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Abstract

As a scholar of supervision and after years of teaching principals, I have begun to rethink what it means for principals to deliver feedback to improve teachers’ instruction. I realized that I held many troubling assumptions. In this essay, I describe the contexts within which my assumptions had taken root, then use selected literature to look more closely at each. In the final section, I address the question: What do principals do if they no longer deliver feedback? This inquiry helped me understand that commonly held assumptions about “delivering feedback” promote an oversimplified view of teaching and its improvement, keep teachers in a dependent relationship, and fail to help them develop their own understanding of accountability.

Keywords

feedback; delivering feedback; teacher evaluation; supervision; intelligent accountability

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Introduction

In 2021, I became involved in a study of Corbett Prep, a pre-K through 8 independent day school in Tampa, FL. I was astonished when staff insisted that principals do not evaluate teachers. However, I suspected they did, if for no other reason than to meet accreditation requirements. Yet, as I spoke with principals, I discovered that they did not see their role as delivering feedback. Instead, teachers worked in teams within and across grade levels as they engaged in cycles of planning, teaching, and assessing learning. “Teaming is evaluating all day long, every day, in real-time, and on-the-spot,” said one teacher (Hazi, 2023a, p. 100).

As they learned to work together, some described the team as “one brain,” “a dance,” or “a marriage,” where the team “keeps them in check.”

Everyone takes leadership on different parts based on what they do best. I’m not as good alone, as the three of us together.... Everyone has respect for each other. Everyone has everyone else’s back. We help each other. (p. 99)

Those who “fit” or belong at Corbett Prep have a growth mindset and view team feedback as helpful. Teams also know who doesn’t fit. As one teacher said, “If you took it personally or got upset because someone was telling you what to do, and you already know everything. People would get very upset and end up just quitting. They called it ‘getting criticized’” (Hazi, 2023a, p. 99). Another teacher said, “It was interesting when people realized this was not the place for them. Some people realized it quickly, sometimes they didn’t” (p. 100).

While the principals did observe, they believed their real work was to “hire and place teachers, allot time in the schedule for their meetings, and help the weaker links” (Hazi, 2023a, p. 100). The headmaster spent many weeks in January meeting with teachers individually to see whether they fit in their team or should transfer to another team or role within the school. Teaming and professional development are central components of school improvement, and he makes time and resources available for both. At Corbett teachers are not simply accountable to administrators. They are also accountable to each other, to students and to their parents.²

The more I thought about the culture of Corbett Prep, the more I began to question many assumptions I had been making about feedback. In this essay, I briefly recount the context in which my assumptions about feedback took root. Then I use selected literature to look more closely at several taken-for-granted assumptions about feedback to inservice teachers in relation to the supervisory role of principals in “delivering feedback.” In the final section, I address the question: What do principals do if they no longer deliver feedback?

Assumptions about Feedback

After teaching a few years in a public school, I entered a doctoral program and began learning the principles of clinical supervision. At the University of Pittsburgh in the 1970s, I studied its rationale under Morris Cogan and practiced it under Noreen Garman in two summers with

² For a more detailed account of this remarkable school see Hazzi (2023a).

interns enrolled in a Masters of Teaching Program and who were teaching summer school at a local school district. Cogan emphasized principles such as teacher involvement and cycles of supervision grounded in carefully and systematically collected data. As I learned and practiced clinical supervision under Garman, I involved the interns in discussing what they wanted to learn about their teaching and in selecting a relevant observation focus in our pre-conference.

Although I was an English teacher, I observed interns in English, social studies, and science. I collected verbatim data and focused on pedagogy, while the teachers were expected to bring the content expertise to the cycles of supervision. Before our post-conference, I presented a transcript to the interns, an audiotape, or a table with a frequency count of behaviors related to the observation focus. I planned my conference by listing a few questions that would start a conversation and ended by helping the intern plan the next lessons. I became empowered in this setting and heady with an ability to collect and analyze data in any subject, or so I thought.

Tacitly, I was learning that feedback based on supervisor-collected data is both important and useful. I carried this assumption into my work as a certified K-12 instructional supervisor in the public schools. I saw myself as a helper to and professional colleague of teachers—not an evaluator, as their principal was. I made sure of that role distinction in my interview with the Board of Education.

Teacher involvement served me well in a Northeastern school district with its unionized teachers. In the pre-conference I let the teacher select the lesson and observation focus, and then shared the data privately in the teacher's classroom. Instinctively, I followed what has become common advice—make sure feedback is “frequent, timely, consistent, specific and private” (e.g., Farr et al., 2012, p. 207). Because data were presumed to be neutral, I took for granted that the data would “speak for itself.” Because I asked teachers questions, I thought I was being positive. Again, I tacitly assumed that teachers welcomed my feedback and found it useful.

In time, I became a professor of education administration with responsibility for teaching a supervision course focused on how to collect and interpret data and conduct conferences. At the end of the semester to grade students' work, I would spend hours in my office alone, reviewing the students' data and audio-taped conferences. After a while, I realized I should spend that time with them. During an hour-long conference, each student provided evidence collected to assess their skills and progress made since the beginning of the course. I could use my time to confirm their strengths and weaknesses and ask questions. Taking root was the assumption that if I modeled giving feedback to students, they, in turn, would learn to deliver it to teachers when they became principals.

When I was admitted to the Council of Professors of Instructional Supervision (COPIS) in the 1980s during “the golden age of supervision” (Garman, 2020, p. 8), I eagerly listened to debates among scholars like Blumberg, Harris, Sergiovanni, Alfonso, Firth and Neville about how to define supervision, its purposes, whether clinical supervision made a difference in schools, and who counted as a supervisor, but never feedback. With the school accountability movement beginning, the conversation shifted to teacher evaluation, and supervision became seen as a vehicle for school reform and instructional improvement. COPIS members focused on what we

considered to be a looming crisis in the field, with calls from some members to abandon use of the term “supervision,” because teachers often think of the process as evaluation.

Over the years, I have come to “see teacher evaluation and supervision as fraternal twins—similar yet not identical, different enough to tell them apart—their practice, concepts, and dilemmas. Since they both require evidence and involve judgment, they are forever entangled” (Hazi, 2012, p. 8). Part of their entanglement arises from assumptions that I increasingly see as troubling aspects of “delivering feedback.”

Rethinking Feedback

Feedback is used so ubiquitously, it is easy to assume that everyone shares a common understanding of what it means. My explorations, however, have led me to see that the term originated in the field of engineering to describe how a mechanical system can regulate itself. Subsequently, feedback has been studied in fields as varied as communication science, counseling, clinical psychology, social psychology, business and organizational psychology, sports, health, and education (Sutton et al., 2012). Its definition varies depending upon the discipline. For example, according to John Hattie (2012b, p. 130) a psychometrician, the purpose of feedback is “to reduce the gap between where the student ‘is’ and where he or she is ‘meant to be.’” Furthermore, he describes the many ways that it can be delivered, that it “thrives on error,” and works from the “observables.”

In contrast to Hattie’s focus on “observables,” Shute (2008, p. 153), a cognitive psychologist, defines it as “information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior to improve learning.” She describes different types of feedback (e.g., explanation of correct answer and hints), administered at various times during the learning process, and taking into account variables such as characteristics of the learner and of the task. According to Shute, “[w]ithin this large body of feedback research, there are many conflicting findings and no consistent pattern of results” (2008, p. 153). Despite the hundreds of research studies conducted, feedback is “one of the more instructionally powerful and least understood features in instructional design” (Cohen, 1985, p. 33).

In education, the concept of feedback has traditionally been associated with behaviorism, “a school of learning theory which argues that all behavior can be predicted, measured, and controlled, and that learning is simply a matter of stimulus and response” (Wallace, 2015, p. 34). Behaviorists “conceived of feedback as stemming from reinforcers (positive feedback) or in avoidance of punishment (negative feedback)” (Hattie & Yates, 2014, para 1) and was used early on “when attempting to analyze alterations in behavior rates and probabilities.” Despite challenges to this behavioral view of learning, feedback is still considered among the top ten influences on student achievement.

Behaviorism has also influenced theories about changing teacher behavior (Hazi, 2020). However, looking at issues of feedback in the workplace I have doubts about its applicability and effectiveness in changing employee (teacher) behaviors. Feedback is given to employees in performance appraisal to maintain effective job performance, improve ineffective performance, and correct errors. In the workplace, feedback is considered a “devilishly complex form of

communication.” For example, according to Farr et al. (2012), industrial and organizational psychologists, “criticism” changes behavior.

According to Farr et al. (2012), workplace feedback is fraught with paradoxes. While employees say that they value and want feedback, they can be “angry, defensive and discount feedback as inaccurate” (p. 201). And while managers say that feedback is an important part of their job, they “do all they can to avoid giving accurate performance feedback to their employees” (p. 201) because it can affect employee-manager relationships. In fact, “more than one in three organizational feedback interventions actually results in a decrease in job performance rather than the expected increase” (Farr et al., 2022, p. 200; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

To avoid these paradoxes, employers are advised to use certain language. To *soften the blow*, employers should frame the feedback as *help* or a *learning process*, and create a *feedback culture* where employees *self-regulate*, *set their own goals*, and *develop action plans*. This then is supposed to allow the employee to have *ownership* over the process (Hazi, 2019a, p.153).

Principal Feedback Improves Teacher Practice

Within schools, principals are those who most typically provide feedback to teachers. Much of the research on principals focuses on their credibility, will, skill, time, and training, as well as the problems with the dual roles of helper (the formative) and evaluator (summative) in teacher evaluation. I’ve discovered that principals do not deliver useful feedback, according to their teachers, even with training. However, most researchers continue to assume that the principal is the key to teacher improvement.

Principal observation is considered the “universal,” “ubiquitous,” and “low cost” method of providing teachers feedback and for changing their practice in the U.S. and around the world (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016; Martinez et al., 2016; Schleicher, 2011). However, even when provided with more time, extensive training, substitutes, and their own coaches, principals struggle to deliver feedback to teachers that is useful. Teachers reported that principal feedback tended to be too general, because they only occasionally visited classrooms (Goldring et al., 2020; Herrmann et al, 2019; Kraft & Christian, 2021).

In some cases, improvement is possible. Johnson (2019) found teacher improvement where principals directed resources to give themselves more time to observe classrooms often, and where they give useful feedback with detailed recommendations and model the suggestion for teachers. These principals were found in high performing schools with a high level of trust and an improvement culture that includes instructional coaching, teaming, professional development, and peer observation that provides additional feedback. However, this is the exception rather than the rule.

Even with a decade of extensive reform of high-stakes teacher evaluation, waivers from stringent federal requirements, and billions of dollars invested in new systems, there has been no discernable effect on student achievement in the states as hoped (Bleiberg et al., 2021). Instead, with the emphasis on student test scores, teacher satisfaction decreased, administrators were burdened with new demands, and unions challenged the use of student test scores and their

ratings in court. Still, some remain hopeful and believe that with more time, training, and buy-in, teacher evaluation implementation will improve, and thus, teacher quality (Will, 2021). Unfortunately, this hope seems quixotic, especially now post-COVID, where principal time is taken up with student absences and discipline, school shootings, teacher shortages, and book bans (e.g., Banerji, 2023).

Instruments Capture a Teacher's Behavior, Any Teaching Style, and Lesson

I began looking critically at teacher evaluation instruments during the eras of Madeline Hunter in the 1980s and Charlotte Danielson in the 1990s. At the time, I knew each promoted a specific model of teaching (i.e., direct instruction and constructivism respectively). Instruments may differ greatly depending on the developers, what they value, and what they think about teaching quality. Elsewhere I have studied these and other problems with teacher evaluation instruments (Hazi, 2019b) including their objectivity, but here I consider the two most relevant to delivering feedback: the idea of the generic teacher and the absence of context information.

Since the 1980s and the use of process-product research as the basis of observation, teaching is assumed to be generic with instruments applicable to any teacher and any lesson. This position was taken to study teaching to correlate it with specific skills in reading and math at the elementary level. The idea of “the generic teacher,” was then used as the basis of instruments during the school-effectiveness movement, to give principals the credibility they needed to evaluate teachers' lessons, regardless of subject or grade level (Ellett, 1987). It continues to be the basis of teacher evaluation instruments used in today's public schools.

The generic teacher includes behaviors such as teacher praise, criticism, questioning, wait time, giving directions, and use of advanced organizers. These are considered to be all independent, observable teacher actions that then make up a coherent whole of teaching. Russ et al. (2016) characterize this conceptualization of teaching as one in which teaching is seen as a set of observable, generic teaching actions that directly connect to student achievement. This focus on generic behaviors seems to have influenced my supervisory thinking and practice, perhaps due to its ease of measurement. It also provided me with a convenient rationale for going into classrooms of foreign language, geometry, and physics teachers whose content was far beyond my understanding. It helped that I had department heads who could confirm my rudimentary understandings about content.

Russ et al. (2016) describe two other conceptualizations of teaching. The second concerns pedagogical content knowledge. In the 1980s and with the influence of cognitive psychology, teaching also came to be seen as “a way of thinking with a particular set of specialized knowledge and cognitive processes” (Russ et al., 2016, p. 396). The challenges students experience with content knowledge and how they might be addressed became important. This view of teaching focuses on teacher routines and lesson images in subjects such as math and science. Since pedagogical content knowledge is important in this conceptualization of teaching, this view of teaching can help address lesson content that's missing from the generic teacher evaluation instruments.

A third view of teaching, teaching as interacting, emerged in the 1980s and 1990s under the influence of anthropology and sociology. In this view, scholars see teaching situated within its many contexts, i.e., social, physical, cultural, and historical that influence how teachers make meaning of their practice. According to Russ et al. (2016, p. 403), teaching “must be understood as embedded in physical and social systems, spread over time and space . . . in communities . . . in which groups of individuals interact with and learn from each other as well as relevant artifacts and representations.” In this conceptualization of teaching, the many contexts of grade, student ability, and lesson matter over time are considered.

Therefore, conceptualizations of teaching influence the items that appear in an evaluation instrument. They may be invisible to the users, but nonetheless present. In turn, they influence feedback given and how teaching is discussed. All three conceptualizations, when combined, help me see teaching in context and in more of its complexity. They also keep me from oversimplified thinking about instructional improvement.

Teachers Find Feedback Useful

Despite assumptions that feedback is useful, most research inside and outside of the U.S. point to a dismal record on its usefulness. Teachers rarely find principal feedback useful (Hazi, 2022), sometimes due to the principals’ lack of content expertise (Lochmiller, 2019). Also, teachers are rarely asked what information is useful (exceptions include: Guskey & Link, 2022; Kyriakides et al., 2002).

Furthermore, during an observation, principals are so busy matching the teachers’ behaviors to those on the form and judging their quality (Brookhart, 2013), that they may not be able to record examples from the lesson or collect data. In fact, principals report that instruments are too cumbersome and complicated (Donaldson, 2011). However, teachers need evidence and examples from their classroom to evaluate individual student or group success (Hazi, in press). When teachers receive ratings of good or satisfactory, they may be happy to defer to the principal’s judgment and not ask for additional information that may be helpful.

Information is missing from instruments that affect their usefulness. Some teacher education scholars believe that context matters (i.e., a lesson’s objectives, activities, and student ability) and helps situate feedback (e.g., Sykes, 1999). Also missing in instruments is attention to lesson content and specifically pedagogical content knowledge (e.g., McConachie & Petrosky, 2010). Some supervision scholars, who promote culturally responsive instructional supervision, believe that instruments tend to be culturally blind and fail to show how instruction is differentiated for those with different backgrounds (e.g., Mette et al., 2023). Differentiation of content requires information about student cultural backgrounds, ethnic identities, and prior knowledge. Differentiation in teaching strategies requires information about teacher-student and student-student relationships, flexible grouping, and choice of topics and products of learning (Hazi, in press). These are absent from most instruments. Most importantly, this would require looking at students as individuals in a class, and not the entire group.

Instruments are designed to be easy to use by the observer and not with the teacher in mind. Some believe it to be a psychometric problem with an instrument’s design that includes finding

the right ‘grain size’ so that it is both measurable and meaningful (Kennedy, 2016). To establish meaningful feedback, Kennedy argues that we need to better understand teacher mental knowledge structures, i.e., what teachers do and why they do it. Teachers need to know the purpose of a practice in addition to actions taken. They also need to know how to expose what students know at any given moment to then determine “whether to repeat, elaborate, or move on” in a lesson (Kennedy, 2016, p.12).

Principles about Student Feedback Apply to Teachers

During the height of the teacher evaluation movement in the U.S. in the Race to the Top decade, advice appeared from educational policy groups about delivering feedback to teachers.

Elsewhere I have reported these in detail (Hazi, 2019a), but here it is important to note that this advice was based on conventional wisdom—not research. It was believed that teachers who had students with low test scores should be rated lower, and that “the rating of ineffective should be used to spur teacher improvement” (Hazi, 2019a, p. 155). Vague undefined terms such as the following were used to describe feedback: “actionable, constructive, objective, observable, personalized, specific, useful,” and my personal favorite “bite-sized” (p. 156).

Hattie (2012b), who has done meta-analyses of over 50,000 research articles, believes that learners must know: where they are going, and how to go there for feedback to be heard, understood and actionable. He advises that effective feedback reduces the gap between where students are and where they’re meant to be. However, he believes that student and teacher learning share “remarkable commonalities” and that the same principles apply to teachers (J. Hattie, personal communication, January 11, 2024).

Such advice, influenced by behaviorism, was once helpful given the importance of feedback for learning and in a time when educators’ knowledge about teaching and its improvement was limited. At the time, it seemed reasonable to apply this same advice to teachers as adults, since we imagined all learners and their learning to be similar. However, it does not take into account the paradoxes of the workplace and that teaching is a complex practice.

Some scholars do take into account the workplace. Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2017, 2018) treat teachers as adult learners and seek to individualize feedback. They interpret problems with feedback to be a mismatch between the administrator’s way of delivery and the teacher’s way of knowing. They pair Kegan’s four constructivist developmental ways of knowing with different styles of providing feedback that both support and challenge the teacher. Through questioning, the administrator determines the teacher’s way of knowing and delivers feedback to match. Their theory may be useful, until we know more about teacher thinking and why teachers change behaviors in their classrooms.

In a radical departure from the feedback path, Buckingham and Goodall (2019, p. 95) believe that evaluations reveal more about the evaluator than the evaluated: “Telling people what we think of their performance doesn’t help them thrive and excel, and telling people how we think they should improve actually *hinders* learning.” Some believe that feedback works best where there are right and wrong answers, but not when discussing a teacher’s classroom (Knight, 2023).

Teachers Are Receptive to Negative Feedback

Research about feedback to teachers tends to focus on principal delivery and associated factors such as relationships and principal content knowledge. Research rarely considers its direction (positive/negative), its context (in conferences/walkthroughs) or its nature (content/specificity). There's still much to learn about teacher's receptivity and willingness to receive and act upon feedback.

Teachers tend not to be receptive to negative feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979). Typical advice is to give negative feedback with the sandwich, i.e., including it between two positives. According to Tierney and Baumeister (2019), *the feedback sandwich* “was popularized in the 1980s by Mary Kay Ash, the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics who advised managers to sandwich critical remarks between layers of praise. However, they found employees would rather have the criticism first, while managers felt more comfortable delivering negative feedback with the sandwich.³ Furthermore, Buckingham and Goodall (2019) report that criticism and focusing on people's shortcomings impairs learning. “Learning rests on our grasp of what we're doing well, not on what we're doing poorly, and certainly not on someone else's sense of what we're doing poorly” (para 22).

In fact, positive feedback, when experienced to be controlling, can backfire and undermine intrinsic motivation (Ryan, 1982). Researchers have historically disregarded that feedback's “effects on performance are quite variable” and that feedback doesn't consistently improve performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996, p. 254). Feedback may have some effect, no effect, or an adverse effect. In fact, teachers tend to be more receptive to feedback on things they can control (Glasman & Paulin, 1982). This may include: deciding learning objectives, amount and order of content; planning and pacing classroom activities, choosing instructional materials and methods; and maintaining student discipline and climate. However, note that while there is an appealing logic to Glasman and Paulin's research, it was done at the beginning of the school accountability movement in the 1980s when teachers had more discretion, and prior to highly prescriptive initiatives that subsequently restricted much of their practice. One would be hard pressed in today's high-stakes climate to find aspects of curriculum and instruction solely within teacher discretion.

Teachers Know What to Do with the Feedback they Receive

Behaviorism influenced early thinking about delivering feedback to students who were considered passive subjects. Then in the 1970s with the influence of cognitive psychology, feedback receivers were considered to be more active agents who must make sense of information to enhance their learning. Scholars still differ in how they conceptualize feedback and the role of those who receive it. However, van der Kleij and Lipnevich (2021) remind me that:

³ See a recent recommended use of the sandwich in Conner and Froehle (2022).

the relation between feedback and learning is still poorly understood . . . no matter how perfect the feedback message is, if a student is not able or willing to use it, one cannot anticipate any improvement. (p. 347)

This also seems to apply to teachers.

Most research about feedback to students has focused on its delivery. Researchers have only begun to understand recently that students require skills of feedback literacy, i.e., how students process and use feedback (Winstone et al., 2017). Such literacy is a process within learners, requiring them to notice evidence of their learning, interpret and make sense of it, transform it into something usable, and then act on it.

Yet this line of thinking is contrary to relatively recent training advice to school administrators from policymakers such as the influential Southern Regional Education Board (SREB, 2017, p. 8) that serves sixteen southern and western states: “Evaluators should use specific examples from the instructional delivery they observed to generate feedback that is bite-sized, balances strength and improvement areas, and is useful for teachers’ daily practice.” In this line of thinking, the supervisor—not the learner—is the one responsible for providing “actionable” feedback, and thus, molding it into bite-size amounts that are digestible and therefore usable by the teacher.

Several bodies of emerging research helped me understand this literacy. Formative assessment and teacher data use are but two.⁴ Formative assessment, or assessment *for* learning, helps identify what students have learned so that teachers adjust their instruction to reteach or move on. Formative assessment “has been recognized as one of the most effective strategies for improving teaching and learning . . . [but has not] become common practice” (Veugen et al., 2021, p.1). It has also been described by Hattie (2012b, p. 20) as follows:

The teacher must know when learning is occurring or not, know when to experiment and when learn [sic] from the experience, learn to monitor, seek and give feedback, and learn when to provide alternative learning strategies when other strategies are not working.

As mentioned earlier, teachers are rarely asked what feedback is useful. However, Guskey and Link (2022, p. 9) did just that and learned that teachers found “analyses of students’ errors on formative assessments were consistently rated the most useful in planning corrective instruction and in making instructional improvements.” They argue that most feedback from observation forms focuses on teachers’ actions and behaviors while teaching. While teachers report such information to be affirming when positive, according to Guskey and Link, they really want to know more about their impact on students and their learning. Teachers, especially those in elementary, self-contained classrooms with the same students all day, report that student errors help them plan corrective instruction. To be most helpful, teachers asked for feedback on student

⁴ A third, not addressed here, is data-based decision making. It is concerned with how teachers use standardized testing data. Teachers in the U.S. tend to be limited in these skills especially since testing data has been weaponized against them (Henig, 2021; Sun et al., 2016). This body of research suffers from “definitive evidence that data use positively impacts teachers’ practice and student performance” (Mandinach & Gummer, 2015, p. 2).

learning, provided in helpful and non-threatening ways; for leaders who believe in them and are confident that they can succeed; and for time to plan formative assessments and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues for instructional alternatives that are new and different ways to instruct for student improvement. Their study helped me realize that teachers needed feedback for at least two purposes: one was to make decisions about instruction, while the second was to affirm them about their behaviors or pedagogy. It also reminded me that observation instruments tend to focus on teacher behaviors, ignoring student learning (the blinding flash of the obvious). These findings will be revisited in implications.

Coburn and Turner (2011), using research from social and cognitive psychology, conceptualize data-use as interpretive and interactive processes that require noticing data, making meaning of it, and constructing implications for action. Furthermore, they say,

Data does not speak for itself [emphasis added]. Rather, people must actively make meaning of the data and construct implications for action. . . . Interpretive processes . . . are shaped by individual beliefs, knowledge, and motivation and are influenced by the nature of patterns of social interaction. (Coburn & Turner, 2011, p. 177)

People tend to notice data, which supports their beliefs and experiences, and ignore or discount that which contradicts. This process is exacerbated by data overload typical of schools in an accountability climate. Data use is then complicated by its interpretation that may involve multiple questions of meaning, especially if it is in multiple forms of data. For example, teachers tend to discount standardized test data if they believe it does not reflect what they teach. Instead, teachers believe student work or their behavior are better indicators of learning. Factors such as pedagogical content knowledge, data analysis, and interactions with their colleagues and administrators also affect interpretation.

Leaders influence organizational routines for data use, time, access to data, and school culture. Of these factors, school routines largely determine the people who come together (teachers only or administrators from different levels), what data is discussed, and then how it is interpreted and resulting actions then negotiated. The organizational and political contexts of schools and state and federal policy influence data use.

In addition, teacher use of data is further complicated by factors such as time, resources, trust regarding data use, professional development, and respect for teacher autonomy and professionalism. Most importantly, Hoogland et al. (2016) found that

the lack of accountability pressure hindered data use... However, too much accountability pressure can hinder data use for genuine improvement purposes. This can lead to a narrow focus on assessment results rather than on the students' learning. (p. 382)

Researchers such as Coburn and Turner (2011), Spillane (2012) and Ebbeler et al. (2017), who study teachers' data literacy, may help provide paths to study and understand literacy processes in teachers. However, a broader term, such as evidence, may help educators to be open to multiple types of both qualitative and quantitative evidence to include classroom artifacts, i.e., lesson plans, the design of tests, and student work in text. So too, the teacher's perspective must

be central to how to conceptualize, seek, collect, interpret and transform evidence in situ so that it is both useful and meaningful. Teachers need evidence to make decisions that will guide instruction. Teachers also need evidence to guide their learning and growth. The next section addresses both purposes.

Implications

Given the troublesome and complex issues outlined above, the question arises: What do principals do, if they don't deliver feedback? In considering this question, I find O'Neill's (2013) concept of *intelligent accountability* to be useful. Admittedly, I have been skeptical about the concept of accountability as it became enacted in the United States. I saw the accountability movement stemming from *A Nation at Risk* of the 1980s as high-stakes and with unintended consequences such as the reusing assessment data about pupils to measure teacher quality, narrowing the curriculum, forcing teachers to teach to the test, and reconceptualizing teaching that can be quantified and measured (Holloway & Brass, 2018). Ball (2003) calls this a culture of performativity, in which:

[c]ollegiality is replaced with competition, and autonomy is replaced with bounded (and calculable) expectations, providing the means through which teachers (and their supervisors) can know their ranks relative to their peers. This process not only changes the teacher's behavior, but it also changes the teacher. (Holloway & Brass, 2018, p. 363)

O'Neill (2013) refers to these "perverse effects" as "malpractice" and "educational vandalism." "[O'Neill's] solution is to develop a more intelligent accountability system with trust and transparency as the cornerstones" (Lillejord, 2020, p. 2). Intelligent forms of accountability, according to O'Neill (2013, p.15), "aim at informed and independent judgment of the results of assessment and communicate those judgments intelligibly."

After reading O'Neill, I began to think of intelligent accountability as important for both institutions and individuals. I see it as "a system of responsibility where educators co-create and participate in a public process to account for their practice with evidence to judge it" (Hazi, 2023c, np). In addition, I believe that self-evaluation that is peer-assisted—somewhat like that at Corbett Prep (mentioned earlier)—has the potential to support the aims of the intelligent accountability that O'Neill desires.

Similarly, Scriven (1994) believes that teachers should self-evaluate in the name of accountability. "Accountability obliges you to be able to demonstrate that success to third parties....and hence that you are in fact successful" (p. 159). Evaluation is done to serve the public interest where students, parents and taxpayers are the clients, stakeholders, and consumers of evaluation (Alkin & Christie, 2004).

Self-evaluation is "a process in which teachers make judgments about the adequacy and effectiveness of their own knowledge, performance, beliefs, and effects for the purpose of self-improvement" (Airasian & Gullickson, 2006, p. 186). Once considered a process fraught with problems, self-evaluation has received renewed interest as a strategy for teacher professional

development (Stronge & Tucker, 2003)⁵ and should not be considered as a substitute for principal evaluation. In self-evaluation teachers will need to develop literacy skills, using evidence to make decisions that will guide instruction and guide their learning and growth.

According to Airasian and Gullickson (2006), teachers establish the criteria, then collect, interpret, and judge the evidence. Literacy, described previously, is a process that requires teachers to notice evidence, interpret and make sense of it, transform it into something usable, and then act on it. Multiple forms of evidence can include recordings of the classroom, student minute surveys, portfolios, and student performance data (Airasian & Gullickson, 2006).

Reflection is an important element in teacher learning as they construct their own practical knowledge from their classrooms. However, it can be shallow, superficial, and subjective without an external observer. A peer observer can help ground self-evaluation in evidence. Teachers, voluntarily participating in a learning community, could also be Scriven's third party. Teachers can learn from one another and be accountable to one another by publicly sharing their self-evaluation in a community of participating teachers. Here teachers can safely challenge each other's noticing and interpreting evidence.

Within a system of intelligent accountability, principals can provide job-embedded professional development that teaches evidence literacy so that teachers can better self-evaluate and observe one another. In addition, they can provide a school climate that protects time for self-evaluation, provides resources to support it, and assures a safe space where teachers can practice it without fear that their weaknesses will be used against them.

Conclusion

Returning to my roots in Cogan and Garman's clinical supervision—wiser, with new eyes and now humble instead of heady—I believe that learning how to observe and collect data, broadened to include evidence literacy and its processes, are relevant to principal (and teacher) preparation as well as for improving one's own practice in service. Recent efforts focusing on principal supervision (e.g., Goldring et al., 2020) and coaching (e.g., Kraft & Christian, 2021) reveal that our understanding of how to change principal behavior to promote pedagogical leadership is limited (Hazi, 2022). Those in preparation programs that teach how to deliver feedback, may have to reconsider that instructional improvement involves more complex processes that require both principal and teacher to have literacy skills in order to study and change one's practice.

Indeed, it is time to acknowledge that "the generic teacher" has its limits and that content and context have an important role in instructional improvement. Stein and Nelson (2003) advise that principals "post-hole," i.e., master one subject, and obtain a 'bounded slice' of others. However, this may not be practical. Instead, principals should promote professional development of the content expertise in teachers or those designated as department heads or teacher leaders, who can account for both content and context within their observation. This can benefit the teacher in observation as well as the principal in curriculum decision making.

⁵ A chapter on self-assessment or self-evaluation is found in all four handbooks of teacher evaluation (Kennedy, 2010; Millman, 1981; Millman & Darling-Hammond, 1991; Stronge & Tucker, 2003).

Additionally, teachers must be active participants in the improvement process (however it is delivered), and not its objects who receive feedback that is bite-sized, so it can be easily digested! Moreover, I should be mindful of Guskey and Link's (2022) findings that many teachers want to evaluate their impact on student learning—the one thing that evaluation forms rarely address. Teachers should address consequential—not trivial—questions such as: What evidence is there of student learning? Was the purpose of the lesson accomplished? What errors did my students make? Principals can help to promote a culture where teachers assemble evidence of student learning (e.g., right answers to teacher questions, quiz scores, and items wrong in a whole class review). Such evidence seems most useful.

Unfortunately, the workplace literature paints a dismal picture about the results of feedback:

Over the past 40 years psychometricians have shown in study after study that people don't have the objectivity to hold in their heads a stable definition of an abstract quality, such as business acumen or assertiveness, and then accurately evaluate someone else on it. Our evaluations are deeply colored by our own understanding of what we're rating others on, our own sense of what good looks like for a particular competency, our harshness or leniency as raters, and our own inherent and unconscious biases. This phenomenon is called the idiosyncratic rater effect, and it's large (more than half of your rating of someone else reflects your characteristics, not hers) and resilient (no training can lessen it). In other words, the research shows that feedback is more distortion than truth. (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019, "The Source of Truth" para 1)

In conclusion, instead of "delivering feedback," I believe we should help teachers assemble evidence to make decisions that will guide instruction, as well as guide their learning and growth. Might this be what we in supervision mean when we refer to instructional improvement (Hazi, 2020)? I hope so.

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