentmanagement.lausd.net

Table 3

Teaching and Learning Framework's Rubric

DRAFT SY 2012-2013 (Released 6/2012)   SY 2012-2013 Focus Elements ONLY

Standard 3: Delivery of Instruction
Component 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
Elements: Quality & Purpose of Questions, Discussion Techniques &Student Participation

Effective teachers design questions that provide cognitive challenge and engineer discussions among students to ensure all students participate. The highly effective teacher designs instruction that provides opportunities for students to develop their own cognitively challenging questions and to engage in various types of student-to-student discussions.

Element	Ineffective	Developing	Effective	Highly Effective
Quality & Purpose of Questions *Questions are designed to challenge students and elicit high-level thinking* CO	Teacher's questions do not invite a thoughtful response or are not relevant. Questions do not reveal student understanding about the content/concept or text under discussion, or are not comprehensible to most students.	Teacher's questions are a combination of both high and low quality, or delivered in rapid succession. Only some questions invite a thoughtful response that reveals student understanding about the content/concept or text under discussion. Teacher differentiates questions to make them comprehensible for some students.	Teacher's questions require rigorous student thinking. Most questions invite and reveal student understanding about the content/concept or text under discussion. Teacher differentiates questions to make learning comprehensible for sub-groups of students.	Teacher's questions require rigorous student thinking and invite students to demonstrate understanding through reasoning. Students themselves formulate questions to advance their understanding about the content/concept or text under discussion. Teacher differentiates questions to make learning comprehensible for all students in the class.
Discussion Techniques & Student Participation *Techniques are used to ensure that all students share their thinking around challenging questions* CO, SF	Teacher makes no attempt to differentiate discussion. Interactions between the teacher and the students are characterized by the teacher generating all questions and most answers. The teacher and a few students dominate the discussion.	Teacher makes some attempt to use differentiated strategies to engage all students in discussion with uneven results. Only some students participate in the discussion and/or the discussion is not intellectually challenging.	Teacher uses intentional, differentiated strategies to engage all students in discussion, attempting gradual release from teacher directed to student initiated conversation. Students are expected to participate in an intellectually challenging discussion.	Teacher uses various, differentiated strategies to engage all students in intellectually challenging student-to-student interactions Teacher creates conditions for students to assume considerable responsibility for the success of the discussion; initiating topics and making thoughtful, unprompted contributions that demonstrate innovative thinking.

Note. Adapted from *Talent Management Division,* n.d., by the Los Angeles Unified School District. Retrieved from http://talentmanagement.lausd.net

Of the 21 focus elements, this study collected data as to how, if at all, this new TGDC affected teachers' Lesson and Unit Structure and Quality and Purpose of Questions. I focused on these two particular elements because I have found in my experience as assistant principal that many teachers need to improve substantially in these elements of the framework. As a school-site administrator, I have conducted numerous observations where teachers have taught lessons with no clear structure or flow, which leads to chaos in the classroom. Hunter and Russell (2006) argue that skill in planning is acknowledged to be one of the most influential factors in successful teaching. If teachers were able to create lessons that are clearly defined with a logical

structure that anticipates and prepares for student difficulties, they would likely experience more successful and meaningful lessons.

In addition, improving the quality and purpose of questioning will help teachers engage students in a more authentic manner. Discussions in class are one of the most common strategies for promoting active and intellectually challenging learning. If the objective is to promote long-term retention of information, to motivate students toward further learning, and to allow students to apply information in new settings, then discussions are preferred over lectures. Unfortunately, I have observed many lessons where the teacher is standing in front of the class lecturing for the entire period, while students are passively just sitting staring at the teacher, waiting for the period to be over (McKeachie, 1986).

Chapter 3

Description of Research Design

Based on the framework delineated in the previous chapter, this work addressed the following specific research questions:

1. What changes in practice, if any, did teachers report as a result of participating in LAUSD's new Teacher Growth and Development Cycle?

   a. What changes in Lesson and Unit Structure (Focus Element), if any, did teachers participating in this new classroom observation system report?

   b. What changes in Quality and Purpose of Questions (Focus Element), if any, did teachers participating in this new classroom observation system report?

   c. What changes in other area(s) of instruction, if any, did teachers participating in this new classroom observation system report?

   d. What did teachers attribute the changes to their practice mentioned above, if any, to (i.e., observational feedback, AGT results, teacher generated assessments, district periodic assessments, incentives)?

   e. How did teachers describe the type of feedback they received from their administrators throughout the entire Teacher Growth and Development Cycle?

2. What changes in practice (i.e., frequency of observations, collection of quality observational data, actionable feedback) if any, did administrators report as a result of participating in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle?

Research Design

I used a qualitative research approach that allowed me to understand how teachers and administrators experienced and reacted to a new teacher evaluation system. A qualitative study

allowed me to explore and understand the meaning the individual teachers and administrators created from their unique experiences navigating through this new process (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research allows for the collection of multiple forms of data, e.g., interviews, observations, and document analysis. My sole form of data collection was qualitative interviews, which documented teacher and administrators' personal thoughts and feelings regarding how this new evaluation system changed their practice.

Methods

I used two rounds of in-depth focused interviews as my sole data collection method. I used teacher (see Appendices A & B) and administrator (see Appendices C & D) semi-structured interviews as a way of collecting data on their experiences. Interview questions focused on participants' descriptions of their own professional experiences as they navigated through this new classroom observation system. Interviews represented the best way to collect data on participants' thoughts, feelings, intentions, and perspectives throughout this new process (Merriam, 2009). Teacher interviews yield descriptive data and stories of how this new experience affected teachers' lesson planning and instructional delivery, e.g., utilizing the new lesson and unit structures, and incorporating higher-order questions during instructional delivery. Administrator interviews allowed me to collect data on administrators' perceived changes in their observational practices and quality of teacher feedback as a result of this new observation system, e.g., having a clear focus for every observation, and providing specific feedback for a pre-determined element. Merriam (2009) makes the argument that to get at the "essence" (p. 25) of the experience, the phenomenological interview is the main method of data collection.

Target population. The target population for this study was high schoolteachers and administrators from small high schools in LAUSD that were participating in the TGDC for the

first time. The sample used in the study included nine teachers and three administrators participating in the TGDC for the first time.

Sample. I purposefully selected and recruited sites and individuals for my study that could help me understand the research problem and central experience in my study (Creswell, 2013). I used a purposeful sampling strategy to develop a *typical sample* that reflects the common or *average* person, institution, or instance of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009).

Site. I conducted my study at a complex that is home to two independent small urban high schools in LAUSD where teachers and administrators have to manage the challenges of an urban community (e.g., low SES and high crime) while participating in this new classroom observation system. The schools are the Business and Technology School (pseudonym) and the Visual and Performing School (pseudonym). The schools are examples of challenging urban schools within LAUSD that are participating in the TGDC.

Access to the site and participants. Once LAUSD's Research Unit approved the proposal, I scheduled a meeting with the principals of both schools along with the assistant principal that is shared by both schools. In the meeting I described the methods and timeline for my study. During the presentation I stressed that my study's focus was on documenting teacher and administrator experiences, feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of how this new teacher classroom observation system was used as a tool for improving and supporting teachers. At the conclusion of the meeting, the three administrators supported my study and were willing to participate in it. They then allowed me to speak to their teachers during a faculty meeting.

At the faculty meeting I presented my study to all 11 teachers that were participating in the TGDC. During the presentation I highlighted that my study was not evaluative, but would be

informative, as its goal was to capture their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of how, if at all, this new evaluation system would affect their practice. My presentation included a time to address teachers' questions and concerns. After the presentation I asked all 11 teachers to volunteer to participate in my study. Of the 11, nine teachers committed to participating in the study, five from the Business and Technology School and four from the Visual and Performing School.

Data Collection and Analysis Method

Teacher interviews. I conducted two separate interviews, each 30-40 minutes long, with all nine participating teachers. My first set of teacher interviews took place in mid March 2013, after teachers had completed the Self-Assessment component of the TGDC. The Self-Assessment is an activity where teachers review their students' achievement data, LAUSD's TLF, and other relevant artifacts (e.g., student work samples, lesson plans, classroom management routines). The focus of the first interview was to collect data on what teachers believed influenced their students' academic performance as well as data on their experiences with the old evaluation system (i.e., classroom observations, pre/post observation conferences). I also collected data on teachers' instructional practices (i.e., lesson and unit structure, quality and purpose of questions). In the interviews I asked teachers to identify what, if anything, they believed influenced their instructional practice prior to participating in the TGDC (Appendix A).

The last set of teacher interviews took place in the end of May 2013, after they had completed one TGDC. The interviews allowed me to collect data as to how, if at all, teachers believed their instructional practices (i.e., lesson and unit structure, quality and purpose of questions) changed as a result of their experience in the TGDC. I also asked teachers to reflect on

the type of feedback they received from their administrator throughout the observation cycle (Appendix B).

Administrator interviews. The three participating school-site administrators were also interviewed two times each, each lasting approximately 30-40 minutes. The first set of administrator interviews took place in mid March 2013, where the focus was to collect data on their observational practices (i.e., frequency of observations, collection of quality observational data, actionable feedback) during the old evaluation system and how they expected the TGDC would affect their future practice (see Appendix C).

The second administrator interviews took place in late May 2013. The second interview followed the completing of the TGDC. In the interviews I asked the administrators about their experience participating in this new observation cycle and how, if at all, their observational practices (i.e., frequency of observations, collection of quality observational data, actionable feedback) changed as result of the TGDC (see Appendix D).

Data analysis methods. I began my data analysis by transcribing all of the teacher and administrative interviews. This allowed me to read through all of the data obtained from the interviews to gain an initial sense of the ideas shared by the teachers and administrators.

Next, I began the coding process by organizing the information collected into topics/categories. I read through each teacher interview to identify the main topic of each interview, which was the basis for my topics/categories. I used a combination of predetermined and emerging topics/categories based on the information collected. The topics/categories generated by teacher interviews answered Research Questions # 1a-1e. For example, in analyzing the answers to one of the questions from my second interview protocol, question 5, "Now that you have completed the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle, how would you

describe the difference between the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle and the "old way" of formal classroom observations?" I received responses like, "Its about the same", "I received specific pointers to make my instruction better," or "It really helps me think about what I need to improve." These types of answers caused me to generate three categories of response for this question: "no difference," "it was more detailed and specific," or "the conversation helped me reflect on my instruction." This would be an example of emerging topics/categories that originated from the data collected.

Conversely, an example of a predetermined topic/category might be the answers to interview question 7-b, from the second interview protocol, "Did the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle lead you to think that you might have to alter how you structure your lessons? If so, How?" It would not be far fetched to think that one or more teachers might have answered that his new evaluation system had no affect on their lesson planning practice. Therefore one of my predetermined topics/categories for this question was, "no effect on lesson planning practices." This same coding process was replicated for administrator interviews.

After identifying the themes from the interview data, I connected themes to generate a clear and rich narrative of teachers' and administrators' experience throughout this new teacher evaluation system. I outlined 13 major themes e.g., improved lesson planning practices, more focused feedback by administrators, higher ordered questioning during classroom instruction, and no change in teacher and administrative practices. My discussion of the several themes is presented in chronological order and uses examples, multiple perspectives, and quotations from all participants. It is important to note that while the participants in this study were from two independent high schools on the same campus, after an analysis of the data collected, it was clear

that there was no direct differentiation between the reported experiences of the participants from each school.

In addition, while this study was designed to identify how teachers' and administrators' practice changed as a result of their participation in this new teacher evaluation system, a reported lack of change in practice by any participant was not interpreted as a negative finding. A lack of reported change in practice could have occurred for different reasons, one being that the participant did not feel his/her practice needed improvement. For example, when teachers were asked how the new evaluation system influenced how they structure their lessons, on teacher, Charles Mendez, felt that this element was one in which he did not need to improve after reflecting on his instructional practice; "I don't have to change how I lesson plan because I rated myself as effective when I completed the Teacher Self-Assessment."

Ethical Issues

As a researcher, it is critical to behave ethically at all times. I assessed the potential risk, if any, for participants, and shared with them how I addressed those risks. I received informed consent from all participants, and informed them that the study had been approved by LAUSD and UCLA. Teachers and administrators who participated in my study might still have had reservations sharing their true feelings and thoughts about how this new teacher evaluation system had affected their practice. I made it clear that my goal was not to bring harm to any participants or to disturb the school-site. To address their reservations I shared with them my plan to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. I guaranteed teachers that I would not reveal their identities to the site administrators or anything that individual teachers shared in their interviews. I used pseudonyms in my findings section when talking about the school and

participants. Finally, I made sure that the process for my study was honest and transparent and that I treated everyone with respect.

Reliability and Validity

As a researcher, I incorporated some safeguards to ensure a certain level of trustworthiness to my study. I realized the potential credibility risk of having participant alter their normal behavior as a reaction to participating in the study. Teachers' knowledge of my experience as an administrator might have influenced their responses or behaviors. Teachers might have answered my questions during their interviews according to what they might have thought what an administrator would want to hear from teachers about their experiences in this new process.

To combat against reactivity, I planed numerous extended school-site visits while I collected my data. This allowed teachers to forget that I was a researcher and see me more as a member of their school community, which allowed teachers to revert to their normal behavior and respond honestly to my questions. I tried to convince teachers that their candid and honest responses regarding the new evaluation system would be most helpful in helping to make recommendations regarding future implementation of the evaluation system.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to document teachers' and administrators' perceptions of how, if at all, the new TGDC changed their practice in ways that can be expected to lead to improved student learning. The findings of the study will demonstrate how the evaluation system, when implemented in ideal conditions, where there is strong leadership, a positive school climate, and a focus on professional learning, can facilitate a reflective process for participants that can lead to improved teacher and administrator practice. Although the focus of this study was to identify the effects this new evaluation system had on participants' practice, the emerging findings demonstrate how the participants' attitude and the schools' culture influence the experiences of the participants in this new evaluation system.

The research questions guiding this study focused on the changes in practice reported by teachers, particularly in terms of Lesson and Unit Structure and Quality and Purpose of Questions. To the extent that changes were reported, questions further probed regarding to what teachers attributed the changes to their practice (i.e., observational feedback, AGT results, teacher generated assessments, district periodic assessments, incentives)? The final question focused in changes in supervising practice reported by administrators in the new TGDC.

This chapter reports on research findings based on analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with nine teachers and three administrators participating in LAUSD's new TGDC. During two in-depth interviews, participants their experiences with the new TGDC and the perceived impact this new process had on their practice. Employing sequential interviews allowed the researcher to document participants' knowledge and perception of the process prior to and after completing the TGDC. The findings in this chapter are presented in two parts. The

first part gives a brief description of the sites and population and presents the major findings that address the aforementioned research questions. The second part of this chapter presents additional exploratory findings based on major themes that emerged from the data. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Population and Sites

The student enrollment at both the Business and Technology School and the Visual and Performing School is roughly 400 students, all of whom are classified as economically disadvantaged. The schools have highly similar student demographics, with the greatest ethnic group at both schools being Latino (over 90% at both schools). The second largest ethnic group at both schools is White, with an average of four percent. In addition, the student population that is designated as English Language Learners at both schools is about 20%. English Language Learners are students who have not reached a certain level of proficiency of the English language, and have yet to reclassify as English Proficient. Of those students that have reclassified as English Proficient, each school averages about 43% of its entire student population. Lastly, the schools also have a similar number of special education and gifted population, with an average of about 12% special education and seven percent gifted students for each school.

With regards to the teachers that volunteered to participate in this study, five teachers were from the Business and Technology School and four were from the Visual and Performing School. The participating teachers from the Business and Technology School were three females and two males, with an average of 11 years of teaching experience. Of these five teachers, only two of them had been formally evaluated in the past 3 years, although all five of them had been formally evaluated with the old way of classroom observations at least once in their careers.

In contrast, the participating teachers from the Visual and Performing School were two males and two females with an average of 8 years of teaching experience. Of these four teachers, only one of them had had been formally evaluated in the past 3 years, yet three of them had been formally evaluated with the old way of classroom observations at least once in their careers.

With regards to the three participating administrators in this study, there was one principal from each of the two schools, along with one assistant principal that was shared by both schools. All three administrators were male and all of them had less then 5 years of administrative experience. In terms of experience with conducting formal classroom observations, only one of the three administrators had administrative experience with the old way of conducting classroom observations (see Table 4 for participant demographics).

Table 4

Student and Teacher Demographics by School

	Business and Technology School	Visual and Performing School
Students		
Hispanic Population	93%	91.5%
English Learner	17% (Spanish)	23% (Spanish)
Reclassified EL's (RFEP)	44%	43%
Students w/ Disabilities	11%	14%
Economically Disadvantaged	100%	100%
Gifted	8%	7%
Participating Teachers		
Avg. Years of Experience	10.8	8
# with 1-5 Years of Experience	1	1
# with 6-10 Years of Experience	2	2
# with 11-15 Years of Experience	1	0
# with 16+ Years of Experience	1	1
Females	40%	50%
Males	60%	50%
Evaluated in Last 3 Years	40%	50%
Total Years of Teaching Experience	54	32
Participating Administrators		
Less than 5 years of Administrative Experience	100%	100%
Males in the Study	100%	100%

History of the Schools

The two schools are located on one campus that is located approximately two miles away from downtown Los Angeles. The school sits in a neighborhood that is comprised of approximately 90,000 residents, with 94% of them being of Latino. The average household in this area of the city is comprised of 3.8 members, with the median household income being a little over $33,000 dollars. Five percent of the residents 25 and older have a 4-year degree, while 60% of the adults have less than a high school diploma.[1]

The campus opened its doors in September 2009 to alleviate the overcrowding from the nearby comprehensive high school. About 40% of the teachers have been at both schools since it opened 4 years ago, with 10 teachers coming over from the nearby high school voluntarily. The buildings and spaces are arranged to permit after-hours community access to certain areas. The two schools have classrooms and science labs, a library, a multipurpose room, food service facilities, a parent center, underground parking, competition gym and outdoor physical education facilities.

The school is overseen by a non-profit organization that works with a few low performing schools in the district to help improve student performance. The non-profit organization has received a little more than $60M in funding from various philanthropists who seek to finance new and innovative ways of improving student academic performance at some of the most historically under performing schools in the district. The non-profit organization stresses and is dedicated to reform and instructional support that accelerates improvement of student academic performance.

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[1] These data are taken from a source that would compromise the identity of the participating school. Therefore, the source is not included to protect subjects' confidentiality.

The non-profit organization uses four key strategies to accelerate student performance: great school leadership, targeted student support, family and community engagement, and effective teachers. To ensure that the every one of their schools is led by an effective principal, the non-profit organization recruits highly effective administrators from across the country. To lure those effective administrators, the organization offers signing bonuses to principals that supplement their salary paid by the district. To provide students with targeted support, the organization has funded the implementation of numerous computer-based programs like Achieve 3,000, ST Math, and Read 180 at each school. To improve family and community engagement, the organization has funded the renovation of each school's parent center, ongoing parent trainings, and an annual summer parent summit.

In their pursuit of having an effective teacher in every classroom, the non-profit implemented initiatives that support teachers' instructional growth (e.g., Instructional Rounds, Summer Teacher Institutes, etc.). In addition, they have encouraged their teachers to volunteer to participate in the district's TGDC. Seven of the schools that are overseen by the non-profit, two of which participated in this study, received the Federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) and were part of the district's TGDC from its inception.

Teacher and Administrator Findings

All of the nine participating teachers described some significant changes to their instructional practice as a result of participating in the TGDC. Due to the large number of elements in the TLF, this study focused on changes to teacher practice related to two of the 21 focus elements: Lessons and Unit Structure and Quality and Purpose of Questions.

It is important to note that while the participants in this study were a combination of members of two independent schools, the findings in this study are not reported and

differentiated by schools. While there was an attempt to analyze the data by schools with the goal of comparing and contrasting the experiences from teachers of each school, the data collected did not yield any significant differentiation between participants' experiences based on school. As a result, the participants' experiences are reported collectively in the findings.

What changes in lesson and unit structure? The TLF describes a lesson or unit as effective if it has a *clear and logical structure with appropriate time allocations* and it must *anticipate student difficulties or confusion* (LAUSD, n.d.b). When participants were asked about how their *Lesson and Unit Structures* were affected by participating in the TGDC, six of the nine teachers reported some changes to their lesson and unit planning practices. Of these*,* four identified a change to the *clear and logical structure with appropriate time allocation* of their lessons, while two identified a change to their lessons that *anticipate student difficulties or confusion*.

The four teachers that identified a change to the structure and time allocation of their lessons realized that they were not meeting the definition of an effective *Lesson and Unit Structure* element that is described in TLF. Dolores Olsen, who changed how she structures her lessons shared the following, "I knew I was doing too much lecturing and not allowing enough time for other activities. I developed lessons with time for students to be active learners and I became the facilitator of the learning." Steve Fowler shared a similar realization when he said, "As a result of participating in the TGDC, I will be spending more time structuring my units and thinking about how much time I want to spend in each activity to make sure I have time for everything." These two examples illustrate how the TGDC affected how teachers structure their lessons.

Similarly, two teachers changed how they structured their units and lessons by *anticipating students/ difficulties' or confusions*. Jennifer Rodriguez shared the following; "Our department is already planning next year's units to include a way of addressing students' pitfalls. Once we know where they might trip-up, then that is where we will support them more." The teachers learned to create lessons and units that include a way of addressing students' possible misconceptions. This type of planning allows teachers to prepare for possible student problems that might derail a teacher's completion of an effective lesson. Mr. Freddy Sandoval shared a similar experience; "I learned to reflect on my lessons to identify possible areas where my students might get confused. I had to have a plan to get them over the hump." Of the six participants that identified a change to their Lesson and Unit Structures, all six had 6+ years of teaching experience, with four being from the Business and Technology School and two being from the Visual and Performing School.

Of the three teachers that did not report a change to how they structure their lessons, Mr. Charles Mendez felt that this element was one that he did not need to improve in after reflecting on his instructional practice; "I don't have to change how I lesson plan because I rated myself as effective when I completed the Teacher Self-Assessment." Gerry Anthony shared a similar response:

> I don't think there are a lot of changes I need to make to how I structure my lessons. My credential program required me to create lessons where I had to identify how much time was allocated to each part of the lesson. We also had to anticipate students' misconceptions and plan on how to address them.

Mr. Anthony said that his credential program, which he had he completed a few years prior, had done a good job of preparing him to plan effectively. Unlike the six participants that identified a

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change to how they lesson plan, two of the three participants that did not identify a change to how they lesson plan had teaching experience that ranged from 1-5 years, and both were the least experienced teachers from each school.

Nancy Diego, the third teacher who reported no changes to her lesson and unit-planning practices, felt she had a good understanding of the skill. She said, "I feel pretty good about my lesson and unit planning. I think that is one element I really don't have to work on."

What changes in quality and purpose of questions? The TLF describes teachers as effective if they utilize questions that elicit *rigorous student thinking* and if they *differentiate questions to make learning comprehensible for sub-groups of students* (LAUSD, n.d.b). When participants were asked about how their *Quality and Purpose of Questions* were affected by participating in the TGDC, six of the nine participants acknowledged some type of change. Of these, three modified their questioning techniques to elicit *rigorous student thinking*. Two teachers made specific changes to their questioning techniques to *make learning comprehensible for sub-groups of students*, while the third teacher had self identified this element after completing the Teacher Self-Assessment, prior to participating in formal classroom observations.

The three teachers that modified their questioning techniques to make their lessons more rigorous felt they had to do a better job of cognitively challenging their students. This is evident by Peter Ortiz's explanation of how his experience in the TGDC has changed his practice, "My questioning techniques have changed since I began this process because I make it a point to ask higher order questions so that students are challenged." Mr. Ortiz's acknowledgement of the changes in how he uses questions is similar to Ms. Dolores's and Mr. Anthony's responses. Ms. Dolores Olsen recalled, "I realized that I had to ask more thought provoking questions so that students could truly master the concepts I was teaching." The teachers made a conscious effort to

create challenging questions that would push students past a superficial understanding of the content. Gerry Anthony explained:

> I am focusing on asking more open-ended questions, rather than just basic yes or no recall questions. I want my students to really know their stuff and I all I had to do was make it a point to ask better questions. I could already see if it's working. My students are challenged. It's like wow; it just took a little bit more planning on my part.

The teachers' experience in the TGDC facilitated a change in how they utilize questions so that students could gain a deeper understanding of the content being taught. Brooks and Brooks (1993) make the case that effective teachers support student inquiry by "asking thoughtful, open-ended questions and encouraging students to ask questions of each other" (p. 36).

Two of the six teachers who acknowledged changes to *Quality and Purpose of Questions* made specific references to adjusting how they *differentiate questions to make learning comprehensible for sub-groups of students.* Freddy Sandoval was one of those teachers who wanted to make sure that all of his students were learning. He said:

> I had minimal experience teaching English Language Learners, so I had to change the type of questions I asked. I had to create questions that were a little more simplistic with less formal biological terms. I had to bring them along at a pace that would not lose them.

Letty Olivas shared a similar experience to the changes to her questioning techniques; "I had to create different questions that were not so confusing to my English Language Learners and Special needs students. I had to create questions that still kept them engaged and challenged without loosing them." Participating in the TGDC led both teachers to modify their questioning techniques to allow all students to access the material being taught.

Finally, Mr. Mendez knew his questioning techniques were going to be affected by his participation in the TGDC because he had identified it as a focus area when he completed the Teacher Self-Assessment. He said, "I had to change how I utilized questioning techniques because I knew that I was really bad at this. This was a major focus element for me."

One of the three teachers that did not report a change to how she utilized questioning techniques was Nancy Diego. Mrs. Diego explained that she did not have to change this part of her practice because she felt she was strong in this element. This was reinforced when her observing administrator rated her as *highly effective* on this element. Mrs. Diego described her conversation with her administrator during her Post-Observation Conference by stating, "He told me I was great at asking questions. He said that my questions really challenged my kids. I always thought I was pretty good at this, but it felt good to hear that from my observer."

Of the three teachers that did not report a change to *Quality and Purpose of Questions*, two of the teachers were Physical Education (PE) teachers. Steve Fowler felt that this element did not really apply to PE classes because few questions re asked in PE. He said:

> I don't really change the type of questions I use in my class because PE is about activities and drills. The only modifications I make for the different types of learners are break-up the activities into smaller ones and model for them.

Mrs. Rodriguez's explanation was very similar: "PE isn't really conducive to asking questions like a normal class. We only spend about five minutes reviewing the activity as a whole group, and the rest of the time the kids are completing different activities in small groups."

When comparing the teachers that identified changes to their *Quality and Purpose of Questions* instructional techniques to the teachers that identified changes to their *Lesson and Unit Structures* practices, four teachers acknowledged changes to both of the focus elements.

The one teacher that did not acknowledge any changes to either one of the two elements was Nancy Diego.

What changes in other areas of instruction? Of the nine participants in the study, only four identified other areas of their instruction that had changed as a result of participating in the TGDC. Of these four, two identified a change in how they employ assessment data to determine the next steps in their instruction. The TLF describes teachers as effective if they *analyze and use assessment data to plan future instruction for groups of students, including re-teaching and re-assessment if necessary* (LAUSD, n.d.b). The two teachers recognized they had to alter how they use assessment data to include a way in which it could inform their instruction. This is evident by Steve Fowler's statement; "I no longer just use assessment data to assign a grade, but I now use the data to identify what students have mastered and what I need to re-teach." Both teachers learned to recognize assessment data as a driving force for their instructional planning. Mr. Mendez shared the following perspective; "I really learned to take the data from each assessment and use it as a tool as I moved on to the next lesson. The data helps me identify which topics to re-teach while still introducing new material."

Mrs. Olsen reported that the TGDC helped her improve how she interacts with her students. The TLF describes an effective teacher student interaction as one that is *friendly and demonstrates caring and respect*. Mrs. Olsen admitted to previously being sarcastic and not always having positive interactions with her students. She said, "Participating in the TGDC made me be more respectful and positive with my students. I no longer was being sarcastic."

Finally, Nancy Diego reported that the TGDC lead her to improve her system of monitoring students' classroom behavior. The TLF describes a teacher who is effective at *Monitoring and Responding to Student Behavior* as one who *recognizes and appropriately*

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reinforces positive behavior and has a clear and consistent system of addressing negative

behavior or rule breaking (LAUSD, n.d.b). When describing how the TGDC changed how she

responds to student behavior, Mrs. Diego recounted:

> I thought I was doing a good job of managing my kids' behaviors because there weren't
>
> any fights breaking out in my class. Yes, kids would yell out and have a good time, but I
>
> didn't think it was too bad. But after reviewing the description of an effective teacher in
>
> this element, and talking to my observing administrator, I realized had to change some
>
> things. I had to develop a clear and consistent way of respond to negative and appropriate
>
> behavior.

After reflecting on her practice and comparing herself to the TLF's description of an effective

teacher, Mrs. Diego realized she had to make changes to an area of her instruction that she had

previously felt was adequate.

To what did teachers attribute the changes to their practice? When teachers were

asked to reflect on what, if anything, to which they attributed the changes to their instructional

practice, five themes emerged as having the greatest influence, while one emerged as potentially

having an influence. The five themes that influenced their practice were; Teacher Self-

Assessment, Lesson Design Template, Pre-Observation Conference, Formal Observation of

Lesson, Post-Observation Conference. The Possible Threat of Dismissal was identified as

potentially having an influence in the future.

Teacher Self-Assessment. The Teacher Self-Assessment is an activity in which teachers

review their students' achievement data, LAUSD's TLF, and other relevant artifacts, reflecting

on and identifying strengths and areas for improvement in their instruction. Seven of the nine

participants declared that the Teacher Self-Assessment component of the TGDC led them to

reflect on their instruction and identify areas that needed to be improved. When recalling the impact of the Teacher Self Assessment, Steve Fowler recounted, "The self-assessment really made me think about my teaching…about whether or not I'm doing a good job as a teacher and what I need to change." Peter Ortiz had a similar response; "The activity was impactful because it required that I reflect on my practice and assess my abilities in various elements of teaching. By the end of it I knew what I needed to work on."

The process of having to answer questions about where they rate their practice with regards to the elements in the TLF and justifying their ratings with evidence led the seven teachers to critically analyze their instructional practices. Jennifer Rodriguez explained, "Going through the self-assessment was like a reflection, an eye opener. Am I really where I think I am as a teacher? Those questions led me to be honest with myself." Mr. Gerry Anthony described a similar perspective when he said:

> The results of the Teacher Self-Assessment were like a pre-test for my teaching. It told me where I was as a teacher as I began this process. After the TGDC, I should see improvements. My results of the End of the Year Growth Plan will be my post assessment.

The Teacher Self-Assessment facilitated the identification and development of goals for the improvement of teacher practice. This is best worded by Letty Olivas who described the process as, "thought provoking and the catalyst for change." Completing the Teacher Self-Assessment lead the seven teachers to experience a type of meta-cognitive process of analyzing their instruction.

Lesson Design Template. In addition to the Teacher Self-Assessment, five of the participating teachers identified using the Lesson Design Template to influence how they lesson

planned. Every participating teacher was required to write the lesson for his/her formal

observation utilizing the district's Lesson Design Template. The template outlines teachers'

instructional plans for their formal classroom observation, as well as providing them with

guiding questions that are meant to coach and support them as they address the needs identified

in the Teacher-Self Assessment and the needs of the various student sub-groups in their class.

Utilizing the new lesson template led the five teachers to experience a paradigm shift related to

how they perceive lesson planning. Fowler described the effects of using the Lesson Design

Template on his lesson planning practices as follows:

> It was challenging because lesson planning wasn't one of my strongest areas. I mean
> designing a lesson that requires me to ensure that each sub-group in my class is addressed
> was tough. I never planned or even thought about my lessons like that.

Similarly, Dolores Olsen also experienced a drastic change in how she perceives lesson planning

as a result of using the template:

> When I first saw the template I thought it was unreasonable to try to do address so much
> in one lesson. But once I taught the lesson I was like, wow, I guess I can teach a lesson
> where I address all of those components.

Freddy Sandoval expressed a similar sentiment; "Personally, it was pretty challenging because I

never planned the way the template required me to. It was really a tool that helped me improve

my planning. It helped me cover all my bases."

The five teachers described the lesson planning process as different and challenging

because they were forced to plan in a way that they had not planned in the past. Letty Olivas

described the lesson planning activity as "challenging because it totally change how I planned

my lessons." This approach to lesson planning approach taken by teachers for their formal

observation during the TGDC was completely different compared to their experience with the old way of classroom observations. This is evident in Mr. Sandoval's comments:

> Unlike the old way, I actually felt that this way of planning allows me to showcase what I can do as a teacher and get credible feedback on what I need to improve on. The old way felt like it was just something that needed to get done. It was common for the lesson to be generic; usually something that kept kids working and kept them quite.

The five participants that identified the Lesson Design Template as having an influence on their instruction were the same teachers that identified changes to their lesson and unit structures.

Pre-Observation Conference. In addition to the use of the Lesson Design Template, the Pre-Observation Conference also influenced teachers' instruction. Of the nine participating teachers, five recognized that the Pre-Observation Conference had an impact on their instructional practices. The Pre-Observation Conference allows administrators to gain a better understanding of teachers' purpose, structure, and activities for the lesson being observed, as well as allowing the administrator to offer ideas on how to improve the lesson. Freddy Sandoval shared one example of an administrator's suggestion that helped improve a lesson; "My administrator took a look at it, and we went over it together. He gave me some pointers and ideas as to what I might want to adjust. The discussion helped me make the lesson better." Mr. Anthony shared a similar experience;

> During the lesson we discussed the structure and goal of my lesson. He gave me ideas on where and what kind of questions to ask to make my lesson better because he knew *Quality and Purpose of Questions* is an element I know I need to improve in.

> In addition to allowing the administrator an opportunity to provide the teacher with explicit suggestions on improving his/her lesson, the pre-observation conference allows the

administrator to ask questions that allows teacher to generate his/her own conclusions on how to improve his/her lessons. The administrator can use various questioning techniques that guide the teacher to self-identify ideas of improving their lesson. Mrs. Letty Olivas shared her perspective:

> He gave me some feedback, but the fact that he listened to me as I talked myself through the lesson and asked clarifying questions, really allowed me to identify ideas on how to improve the lesson myself. The conversation really helped me feel like I really knew what I wanted to teach.

Peter Ortiz described something similar; "We discussed the lesson and they asked me questions about different components. Having to answer their questions really made me reflect on specific elements of the lesson and helped me make slight changes that made the lesson better." The conversation and its impact on the teacher and administrator during the Pre-Observation Conference component of the TGDC differed from some of the conversations had by teachers during the old way of classroom observations. This is evident in Mr. Sandoval's comparison;

> I just think the pre-observation during the TGDC was a lot more detailed and valuable compared to the old way. Those conferences were a lot more vague. We didn't have a real meaningful discussion about my lesson. It was very more superficial.

Formal observation of lesson. The lesson observation component of the TGDC was one of the aspects of the cycle that all nine participants identified as having an effect on their practice. The formal observation provides an opportunity for the teacher to demonstrate his/her instructional practice in order to receive feedback that will support his/her professional growth and development. Every participant stated that his/her administrator observed his/her 60-minute lesson in its entirety. The teachers shared the opinion that since administrators observed their lessons in their entirety, the administrators earned a level of credibility and perspective that

empowered the type of feedback they provided teachers during the Post-Observation Conference. Peter Ortiz recalled, "He was there for the entire period. Since he saw the whole lesson, the good and the bad, I was more willing to listen to and implement his feedback." Nancy Diego shared a similar experience;

> Being that I teach science, my lessons are sometimes a bit heavy and complicated. I stress
> to my students the importance of getting to class on time every day to avoid falling
> behind or getting confused. That is why getting feedback on a lesson that my
> administrator observed, from beginning to end, is ideal. He is able to analyze and provide
> feedback on my lesson from the students' perspective, which is what I'm trying to
> improve.

When administrators observe the majority of the lesson and collect sufficient information, teachers are more open to the feedback they receive from their administrators.

The experience of having administrators observe them for the entire period was new for the majority of the teachers. The eight teachers that had been formally observed under the old way of conducting classroom observations had never been observed for an entire period. Dolores Olsen shared the following experience;

> The principal would come in for about 20 minutes, get a call on the radio, and then run
> out. She would return with about 5 minutes left in the lesson, and then tell me during the
> post observation conference how great my lesson was. It was a joke.

Freddy Sandoval shared a similar experience, "My A.P. would come in and observe me 20 minutes into my 50 minute lesson...after the lesson he would leave me a generic form with boxes checked off…that's it." Although Mr. Sandoval's administrator did not observe the entire lesson, his experience was better than Charles Mendez's experience. Mr. Mendez said:

In the past I would meet with my administrator and schedule my formal observation and he would always miss it. He would proceed to reschedule the observation only to miss it again. This would happen about three times, then would show up to my classroom the last week of school and ask me to sign-off on his observation form where he would always rate me as exceptional.

According to the eight teachers' responses, when the classroom observations were brief, there was little chance that the Post-Observation Conferences could lead to improved instructional practices.

Post-Observation Conference. The Post-Observation Conference allows the administrator and teacher to review evidence collected during the observation and to discuss and reflect on the success of the lesson. All of the participants stated that the Post-Observation Component of the TGDC had an impact on their instruction. Four of the seven teachers credited the ideas provided by their administrators during their Post-Observation Conference as actionable feedback that improved their instruction. Freddy Sandoval explained, "After discussing what it was that he observed and listening to his suggestions, I went back in my lesson and changed a few things to make it better. He really helped me take the lesson to the next level." The specific suggestions offered by administrators during the Post-Observation Conference gave teachers clear ideas that can be implemented immediately. Steve Fowler had a similar experience;

During the conference we discussed the lesson and he gave me really good ideas on how I can make my lesson better. He gave me really good ideas on how to check for understanding at various points in the lesson, ways I had never thought about before.

The administrators' suggestions during the Post-Observation Conference helped teachers grow their teaching repertoire.

In addition to improving their lessons by receiving actionable feedback, five of the nine teachers identified that the changes to their instruction were a result of how the administrator facilitated the conference. The teachers felt the administrators did not tell them what could be improved, but asked them questions that made them self-identify areas of improvements. Dolores Olsen explained;

> I wouldn't say that he gave me a lot of feedback during the Post-Observation Conference; I would say he just had a lot of questions. As we talked about the lesson, he asked me various questions that lead me to critically analyze and challenge my perceptions of the lesson's effectiveness. He just really helped me reflect on my lesson on a totally different level.

The administrators facilitated the Post-Observation Conference to allow teachers to reflect on and analyze their instruction, thinking about ways to improve their instruction. Gerry Anthony recalled; "The conversation helped me see things from students' perspective. I learned that I must always reflect on my lesson and see things from their [students'] eyes so that I can make the lesson better for them."

The dialogues during the Post-Observation Conference led teachers to constantly reflect on their instruction and analyze it objectively from various perspectives (e.g., students, administrators, parents). Mrs. Rodriguez described how an objective conversation about her instruction led her and her observing administrator come to a mutual agreement about her instruction. She shared the following;

We went through the rubric and discussed what an ineffective teacher is, what's a

developing, and do on. He then asked me, "Where do you think you fall?" I'm like you

know what I know I wasn't a totally highly effective, but I feel like I was here, effective.

He said, "I totally agree with you because you did this, this, and that." And so it made me

feel that we're both on the same page as far as my instruction.

This was different than her experience during with the Post-Observation Conference during the

old way of formal classroom observations. She said, "In the past my administrator would just tell

me I did a good job and ask me to sign my Stull. That's it. There was no conversation about how

I could improve my instruction." That is why during the TGDC, the Post-Observation

Conference allows administrators an opportunity to provide teachers with explicit ideas on how

to improve instruction, or it can allow for an administrator to facilitate a conversation where the

teacher critically analyzes his/her instruction.

Possible threat of dismissal. The same six teachers identified the threat of dismissal as

potentially influencing their practice. The growing sentiment around the district that teachers will

soon be evaluated solely on student performance seems to have struck a cord with this group of

teachers. Peter Ortiz shared; "If I will be evaluated solely on my students' performance, then you

bet I will be working to be the best possible teacher." These teachers acknowledged potentially

being motivated to improve their practice if they faced a threat of dismissal if their students were

not performing at grade level. Gerry Anthony described a similar perspective on the influence

this might have; "It would have a great influence on my instruction. I'm the major breadwinner

in my family. I can't lose my job." The potential threat of losing their jobs would be a great

motivator for these six teachers to improve their practice. These teachers realized that if the

district decides to pursue an evaluation system that weighs student performance heavily, every

teacher would be forced to improve his/her practice. Freddy Sandoval shared his perspective; "If they say, 'You are going to be dismissed because your students' performance doesn't measure up,' you bet I'm going to change my practice along with every other teachers in this district."

However, in contrast, three teachers did not feel that threat of dismissal would influence their instruction. Regarding how this might influence his instruction, Steve Fowler stated:

That wouldn't affect me because I just feel I come in everyday and do my job. My administrator supports me wholeheartedly and he knows I'm here doing the best job possible. As long as I'm doing my best I don't have to think about that.

Mr. Fowler felt that as long as he worked hard on his craft and continued to work alongside of his administrator at evolving as a teacher, his job would not be in jeopardy.

Jennifer Rodriguez had a different perspective as to why the threat of dismissal would not influence her instruction. She said, "If the district does do that, then they would have to fire about 50% of the teachers in our district because about half of our kids are not performing at grade level." She felt that the district would never follow through with such drastic measures as firing thousands of teachers solely on student performance.

An explanation for why these three teachers do not perceive the potential threat of dismissal as influencing their practice might be their years of experience. All three teachers had more than 6 years of teaching experience, and two had more than 16 years of experience. Mrs. Letty Olivas, one of the two most experienced teachers, said the following about how the threat of dismissal might influence her instruction; "I think at this point of my career, no, it wouldn't influence my instruction at all."

How did teachers describe the feedback from their administrator? All nine teachers had a positive description of the type of feedback they received from their observing

administrator during the TGDC, and stated that this feedback facilitated some improvement in their instruction. The cycle of feedback begins during the Pre-Observation Conference when administrators provide teachers with feedback on their lesson plan for the formal lesson observation, and continues through the Post-Observation Conference. Five of the nine teachers described the feedback as relevant to their lesson and to what they were trying to teach. One example of relevant feedback during TGDC was the feedback that Mr. Fowler received on his lesson plans during the Pre-Observation Conference. Steve Fowler stated, "The feedback was actually relevant to my lesson and we discussed how to make it better…it wasn't a lot of theoretical jargon discussed." The teachers described the feedback as positive because they felt it was centered on improving elements of specific lessons. This same sentiment was shared by Letty Olivas, who described the feedback she received during the Post-Observation Conference as "very direct and specific…not as vague…We talked about some adjustments to make the lesson more effective."

In addition to describing the feedback as relevant, five teachers described the administrators' feedback as having actionable focus or content. They shared how their administrator provided them with specific strategies and ideas at various points in the EGDC that improved their instruction. Charles Mendez recalled how his administrator gave him strategies to front load vocabulary words to his English Language Learners;

> During the Pre-Observation Conference he suggested I provide my struggling English
> Language Learners with the translation of some of the words in the book. This will allow
> them to understand the meaning of the word so that they can follow along to the story.

This type of specific idea helps teachers make immediate changes to their lessons while providing them with strategies they can use with future lessons.

Five teachers made references to their administrators' use of questioning techniques as a type of feedback that facilitated a reflection on their practice that led to instructional improvements. These teachers shared that their administrators asked them questions that led them to reflect on their instruction and self-identify areas of improvements in their lessons. Nancy Diego shared how her administrator asked her questions during the Pre-Observation Conference that allowed her to self-identify areas of improvement; "He would ask me questions that made me realize I hadn't thought about certain parts of my lesson. He helped me be critical of every aspect of my lesson."

Lastly, five of the nine teachers described the feedback from their administrators as objective. Administrators participating in classroom observations as part of the TGDC are required to note what they observe during their classroom observations objectively. Administrators are trained not to allow for their observations to be influenced by their personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudices, but rather must base them on facts. The observing administrator cannot infer what is going on, and must only note what he/she observes. This is demonstrated by Steve Fowler's experience, "During the Post-Observation Conference my principal was able to say, 'Okay, out of 15 kids, 13 were engaged'. And I know this because 13 tracked you with their eyes as you moved around the room." Teachers felt that the administrators were not making assumptions about the lesson but only reporting what was going on in the classroom.

What changes in practice did administrators report? This study tried to capture the perspectives of three administrators, one principal from each of the two schools, along with one assistant principal that is shared by both schools. All three administrators were male and all of them had less then 5 years of administrative experience. In terms of experience with conducting

formal classroom observations, only one of the three administrators had administrative experience with the old way of conducting classroom observations. With only one of the administrators having administrative experience with the old way of conducting classroom observations, there were limited opportunities to compare their experiences between the old way and new way of conducting classroom observations. Therefore, most of the information gathered about administrators' changes in practice was about learned practices, not changes in practice.

The three participating administrators identified three major changes to their practice they attributed to their participation in the TGDC. First, the three administrators recognized that they learned to conduct more objective classroom observations as a result of the TGDC. In addition, all three administrators agreed that they gained a greater commitment to conducting classroom observations as a result of this experience. Last of all, all three administrators reported an increased use of vocabulary found in the TLF when they discussed classroom instruction with teachers or within themselves.

Objective observations. One change in practice the administrators identified as result of their experience was how they conduct classroom observations. All administrators that participate in the TGDC go through a weeklong training where they review the TLF that is the foundation for the EGDC. Before an administrator is allowed to go out and formally observe a teacher, he/she must pass an assessment that certifies him/her as a formal observer. The assessment requires the administrator to objectively observe a video of a teacher's lesson and rate that teacher's instruction on TLF's focus elements. District experts determine if the administrator correctly rated the teacher's practice and award administrators certifications.

All three participating administrators reported learning to observe classrooms objectively. The classroom observations in the TGDC allow observers to collect evidence of teacher practice

that is then used as the basis for feedback to improve teacher practice. All three administrators

reported struggling to leave their subjectivity out of what they noted as classroom teacher

practice. Fernando Avila shared his struggle when he stated, "It was tough for me not to make

inferences about what I was observing…I had to force my self to note only what I saw, not what

I felt." Administrators are tasked with finding solutions to various issues; many times they must

first interpret the issue and recommend the appropriate intervention. The administrators felt it

was difficult not to do that during classroom observations. Mr. Martinez recalled, "I had to stop

diagnosing teachers' practice and noting suggestions during the actual observation… I had to

consciously note only what I observed and not my recommendations, I had to wait to give

recommendations until the Post-Observation Conference."

   Increased commitment to classroom observations. The second change the administrators

described as result of their experience from the TDGC was an increased commitment to

conducting classroom observations. All three described how their participation in the EGDC led

them to develop a sense of responsibility to visit classrooms on consistent bases to observe the

instructional practices that were taking place. This is reflected in Mario Bennett's statement, "I

felt I had to be in classrooms observing instruction…it became my number one priority." The

administrators explained that their teachers' commitment to the process drove them to develop a

sense of obligation to match the same amount of commitment. Anthony Martinez shared a

similar perception when he said, "I put operational things in the back burner…I made it a point

to be in the classroom observing teachers' instruction and match their commitment to the

process." This sense of commitment to classroom observation is a sharp contrast to how

administrators described their classroom observation practices prior to the TGDC. Mr. Avila

said, "In the old way, classroom observations were basically compliance checks. I would try to

hit about four or five classes each period." In contrast, Mr. Avila now describes classrooms observations as one of his top priorities, stating, "I have to be in classes everyday observing teachers' practice. I want to know where my teachers are, and how I can help them."

Consistent use of TLF's vocabulary. Lastly, all three administrators reported an increased use of vocabulary found in the TLF. The administrators described using the vocabulary found in the framework whenever they discussed classroom instruction with teachers. They found this to be the case more so with teachers participating in the TGDC because they all had extensive training in the district's framework. Mr. Avila said, "I used the vocabulary from the framework more often because I felt that we, teachers and administrators, all knew what those words meant." The vocabulary from the framework provided a common language when discussing classroom instruction. Prior to the TGDC, teachers and administrators did not have a standardized way of discussing instruction because they did not always use the same language, which led to unproductive conversations about how to improve teaching practices. Mr. Bennett explained:

> Many times when I would discuss my observations with teachers that were not participating in the TGDC, I felt that were speaking different languages. It was tough making suggestions because I would constantly refer to the framework and he or she wouldn't know what I was talking about.

The teachers in this study corroborated the use of the TLF's vocabulary by administrators. Freddy Sandoval stated that the principal "made it a point to use the language from the framework during our conversations. It helped us have a common language when we discussed my teaching."

Part Two: Additional Findings and Emerging Themes

In addition to generating findings based on the research questions, the interviews revealed additional findings that provide insights into the unique experience of teachers and administrators participating in the TGDC. The additional findings describe individual and collective characteristics that might have influenced participants' experiences. The first set of additional findings relate to teachers' expectations for the TGDC, along with individual teacher characteristics that arose from the data. The second set of findings relate to the school's positive school climate, which is illustrated by supportive faculty and a collaborative environment. The last finding refers to the participants' description of their experience in the TGDC as positive. While the themes are reported as being discrete, there is considerable overlap among them. Further, participants' responses to interview questions often addressed more than one theme. In those cases, the interview data are used where they appear to fit most logically.

No expectations for the EGDC. Eight of the nine teachers mentioned they did not know much about the process prior to volunteering to participate in the TGDC. This lack of information allowed teachers to experience the TGDC without any clearly defined concepts of the process or expectations. Mrs. Olivas explained how much she knew of the process thusly;

> I actually read somewhere about it, in those newsletters that the Superintendent puts out so often electronically. I think there was a small article or blurb about it. It said it was a pilot program that would invite participating teachers to share their thoughts about the process. That's it.

Steve Fowler said something similar; "To be honest, I didn't know much. We were asked to volunteer and I thought it might be an opportunity for me to gain some knowledge." Teachers experienced the process with little to no expectations, which allowed teachers' own attitudes,

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work ethics, and individual school cultures to influence their experience. Fred Simmons's experience reflects this point. He said, "I didn't have a whole lot of information or expectations coming into this. I just wanted this process to help me improve some things." Mr. Simmons improving his teaching allowed him to perceive the TGDC as positive opportunity to become a better teacher.

  Teachers' commitment to improving instruction practice. Through analyzing interview transcripts, I found that all nine teachers demonstrated some level of commitment to improving their instructional practice. Teachers' commitment to improving their practice was evident by their desire to improve their craft and their seeking opportunities to do so. Mrs. Olivas demonstrated this commitment by stating, "I'm one of those teachers that's always excited to go to this PD, or that PD, or try this, try that. I need to find ways to get better." Mr. Fowler shared a similar attitude towards his practice when he said, "It's just like a personal challenge for me now. This is my trade, teaching is my trade, and teaching is my career choice. So it's natural for me to want to improve my practice." Mrs. Olsen used similar terms when she described her commitment to improving her practice; "I'm a craftsman, a craftswoman. This is my craft, and I'm always trying to improve my trade as an educator." The nine teachers made various references to a constant drive to improve their practice, which they felt was a natural part of being a teacher.

  Charles Mendez and Gerry Anthony, who were the participating teachers with the least amount of teaching experience, made similar comments about wanting to improve their practice by working with more experienced teachers. Mr. Mendez said:

I want to pick their brain [referring to teachers in their department] because they have

been doing this so much longer than I have. I want to make my lessons better by

including those little tricks that more experience teachers do.

Mr. Anthony shared, "I want to observe my peers teaching more often. I know they have more

effective ways to teach concepts." Mr. Mendez's and Mr. Anthony's desire to improve their

practice reflect the rest of the participating teachers' commitment to improve their practice.

Participating teachers' commitment to improve their practice is supported by the fact that

seven of the nine teachers shared specific examples of reflecting on their practice that led to

improvements in their instruction. Teachers shared examples of reflecting on their practice and

identifying areas for improvements throughout the TGDC.

The seven teachers' willingness to reflect on their practice was demonstrated at various

points during the TGDC. Teachers' reflective nature was evident when they discussed the

Teacher Self-Assessment component of the TGDC. Mrs. Olivas recalled the reflective process by

sharing, "I want to be highly effective, and that's my goal. If I rank as 'developing' in an area,

I'll reflect upon it. I'll think about what I need to do improve those things." It seemed as if the

seven teachers' willingness to reflect on various elements of their instruction would have a

positive effect on their instruction. This same sentiment was shared by Mr. Mendez who

described the TGDC in this way; "The entire process allowed me to reflect about my entire

instructional practice. Everything." Teachers' reflective nature feeds their commitment to

improving their practice.

Positive school climate. A second theme that emerged from the data was the participants'

positive description of the schools' positive climate. Krug (1992) describes school climate as

"the set of internal characteristics that influence the behaviors of each school's members, shared

values, and commonly held definitions of purpose" (p. 2). Six teachers and all three administrators made specific references to their schools as having a positive school climate at the time of the study. In addition, a combination of seven different participating teachers from both campuses and all three administrators described their colleagues as supportive and a different combination of six teachers and all three administrators described their working environment as collaborative.

The positive perception of the school described by these nine individuals is evident in their description of their supportive faculty and collaborative working environment. These nine individuals described their working environment as having a positive effect on how they work. Teacher Mrs. Rodriguez explained, "We are a small family…We are very united and I feel like I belong…That makes me work extremely hard together." Charles Mendez shared a similar perception of his school, stating, "Everyone is real nice to each other, everyone says 'hi' or 'good morning.' You don't see people give each other dirty looks, or anything like that." The teachers' positive school climate gives them the confidence to work together and seek each other's help to improve their instructional practice.

Some participants believed the perception of a positive school climate was not limited to teachers, but that students also had similar experiences. Mr. Ortiz said, "It's a very positive school climate. Kids feel like they belong to a small community. There's a lot of unity. Even though we are two schools, the kids still interact with each other, the staff interacts with each other." Anthony Martinez, the administrator who works with both schools, described the school climate in a similar way; "The students and adults work together all the time. It is a very positive working environment for adults and students." This positive school climate allows for positive interactions between all stakeholders.

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Although there are two schools on this campus, a combination of seven teachers from both campuses and all three administrators shared experiences where they described their colleagues as supportive. This is evident in Mrs. Olsen's recollection of the reaction when teachers were presented with the opportunity to participate in the TGDC, "There was excitement because we had anywhere from 11-16 teachers that volunteered to do it. Everyone was excited about it. 'Are you doing it'? 'Are you doing it?' 'Yeah, I'm doing it.' 'Great! Let's do it together." The faculty showed support for each other in various ways. Mr. Avila, who was sponsoring a club on campus, recalled how the majority of the faculty was willing to support his club's fundraiser; "We were selling candy after school to raise money, and the majority of the staff was willing to spend a few bucks to help us out."

But the support was not limited to interactions between teachers. Mr. Avila, one of the principals, shared the following, "Mr. Bennett [the other principal] and I help each other out. We both understand that when one helps out the other, we both benefit in the long run." The administrators understand that with limited resources, they need to support each other to be successful. The supportive atmosphere expressed by both faculty teams allows for increased collaboration.

Six teachers and all three administrators described their working environment and interactions with their colleagues as collaborative, discussing their colleagues' willingness and commitment to working together to accomplish various goals, such as when both principals wanted to provide their teachers with professional development on AVID strategies, yet they both lacked the budget flexibility to provide individual trainings. Principal Bennett described their solution; "We decided to put our money together and provide the professional development to both of our staff for half of the cost to each school."

The collaborative nature of both staff teams makes it easy to reach out for help, which leads to improved teaching practice. When asked to describe her working environment, Mrs. Olivas said, "Comfortable, confident, supportive…we are a group of teachers that collaborate wonderfully." Charles Mendez shared an experience where his department demonstrated its collaborative nature; "My department gets together and plans assessments. We are constantly talking about our lessons and we help each other make them better." Creating a culture of collaboration is must be embraced and practiced by teachers and administrators.

Six of the nine teachers credited the positive school climate to their supportive administrators, describing their administrators as colleagues who are there to support teachers and students. Mr. Fowler described his administrators as, "Great! Our administrators take the time to address our needs and concerns which just makes teaching that much easier." Administrators' supportive nature allows teachers to focus on improving their practice, facilitating teachers' professional growth and increased confidence. As a result, teachers described a greater willingness to implement different strategies that might result in improved student performance. Mrs. Rodriguez described her administrators as:

> Very supportive and open to new ideas. Our department is able to incorporate new units that would not be considered in other schools, but because our administrators have been extremely supportive, we are trying new things that are working well.

Teachers' positive descriptions of their administrators seem to positively influence how teachers approach their job.

Positive overall experience. When participants where asked to describe their experience in the TGDC, every participant described his/her overall experience as positive. The participants shared various reasons for why their experience in TGDC was positive. Two participating

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teachers made specific mention of how the structures of the TGDC led to a positive experience. The different components of the TGDC provided teachers and administrators with various opportunities improve their practice. Steve Fowler said:

> My experience was definitely positive…the whole process has opened my eyes to my practice, and really made me think about what it is I teach and how I want to present the material. For me it was all positive.

Jennifer Rodriguez had a similar description of the process, "The whole process was positive; the planning, the reflection, the pre-observation, the post observation, everything. Again, if you are passionate about what you do, then this is a good tool for you."

In addition to mentioning the structure TGDC as the reason for a positive experience, two teachers stated that their participation in the TGDC was positive because the process allowed them to reflect on their practice. Gerry Anthony described his experience as positive because it "it gives teachers a chance to reflect on teaching. And see how you can improve." Mr. Charles Mendez shared a similar experience; "It was positive because it really helped me reflect and identify what I needed to improve. It gave me real ideas on how to do improve." The opportunity to reflect on their practice was instrumental in teachers' positive perception of their experience.

One teacher and all three administrators mentioned how the TGDC allowed for conversations about instruction, which led to their positive experience of the process. Mrs. Letty Olivas described her experience as positive because TGDC "provided the opportunity for my colleagues and I to have in depth quality conversations and discussions around instruction." Similarly, Mr. Martinez, the assistant principal for both schools, also described his experience as positive because of the dialogue that is embedded in the TGDC. "It really allowed me to talk to teachers about instruction. I really felt like an instructional leader that had a clear

understanding of what good teaching is and it showed when I talked with teachers about their instruction."

One teacher described her experience as positive because they felt the TGDC provided her with specific and useful information on how to improve her practice. Nancy Diego said, "I thought the experience was positive because it gave you real and useful information. The whole process was about improvement…about getting better." The TGDC provided teachers with concrete examples of how to improve their practice, either via the feedback they received during the Pre and Post-Observation Conferences, or simply the specific teaching elements outlined in the TLF.

Lastly, one teacher described her experience as positive because she felt the process would help improve the quality of teaching within the profession. Dolores Olsen said, "It was positive because I'd like to see those crappy teachers take their job more seriously. If they're not making the cut, they need go find a new career." The teachers had different reasons why their participation in the TGDC was positive, but all teachers made reference to this process as helping improve their practice.

Participant Recommendations

During the interviews, participants were given an opportunity to provide recommendations for improving the TGDC. Five of the nine teachers recommended that the process be shortened, describing the process as taking too much time. Mrs. Olivas shared her perspective; "It's too long. They need to make it shorter if they want more teachers to buy-in." The participants suggested that a shorter process could lead to greater teacher voluntary participation. Mr. Mendez shared a similar thought when he said, "I felt tired after the process. If I knew it was going to be so much work, I might have not volunteered for the process." Two

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participating administrators shared similar concerns regarding the length or amount of work involved in the TGDC. The administrators questioned whether administrators throughout the district would be able to commit so much of their time to this process. Mr. Avila shared his perspective; "The process is overwhelming for us (administrators). I have friends that are administrators at real tough schools. All they do is put out fires. I don't know how they can do everything that the TGDC requires." The administrators felt that the TGDC in its present format is not sustainable if it is rolled out district-wide.

A second recommendation shared by two teachers was to alter the TGDC process to allow for video recording of lessons. The recommendation serves two purposes. First, one teacher believed that video recording lessons would help improve the experience for the teacher being observed. If the lesson is video recorded, then the observing administrator can give specific feedback to the teacher regarding the lesson and he/she could refer to the video as evidence. Mr. Anthony referred this when he said, "One thing I would do is add a video taping component. I think it would benefit me if I saw my own lesson while I was receiving feedback."

The second purpose of video recording the lessons was expressed by two teachers and one administrator, who felt this technique would help combat the concern over sustainability. The teachers shared that video recording the lessons would help capture the lesson for an administrator who, for whatever reason, was not able to attend the classroom observation. The teachers stressed how planning for the formal classroom observation during the TGDC was a lot of work, and how if the administrator missed the observation, the process might lose credibility. A loss of credibility might negatively affect any plan to expand the implementation of the TGDC. Mr. Fowler described his rationale for video recording thusly; "I would feel more comfortable if I video taped the lesson. I understand administrators have to deal with

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emergencies, but if my lesson is scheduled when something important comes up, then that means my hard work was for naught." Principal Bennett offered a similar idea, suggesting, "The lesson must be recorded to ensure that the process isn't compromised if I have to deal with a fight or other 'emergencies' that we have to deal with."

Summary of the Findings

This chapter reported on research findings based on analysis of two sets of semi-structured interviews conducted with nine teachers and three administrators participating in the TGDC. The findings in this chapter were discussed in two parts. The data in the first part of the chapter presented the first set of major findings that addressed the research questions. The second part of this chapter presented additional findings based on major themes that emerged from the data. When combined, the two sets of data provided a better understanding of the participants' perceptions of their experience during the TGDC.

With regards to the first research question that asked teachers to report changes in practice as a result of participating the TGDC, all nine participating teachers identified at least one aspect of their instruction that was affected. The first sub-question that referred to how, if at all, the participants' lesson and unit structures were affected; a combination of six of the nine teachers reported some changes. A different combination of six teachers acknowledged noteworthy changes in response to the second sub-question that referred to how participants' design and utilization of questions were affected by participating in the TGDC. In response to the third sub-question, how any other areas of instruction were affected by participating in the TGDC, only four of the nine participants identified other areas of their instruction that changed.

The fourth sub-question that asked teachers to identify to what they attributed the changes to their practice resulted in at least five of the participants identifying the following six

themes: Teacher Self-Assessment, Lesson Design Template, Pre-Observation Conference, Formal Observation of Lesson, Post-Observation Conference, and Possible Threat of Dismissal. The fifth sub-question that asked teachers to describe the type of feedback they received from their administrators resulted in all nine of the teachers describing the feedback as positive.

The second research question asked how administrators' practice changed during their participation in the TGDC. The three major changes to administrators' practice identified by all three of the administrators were an increased commitment to conducting classroom observations, objective observations, and consistent use of the TLF's vocabulary.

The second section of this chapter presented the additional findings that emerged as major themes from the data. The first set of additional findings is related to teachers' expectations for the TGDC, along with individual teacher characteristics that arose from the data. The second set of additional findings is related to the school's positive school climate, which is illustrated by supportive faculty and collaborative environment. The last finding in this section refers to the participants' description of their experience in the TGDC.

It is hard to deny the effects of LAUSD's new TGDC on the teachers and administrators of these two schools. To that end, Chapter 5 discusses the larger context of the themes that emerged from this study, the relationship between this study's findings and existing research, this study's limitations, and recommendations for future practice and research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

A report released by the Lumina Foundation for Education (Matthews, 2009) predicts an impending shortage of 16 million college-educated adults in the American workforce by 2025. Presently, the nation's educational system is graduating about 71% of all high school students. When looking at African American and Hispanic students, the graduation rate is closer to 50% (Chapman et al., 2011). Research shows that highly effective teachers can be key for helping improve educational and economic outcomes for low performing students in all sub-groups (Hanushek, 2010).

Therefore, it is imperative that schools, districts, and states improve their ability to identify effective teachers and teaching practices by creating formal evaluation tools that can identify, inform, and stimulate a teacher's direct influence on students' academic performance (Ed Source, 2011). Weisberg et al. (2009), who researched teacher evaluation practices of 12 districts in four states, concluded that the focal point of teacher evaluation must be to facilitate the improvement of teacher practice and effectiveness, not just document poor performance as a way to move for teacher dismissal. Existing research suggest that quality observation systems likely to lead to this kind of improvement are based on clear objective standards of practice that are conducted by multiple trained evaluators over multiple observations (Danielson, 2009).

In the 2010-2011 school year, LAUSD responded to the issue of low student performance by piloting a new teacher evaluation system that they hoped would help improve teacher practice by creating a more robust standardized way of evaluating and supporting teachers' instruction. LAUSD partnered with TLS to develop a TLF that provides common language for guiding the district's discussions and improvement efforts around instructional practices. The TLF acts as a

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guide for teachers to analyze, reflect upon, and improve their teaching practice independently, with colleagues, and/or with their administrator as part of the TGDC: the district's formal classroom observation cycle, which is composed of the Teacher Self-Assessment, Lesson Design, Pre-Observation Conference, Observation of Lesson, and Post-Observation Conference (LAUSD, n.d.b).

The TLF is based on Charlotte Danielson's (1996) Framework for Effective Teaching. The district's framework highlights researched-based strategies that have been proven to be effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners including English Learners and Students with Disabilities. It identifies five standards, which refer to a distinct aspect of teaching, 22 components, which describe a distinct aspect of a domain, and 61 elements, which describe specific features of a component (LAUSD, n.d.b).

The purpose of my study this to record what teachers and administrators self-reported to be their experiences as they navigated through this new evaluation process, with a focus on how the new observation protocol affected their instructional practice. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators to capture detailed descriptions of how they experienced this new evaluation system and how it has affected their instructional practices.

In this chapter, I highlight the findings from Chapter 4 and discuss how they are linked to related literature. I then discuss the implications for practice prompted by the literature along with the findings in this study by identifying certain elements that must be present at each school to ensure the success of this evaluation system when rolling it out district-wide. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on the limitations of the study along with a personal reflection.

Conclusions

The conclusions in this section were based on teacher and principal participant responses to the interview questions, along with some themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected. The purpose of this research was to capture teachers' and administrators' perceptions of how, if at all, their participation in LAUSD's new TGDC affected their practice. Through the 18 interviews, two for each participant, that were conducted over a 3-month period during the Spring semester of the 2012-2013 school year, I learned from practitioners how they feel this experience affected their practice. The following conclusions are based on the findings presented in Chapter 4.

The TGDC Promotes Critical Reflection and Professional Learning

The results of the study suggest that the TGDC allows teachers to critically analyze their instruction by facilitating various opportunities for them to reflect on their instructional practices. Of the nine participants, seven teachers declared that the Teacher Self-Assessment component of the TGDC led them to reflect on their instruction and identify areas for improvements. The Teacher Self-Assessment is one of the components of the TGDC that requires teachers to reflect on and analyze their instruction. In addition, five teachers made reference to their administrators' use of questioning techniques as a type of feedback that facilitated reflection on their practice that led to instructional improvements. Although most would agree that reflection is a byproduct of the teaching profession, research shows that critical reflection that leads to substantial change in instruction is a skill that is developed. Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) argue that reflection that leads to improved instruction is a learned skill that must be developed consciously. Reflection leads teachers to identify the areas of their instruction that are strong and those that need to be improved. Danielson (2007) suggests that "reflection is inherent in self-assessment,

which leads inevitably to a focus for professional learning and growth. Although the two activities-reflection and self-assessment-might be considered to be distinct conceptually, in practice they are intertwined; one cannot happen without the other" (p. 170). The EGDC provides teachers with opportunities to reflect on, self-assess, and discuss their classroom practices as a vital tool for continually improving their instruction (Danielson, 2007).

The findings suggest that teachers and administrators who participated in this study experienced some level of professional learning through their experience in the TGDC, as a result of multiple opportunities to engage critically in activities that led them to construct and grow their instructional knowledge base. Resnick and Klopfer (1989) describe how individuals construct knowledge; "learners' direct actions, reactions, and interactions with objects, people, rules, norms, and ideas result in the personal construction of and recognition of knowledge and adaptive abilities" (p. 78). For teachers, this construction of knowledge happens as they complete the Teacher Self-Assessment, plan and deliver their lessons, and engage in conversations that take place before and after the lesson. For administrators, this intellectual engagement begins during their required certification observational training, and continues during the conversations that take place during the Pre- and Post-Observation Conferences. In addition, the learning continues when they identify the various components of the teachers' lesson plans and classroom instruction and interpret them against the specific levels of the framework.

The findings revealed that the three participating administrators learned to use the vocabulary found in the TLF when discussing instruction with teachers. Administrators used the vocabulary from the TLF with teachers because it provided a common language when discussing classroom instruction. Prior to the TGDC, teachers and administrators did not have a common understanding or definition of what good teaching is and what it looks like, which led to

misunderstandings and confusion when discussing instruction. The TLF provides clear standards of practice with components and elements that are clearly defined and described.

In addition to learning to use the vocabulary found in the framework, all three administrators learned to conduct objective observations during the TGDC and to focus their observation on teachers' observable behaviors and interactions with students. The process requires administrators to remove all subjectivity when noting behaviors witnessed during the observation, while abstaining from making judgments or recommendations prior to meeting with the teacher during the Post-Observation Conference. This practice is meant to combat one of the biggest challenges with classroom observations: its susceptibility to rater bias (Gallagher, 2004).

Along with providing teachers and administrators with a common vocabulary when discussing instruction, the TGDC allows teachers and administrators to engage in meaningful conversations about practice. The conversations that take place during the Pre- and Post-Observation Conferences are not one-sided or administrator dominated. On the contrary, the way the Pre- and Post-Observation Conferences are structured in the TGDC, they allow for a more balanced conversation that leads to more learning by the teacher. Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) describe an effective model for teacher and administrator dialogue as one in which the supervisor asks non-judgmental open-ended questions that encourage the teachers to think critically about their practice where the two can come to a clear understanding about areas where instruction needs to be improved. Sartain et al.'s (2011) report from the Excellence in Teaching Pilot in CPS described the conferences as being more reflective and having a greater focus on instruction and improvements. Chicago uses its own version of Danielson's framework to provide principals and teachers a common language, make the dialogue more evidence-based, and reduce subjectivity. Although some teachers and some administrators are skeptical that this

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can occur, research shows that many educators who have used the framework for evaluation purposes attests to its results in encouraging professional growth (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008).

The TGDC Had an Impact on Teacher Instructional Practices

Although professional learning does not guarantee improved instructional practices, the results of this study suggest that the TGDC did lead to improved instructional practices among participating teachers. This study focused on two specific areas of practice in the district's TLF—Lesson and Unit Structure, and Quality and Purpose of Questions—chosen because they represented elements of practice with which teachers at the schools where I worked as an administrator constantly struggled.

There is plentiful research on lesson planning and its importance. In *Powerful Lesson Planning Models: The Art of 1,000 Decisions*, Skowron (2001) underscores the importance of careful planning:

> Good planning sets the stage for good teaching, which in turn fosters optimal learning. Teachers who know how to plan know precisely what they want   to accomplish, or more exactly, what they want their students to accomplish. Poor planning results in nobody, including the teacher, having a clear understanding of what it is to be accomplished. Effective instruction starts with an organized instructional plan. (p. 2)

The results of the study strongly suggest that the TGDC had a significant effect on the instructional practices of the teachers interviewed. Of the nine teachers that participated in this study, six teachers reported making changes to their lesson and unit planning practices as result of participating in the TGDC. Of those six teachers, five teachers recognized that using the Lesson Design Template influenced how they plan lessons. The template facilitates teachers' creation of logically sequential lessons that incorporate elements of effective lessons by requiring

teachers to identify the class composition and instructional goals and objectives; monitor student progress, procedures, and instructional sequence; provide targeted support for specific groups of learners, assessments; and plan next steps (LAUSD, n.d.b). The focus on creating comprehensively thought out lessons is central to Danielson's (2007) framework, where it is seen as a critical feature of instructional design that combines instructional outcomes, activities, materials, and methods.

This study suggests that the TGDC has a specific impact on how participant teachers plan the structure of the lesson and how much time is allocated for each activity. The Lesson Design Template in the TGDC requires teachers to identify how much time is allocated for each activity within each lesson. Identifying the amount of time allocated for each activity helps to create a lesson with appropriate structure. Glatthorn (1993) describes effective lesson plans as "delivering instruction that makes effective use of time," as well as, "providing an organized structure for learning for all students" (p. 2). Identifying the amount of time spent for each activity allows for a clearly structured lesson that maximizes instructional time.

The results of this study also suggest that the TGDC had an effect on the types of questions participating teachers used during their instruction; six out of nine teachers reported that the TGDC had an effect in the quality and purpose of questions they used. Research has shown that most of the questions teachers ask during their instruction are lower order questions (Davis & Tinsley, 1967; Filippone, 1998). The TGDC encourages teachers to improve how and which questions to utilize during their instruction by providing multiple opportunities to refine their questioning techniques, which will increase student engagement in higher-level cognitive dialogue (e.g., completing the Teacher Self-Assessment, utilizing the Lesson Design Template, Pre-Observation Conference, etc.). Redfield and Rousseau (1981) describe the difference

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between high level questions and low level questions as follows; "higher cognitive questions require pupils to manipulate information to create and support responses; lower cognitive questions call for verbatim recall or recognition of factual information" (p. 237). Generating high-quality questions promotes thinking by students, encouraging them to make connections among concepts or events that were previously believed to be unrelated and to arrive at new understanding of complex material (Danielson, 2007).

The School Climate Influences How Teachers Experience the TGDC

One of the unexpected themes that arose from the interviews was the positive perception of teachers and administrators about their school climate: specifically, the interactions and relationships among teachers, and between teachers and administrators. Homana, Henry Barber, and Torney-Purta (2006) define school climate as, "The impressions, beliefs, and expectations held by members of the school community about their school as a learning environment" (p. 1). Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) and Heck (2000) also found links between school climate and academic achievement.

Teachers who participated in this study had positive impressions of their schools as learning environments, which seemed to have some influence on their positive experience in this new evaluation system. Hoyle, English, and Steffy (1985) make the argument that school climate may be one of the most important ingredients of a successful instructional program. The interviews provided many examples of teacher perceptions of a positive school climate; teachers described their colleagues and administrators as supportive and recalled receiving instructional support from teachers and administrators on various occasions. The support received by teachers was not limited to the classroom; teachers reported receiving support on non-instructional items, like fundraising for student clubs they sponsored and for support for personal needs. Fullan and

Hargraves (1996) note that without a climate that creates a harmonious and well functioning school, a high degree of academic achievement is difficult to obtain. Collaborative schools cultivate teacher development through communal support, cooperative work, and mutual agreement on the value of education. A collaborative climate is the best setting for learning for teachers as well as students. Schools that create a collaborative climate benefit from greater teacher and student performance and satisfaction (Heck, 2000). The supportive climate at the two schools might be the reason why every teacher reported a positive experience in the TGDC.

The teacher interviews also revealed how the positive school climate created a high level of trust between teachers and administrators. Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) state, "Collegial environments feel safe and nurture thoughtful practice. In such settings, trusting relationships blossom and reflective dialogue begins" (p. 50). One example that sheds light on the level of trust shared between the participating teachers and administrators at these two schools is the fact that nine teachers volunteered to participate in the TGDC. The district required each school-site administrator to formally observe one teacher using the TGDC. Administrators were tasked with recruiting at least one teacher from their schools to observe during this new system. At these two schools with three administrators, nine teachers volunteered to participate in the TGDC. Although the TGDC is perceived by many teachers as anti-teacher (United Teachers of Los Angeles [UTLA] called for its members to boycott this evaluation system), the nine teachers' willingness to participate in the process despite their union opposition is noticeable and sheds light on the quality of relationships the teachers and administrators shared.

Another indicator of the level of trust shared between teachers and administrators was the high level of engagement, willingness, and quality of dialogue that transpired during the Pre and

Post-Observation Conference, as described by the teachers and administrators. This allowed the dialogue between teachers and administrators to be influential in efforts to improve instruction.

While most of the teachers did identify the TGDC as facilitating an improvement in practice, the teacher interviews did reveal that six teachers identified the potential threat of dismissal as possibly influencing their future instructional practices. These teachers automatically associated the possible threat of dismissal with low student academic performance. While no teacher made reference to discussion of student test scores or threat of dismissal with their administrators, they did acknowledge that if the evaluation system were high-stakes, it would lead to changes to their instructional practice. Surprisingly, there was no other point in the interviews at which a teacher made reference to the threat of dismissal. This could be a result of the teachers having minimal exposure to their AGT results, or it might suggest that they did not find the AGT results informative. At this low-stakes stage, teachers and administrators may have focused their experience on working together to improve their instructional practices.

The Administrative Leadership Style Influences Teachers' Experience in the TGDC

The data yielded many references to the administrative leadership style exhibited by the school-site administrators in this study. The participating teachers described the administrators as supportive, competent, and objective, which seemed to affect the positive climate of the school and might have influenced teachers' experience in the TGDC directly. Donaldson and Sanderson (1996) describe administrative school leadership as, "the process of articulating a vision that promotes teamwork, collaboration, sharing, and fostering a climate of collegial interactions" (p. 55). The three participating administrators exhibited leadership styles that promoted a positive school climate where professional learning was able to take place. Their positive

interactions with teachers and students seemed to foster an environment where collaboration, support, and learning could flourish.

The participating teachers described how the three administrators demonstrated their support for teachers' efforts in the TGDC by committing to observe lessons in their entirety, and meeting with them during the Pre and Post-Observation Conferences. McLaughlin (1987) makes the point that administrators' actions serve to legitimate whether a change is to be taken seriously and to support teachers both psychologically and with resources. The administrators in this study modeled the importance of the TGDC by learning the vocabulary of the TLF and using it whenever discussing instruction. It is important to note that the principal is the person most likely to be in a position to shape the organizational conditions necessary for success, such as the development of shared goals, collaborative work structures and climates, and procedures for monitoring results (Fullan, 2007).

Many studies indicate that the way in which leaders lead is perhaps the single most influential factor for determining school climate and ultimately academic achievement (Blackburn, Hutchison, & Martin, 2006; Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Teachers and principals I interviewed reported working collaboratively, with the teachers crediting the administrative leadership style as the biggest reason for their collaboration.

It is important to note that the teachers in this study did not find the administrators' lack of administrative experience as affecting their leadership style negatively. On the contrary, the teachers described the administrators' style as refreshing and open to new ideas. Teachers valued the administrators' supportive nature and ability to participate in cognitively challenging conversations over everything else. A study by Blasé and Blasé (1999) suggests that the length of the time out of the classroom an administrator has is not important because they view the

administrator's instructional role as one of encouraging, inviting, and promoting inquiry. What is important is the administrator's ability to lead teachers in the practice of critical inquiry, collective reflection, and problem solving. Blasé and Blasé also assert that although instructional leadership is important for principals, the most important aspect of their job is to foster a positive and stimulating environment at their schools.

Implications For Practice

The ability to create a classroom evaluation system that is effective at identifying and improving the quality of teaching in the nation's schools has been a struggle for educators for decades (Matsumura et al., 2006). Weisberg et al. (2009) concludes that the focal point of teacher evaluations must not be seen as mere tools to document performance, and instead be used as tools that facilitate the improvement of teacher practice and effectiveness. The purpose of the study was to document teachers' and administrators' perceptions of their experience in LAUSD's new TGDC, and how, if at all, this new process changed their practice in ways that can be expected to lead to improved student learning. The results of this study demonstrate that a standards-based teacher evaluation system that promotes dialogue between teachers and administrators and focuses on professional learning can help teachers and administrators improve the quality of instruction, particularly in contexts where school climate is positive, teachers are committed, and the principal exerts strong leadership.

It is important to note that the reality of the two schools where this study was conducted is not a typical situation that can be expected at the schools throughout the district when this evaluation system is rolled out district-wide. The reality is that the majority of the schools in LAUSD are led by administrators that are overwhelmed with the daily responsibilities of running a school. For example, a greater part of the district is comprised of elementary schools, most of

them with only one full-time administrator: the principal. Most of them will have trouble committing the time needed to implement this evaluation system with fidelity, which this study identified as being a key to its success.

In addition, many administrators lack the leadership training needed to create a positive school culture where this evaluation system can foster a professional learning experience for teachers and administrators. This preparation will be essential when a large number of administrators attempt to overcome the opposition from the teachers' union to this new evaluation system, which is present at many of the schools in the district.

In the subsequent sections, I identify a series of essential elements that must be present in school-sites when the evaluation system is rolled out district-wide in order to ensure its success. I discuss these elements in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and additional sources discussed in this chapter.

Effective leadership. In order for this evaluation to improve instructional practices on a large scale, effective principals are essential because the principal plays an important role in the success of any school-site initiative. Leadership, as defined by Northouse (2007), is "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3). The focus of leadership as process means it is not a linear, one-way event, but rather an interactive event between the leader and the group he/she is leading in a "leadership relationship" (p. 4). Since every school and its leadership are not all the same, it is important to equip school-site administrators with different leadership styles and strategies that they would be able to implement to ensure the success of the teacher evaluation system. The principal has a major effect on the success or failure of a school and any initiatives within it.

Administrators whose schools will be participating in the TGDC must go through extensive leadership training. In addition to learning various leadership styles and strategies, administrators must also learn to provide teachers with feedback and facilitate conferences that will lead to improve teaching practices. All nine teachers had a positive description of the type of feedback they received from their observing administrator during the TGDC, and stated that this feedback facilitated some improvement in their instruction. Administration plays a vital role in ensuring the effectiveness of the evaluation system by engaging participating teachers in reflective dialogue about improving practice, which takes place during the Pre- and Post-Observation Conferences. An example of administrative training that will facilitate teacher reflection is Cognitive Coaching, which requires the supervisor to ask open-ended, thought provoking, non-judgmental questions that lead the teacher to critically reflect on his/her instruction (Sparks-Langer, Simmons, Pasch, Colton, & Starko, 1989).

Besides learning how to facilitate a reflective conversation, administrators must also receive training and support in dealing with their operational responsibilities to ensure that classroom observations is one of their top responsibilities. The three participating administrators described an increased commitment to conducting classroom observations. Weisberg et al. (2009) make the point that if instruction is to improve, administrators must make an increased commitment to get into the classrooms so they can provide teachers with effective feedback. All nine participating teachers shared that their administrators observed their lessons in their entirety. The commitment to being in classrooms seems to be one of the biggest challenges for present school-site administrators who have the difficult task of doing more with fewer resources.

Positive school climate. A second element that can facilitate the success of this new evaluation system is the creation of positive school climate at every school. There must be a

concurrent initiative by the district or the school that is implementing the evaluation system to improve the climate of the school and the trust between its members. The findings in this study suggest that a positive school climate might have affected the experience of the participants in this study, which was demonstrated by the amount of trust that teachers and administrators exhibited throughout the implementation of the TGDC. To foster a trusting environment the school must work to create a positive school climate. Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) make the argument that friendly environments make individuals feel safe. In such settings, "trusting relationships blossom and reflective dialogue begins" (p. 50). In order for teachers to be honest during the Pre- and Post-Observation Conferences, they need to feel safe and comfortable when discussing their instruction with their administrators. Positive school climates have been found to be a necessary prerequisite for schools that are implementing change or reform (Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996). The best-laid structural and curricular plans may go to waste if a school's climate is not positive (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Focus on professional learning. The third component that mediates the success of an evaluation system is a continuous focus on professional learning. The findings demonstrate that when the evaluation system is focused on professional learning, the various components of this system allow teachers and administrators to engage in conversations about instruction that lead to improvements in practice. Evaluations can and should be utilized to push teachers and administrators to think critically about instruction by discussing, reflecting on, and planning ways to improve lessons. This assertion reflects Vygotsky's (as cited in Kratzer & Teplin, 2007) Sociocultural theory, which states that adults learn through the process of reflection, participation, and knowledge construction. A "critically reflective teacher" (Brookfield, 1995 p.

15) is aware of his/her teaching ability and his/her students' needs, and is able to adjust his/her instruction to ensure that every student is able to learn in his/her classroom.

Committed teachers. Lastly, if LAUSD's new evaluation system is going to be effective, participating teachers must have a certain level of commitment to improving their practice. The findings demonstrated that when a teacher is committed to improving his/her practice, this system is effective at facilitating the desired improvements. In addition, teachers must also be committed to the large amount of time this system requires, which is considerably more than the previous evaluation system. Five of the nine teachers in this study made a specific reference to the large amount of the work this evaluation system requires and how this might be a challenge when rolling it out district-wide. This is why it is essential that teachers be aware of the large amount of work required by this system prior to their participation. By understanding the time requirements prior to beginning the process, teachers will be able to make the necessary preparations that should improve their experience with the new evaluation system.

Concurrently to the implementation of this evaluation system, it will be important for the district to develop database systems to monitor and track teachers' performance in the evaluation system over time. This database can provide principals with an opportunity to assess short term and long-term changes in instructional practices. By identifying trends in teachers' instructional performance, principals can develop professional development sessions to address the needs of their staff. In addition, the database can also be used to provide individualized support for teachers that are having challenges with their instructional practices. Similarly, the database can provide the central district office with information on instructional challenges that are being experienced by a large number of teachers in the district. This information can lead to district-

wide instructional initiatives where the district provides teachers and schools with professional learning opportunities and additional resources.

Although the evaluation system is intended to support teachers in improving their instructional practice, the database can provide principals with information about teachers that have struggled to improve their instruction, even after receiving individualized support. The information on struggling teachers can be used as documentation if a principal decides to begin the disciplinary process. Therefore, utilizing a database that tracks teachers' instructional performance over time is essential in ensuring that the evaluation system is leading to improved instructional practices.

In short, by developing principals to be effective school leaders, as well as providing support on improving a school's climate, maintaining a focus on professional learning, and having informed and committed teachers, LAUSD can succeed when it rolls out this evaluation system district-wide. By ensuring that the aforementioned elements are present at every one of their schools, the district can increase the probability that more of their teachers will have a similar encounter that reflects that of Mr. Fowler's description of his experience:

> I'm sure you can tell that I became a big fan of it [TGDC]. I don't know if it's because it's a small school and we have so many teachers on the same page. Or if it's because of our good administrators. But I think it's probably a combination of all of those things.

Limitations

Whereas the findings that emerged from the teachers and principals in this study may have useful implications for educators and educational leaders, this study also had several limitations that need to be considered. One limitation is the small sample of teachers and administrators in this study, which makes the findings not generalizable to all principals and

teachers participating in the TGDC. The study offers a narrow perspective of teachers'

experiences in this new system. Additional research should be conducted with more participants

throughout the district to include a more representative sample of the population of teachers in

the district. However, the experiences of these 12 individuals can be instructive and informative

to leaders and policymakers concerned with how the TGDC is influencing teacher and

administrative practice.

Related to the aforementioned limitation, a second limitation is that the teachers in this

study volunteered to participate in the TGDC. It is possible that the perspectives of teachers who

are mandated to participate in this new system in the future will differ from those of this sample

of volunteers. Individuals that are forced to participate in this system might enter the process

with a negative perception, which might influence their experience. Other teachers might have

had negative experiences with the old method of evaluation, which might also influence their

experiences in the TGDC.

A third limitation was that the data was only collected over a time span of about 5

months, which provides limited insight into teachers' changes in perspective and practice over

time. Future studies should consider studying teachers over the entire school year or over

multiple years to determine if, and how, teacher perceptions and practices developed as a result

of their participation in the TGDC.

Another limitation to the study was that the information collected from participants was

self-reported data. This means that there was no way to determine if the changes to instruction

that teachers reported were actually true. One way to determine the veracity of reported changes

to their instructional practices would be to conduct classroom observations, which would allow

observers to verify or refute the changes in instruction identified by teachers. Additionally, student surveys would be useful in verifying changes in teacher instructional practices.

A final limitation is that there was no way to determine if the changes in instruction that were reported by teachers actually led to improvement in student academic performance. To determine if the changes reported actually led to improvement in student performance, student data will need to be used in future studies and related to changes in instruction.

Personal Reflection

From the outset of the study, I wanted to explore if the new evaluation system utilized by LAUSD would be a useful tool that would lead to improvements in teacher practice—and eventually student performance. As a school-site administrator who has worked at two of the most challenging schools in the district, many times I felt helpless or unequipped to help teachers improve their practice in ways that would lead to gains in student performance. As someone who values education and has experienced firsthand the transformational effects it can have on one's life, I was motivated to find a way to help teachers facilitate a similar experience for the students in their class.

That is why, when our district piloted the TGDC at a handful of schools in the district, I was happy and interested to hear that my school would be one of those schools. I attended the extensive administrator training and I received certification as an observer. I participated in the TGDC pilot along with one volunteer teacher. The teacher and I implemented all of the components of the TGDC with fidelity, but did not feel that, at the conclusion of the cycle, the teacher's instruction had drastically changed, or that I had been fully successful at facilitating that change.

As a result, I felt that my experience in the TGDC was a negative one, not because I did not see the value of the TGDC as a tool that would facilitate change in instruction, but because I felt there was a problem with the school in which it was being implemented. This is why I think the findings of this study are so important. The goal of the study was not to validate the TGDC, but rather to capture teachers' and administrators' perceptions of how this system can influence their practice. I believe my study was successful at doing that, but more importantly, my study was able to capture something just as important: how a school with a positive school climate and an effective leader can be the ideal environment where this type of evaluation system can thrive.

Teacher Interview Protocol # 1

Date: _____ _ **School:** _____

Location of interview:_____ **Name of Interviewee**:_____

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and for volunteering to take part in my study. I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in LAUSD's new multiple measure teacher evaluation system. Our interview should take about half an hour. With your agreement I will be taping the session to help me keep accurate record of your comments. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will not be shared with anyone and any information included in my report will not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Before we start, do you have any questions?
Great! Let's begin.

First, I want to ask you a few questions about your background:

a) How many years have you been teaching?

b) What education & credentials do you hold?

c) What subject do you currently teach?

d) What subjects have you taught in the past?

e) Where did you teach prior to arriving at Business and Technology/ Visual and Performing Arts?

f) What led you to take a teaching position at Business and Technology/ Visual and Performing Arts?

g) How would you describe your relationship with your fellow teachers?

h) How would you describe your relationship with your administrators?

i) How would you describe the overall school climate at Business and Technology/ Visual and Performing Arts?

j) How much did you know about the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle prior to volunteering to participate in it?

k) What influenced your decision to participate in the TGDC?

l) What kind of reaction, if any, did you get from your colleagues (UTLA Chair, veteran teachers, young teachers) when they heard you volunteered to participate in the TGDC?

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your instruction practices prior to participating in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle

1) What areas of your instructional practice would you describe as strong?
    a) If so, what is it/are they?
    b) Why do you think it/they are an area of strength?

2) What areas of your instructional practice do you feel you need to improve?
    a) If so, what is it/are they?
    b) Why do you think it/they need improvement?
    c) Who will you seek out for help to improve them?

Now I'm going to ask you about what, if anything, has influenced your instruction in the past

3) Tell me whether each one of the following items influences your instruction, and if so, how?

Item	Yes	No	If yes, how so?
Prior student's CST			

Results			
Teacher Generated Assessments Results			
District Periodic Assessment Results			
Competition within grade level			
Competition within department			
Threat of Dismissal			
Peer Pressure			
Other (please specify)			

4) Of these, which had the greatest influence?

    a) How so?

5) Were you formally observed (stulled) over the past three years? (Yes, continue below / No, skip to Question 8)

    a) Who observed you?

    b) Did you receive feedback? If so in what form?

    c) Did it influence your practice, if so, how?

    d) Overall, would you describe this experience as positive or negative, and why?

Now I'm going to ask you about your expectations for the new Teacher Growth and Development Cycle being implemented in LAUSD.

6) What type of support do you expect to receive from this new evaluation classroom observation system?

7) Do you think this new system will influence your practice?
    a) If so, how? If not, why not?

8) *Do you have any other thoughts, feelings, or comments you would like to share about the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle? (e.g., any* expectations, hopes, questions, or concerns)

Thank you for your time and this has concluded our first interview.

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Protocol # 2

Date: _____ _ **School:** _____

Location of interview:_____**Name of Interviewee**:_____

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and for volunteering to take part in my study. I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in LAUSD's new multiple measure teacher evaluation system. Our interview should take about half an hour. With your agreement I will be taping the session to help me keep accurate record of your comments. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will not be shared with anyone and any information included in my report will not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Before we start, do you have any questions?
Great! Let's begin.

I'm going to ask you a few questions about specific components of the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle

1) Before you began the formal observation cycle, did you complete the Teacher Self-Assessment?

   a) If so, did you find that activity to be informative? If yes, how?

2) After the Teacher Self-Assessment, did you design a Lesson that would be used during your formal classroom observation?

   a) If so, was designing the lesson easy or challenging? How so?

   b) Did you meet with your observing administrator to discuss your lesson prior to your formal observation?

   c) If so, did the administrator give you feedback on your lesson? What type?

3) After the Pre-Observation Conference, did you participate in a formal observation cycle?

   a) If so, how many times were you observed during this observation cycle?

   b) How long did each observation last?

   c) Who conducted the observations?

4) After your classroom observation, did you meet with your observing administrator to discuss your lesson?

   a) If so, how would you describe the type of feedback he/she gave you?

5) Now that you have completed the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle, how would you describe the difference between the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle and the "old way" of formal classroom observations?

6) How, if at all, was the administrator's feedback during the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle different from the feedback you would receive during the "old way" of classroom observations?

Now, I will ask you some questions about how your experience in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle affected your teaching practice

7) Did your experience in the TGDC lead you think that you might have to alter the following aspects of practice in the future:

a. how you structure your units

b. how you structure your lessons

c. how you utilize questioning techniques in your lesson

d. any **other** aspect of your instructional practices? (Which? How?)

8. Do you think that your participation in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle (this year or in the future) could negatively affect some aspect(s) of your practice somehow? If so, How?

Now I'm going to ask you about what, if anything, might influence your future instruction

9) In the context of New TGDC, how, if at all, do you anticipate the following will influence your instruction moving forward?

Item	No	A little	A lot	If a lot, how?
Prior student's CST results				
AGT Results				
Teacher Generated Assessments Results				
District Periodic Assessment Results				
Competition within grade level				
Competition within department				
Potential monetary Incentives				
Threat of Dismissal				
Peer Pressure				
Feedback during Classroom observations				
Is there anything else (other)				

10) What, if anything, would you change to this process so that it can be used as a tool that improves teacher practice?

11) Overall, would you describe your experience in the TGDC as positive or negative? Why?

12) What advise would you give to teachers that are contemplating participating in the Teacher Growth and Development?

13) Are there any other comments you would like to share with me about your experience participating in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle?

Thank you for your time and this has concluded our second interview.

Appendix C

Administrator Interview Protocol # 1

Date: _____**School:** _____

Location of interview:_____**Name of Interviewee:**_____

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and for volunteering to take part in my study. I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in LAUSD's new multiple measure teacher evaluation system. Our interview should take about half an hour. With your agreement I will be taping the session to help me keep accurate record of your comments. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will not be shared with anyone and any information included in my report will not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Before we start, do you have any questions?
Great! Let's begin.

1) I want to begin by asking you a few questions about your background as an administrator:

    a) How long have you been an administrator?

    b) How long did you teach prior to becoming an administrator?

    c) How long have you been in administrator at this school?

    d) Have you been an administrator at another school?

2) Now I'm going to ask you about your classroom observation practices prior to participating in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle.

Please describe, in detail, the following:

    a) How would you decide what to look for/focus on during your classroom observations in the past?

    b) How often would you conduct formal and informal observations?

    c) What type of documentation would you use during your classroom observations (check off sheet, narrate what you observed)?

    d) How would you provide feedback from your observations to your teachers?

    e) Were you able to complete all of the formal observations you were responsible for?

3) What training in conducting classroom observations did you receive prior to this year?

4) In the "old way" of classroom observations, did you typically feel that you were effective in influencing classroom practice through the feedback you provided teachers?

    a) If so, how? If not, why not?

5) Now that you have been trained and certified as an Observer in the new Teacher Growth and Development Cycle, how would you describe the difference between the "old way" of classroom observations and this new observation system?

6) Which system do you think would be more effective at helping improve classroom practice?

    a) Why?

7) Do you think this new system will affect your classroom observation practices? a) If so, how? If not, why not?

8) Do you think this new system will affect the type of feedback you provide teachers?

    a) If so, how? If not, why not?

9) Are there any other thoughts, feelings, or comments you would like to share about your classroom observation practices during your participation in the Educator Growth and Development Cycle?

Thank you for your time and this has concluded our first interview.

Appendix D

Administrator Interview Protocol # 2

Date: _____ **School:** _____

Location of interview:_____**Name of Interviewee:**_____

I want to thank you again for taking the time to meet with me today and for volunteering to take part in my study. I want to remind you that every one of our interviews should take about half an hour. I will be taping the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will not be shared with anyone and any information we include in our report will not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

I'm going to ask you a serious of questions about your classroom observation practices now that you have participated in the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle.

Please describe, in detail, the following:

  a) How do you decide what to look for/focus on during your classroom observations?

  b) How often do you conduct formal and informal observations?

  c) What type of documentation do you use during your classroom observations (check off sheet, narrate what you observed)?

  d) How do you provide feedback from your observations to your teachers?

  e) Were you able to complete all of the formal observations you were responsible for?

1) Now that you have completed one formal observation cycle under the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle, how has your classroom observational practices changed?

  a) Has the change been positive or negative?

  b) Why?

2) How, if at all, has this new observational system affected the feedback you provide teachers?

  a) Why?

3) How would you describe the overall quality of feedback you provided teachers?

  a) Why would you describe it this way?

4) Would you say that the change in your observational practices have led to improved classroom instruction?

    a) If so, how do you know?

5) Now that you have participated in a formal observation cycles under the Teacher Growth and Development Cycle, which classroom observation system do you prefer, the "old way" of classroom observations or this new system?

    a) Why?

    b) Which one do you think does a better job of providing teachers with the support that will lead improve student performance?

    c) Why?

7) Are there any other thoughts, feelings, or comments you would like to share about how the new observational practice has affected your observational practice?

Thank you for your time and this has concluded our third interview.

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