Assessing Multiple Stakeholders' Perceptions of an Effective

Principal Evaluation System

Abstract

Existing principal evaluation research has failed to include the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The present research study used focus group interviews to gather data about designing a principal evaluation process that includes these perspectives. Focus groups were conducted with principals, parents, certificated staff, and classified employees (N=34) in a public school district. Our findings revealed five common themes for all stakeholders, as well as themes that were unique to specific participant groups. We then examined the themes to determine how they aligned with the two primary purposes of evaluation: accountability and professional development (Stronge, 1995).

The evaluation of school leaders has received much attention in research and policy debates (Council of Chief School Officers, 2008; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2011). Yet, the focus has been primarily on determining the content and purpose of evaluation, rather than on the principal evaluation process itself (Sun, Youngs, Yang, Chu, & Zhao, 2012: Goldring, Cravens, Murray, Porter, Elliott, & Carson, 2009). Dialogue amongst researchers on the topic of evaluation has resulted in recommendations to include multiple stakeholders (VIVA Project Minnesota Teachers Idea Exchange, 2012; King & Ehlert, 2008; Clifford & Ross, 2011). Scant empirical research has focused, however, on the inclusion of perspectives from these stakeholders in the design of the principal evaluation system (Mahar & Strobert, 2010).

Given the limited empirical research on the principal evaluation process, especially regarding incorporation of the multiple perspective framework, this study examined the evaluation process by exploring the perspectives of multiple parties who should be included in the principal evaluation. Focus group interviews guided the design of this research study because this approach enabled the gathering of data directly from the multiple stakeholders, including principals. In this study, we examined the potential benefits of using the multiple stakeholder approach to balance the two primary purposes of principal evaluation: accountability and professional growth. Then we examined the stakeholders' perspectives about the principal evaluation process to identify themes and determine alignment with the evaluation purposes.

Purpose of Evaluation in Education

Increasing focus on educator quality and accountability has placed the spotlight on employee evaluations in education. Stronge (1995) identified the need for developing an

educational evaluation system that reflects the two dominant personnel evaluation approaches, which he asserts are accountability and professional growth. An important feature of principal evaluations is the fact that these assessments can serve multiple, often conflicting purposes (Portin, Feldman & Knapp, 2006). These two approaches are closely aligned with what educators describe as summative and formative assessment respectively and have been "described as incompatible, often resulting in a focus on one purpose to the virtual exclusion of the other" (p. 131). Yet the emerging trends in principal performance assessments have moved towards greater emphasis on both of these purposes. Specifically, the federal and state standards reform movement has shifted greater emphasis on evaluating principals based on student outcomes via an accountability perspective, all the while "interest in discovering what assessment can do for leaders is growing" (Portin, et al., p. 28) via a professional growth perspective.

School districts must be clear about the purpose of their principal evaluation before developing the appropriate assessment tools and process, but determining this purpose is not an easy task as evidence suggests that districts must reconcile the conflict between both accountability and professional growth purposes for evaluation. For instance, Zepeda, Lanoue, Price and Jiminez (2014) showed that principal evaluators such as superintendents, often have to struggle with the tension of wanting to focus on principal professional improvement and growth against the context of accountability pressures. In this study, we examine how the use of a multiple stakeholder approach to principal evaluations balances both accountability and professional growth purposes of school leadership assessment.

Principal Evaluation

While the emphasis from policy and research perspectives has been on teacher evaluations, both the Race to the Top criteria (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) and No

Child Left Behind waiver requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) also incorporate principal evaluation as a critical component (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2009). In fact, past research supporting principals' influences on student outcomes (Waters, Marzano, & McNully, 2003) and teacher retention (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Balu, Beteille, & Loeb, 2009) has demonstrated principals' critical impact on the school community.

Due to the lack of research on evaluating principal effectiveness, policy has been driving practice as principal evaluation systems are implemented prior to the establishment of an empirical base of knowledge required for such an endeavor (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2013). The existing research on principal effects has primarily focused on student outcomes, particularly achievement (Bowers, & Bradford, 2014; Coelli & Green, 2012; May, Huff & Goldring, 2012; Waters, Marzano, & McNully, 2003). Despite the political push to use student achievement as measures of principal quality in the field setting, research findings have suggested that student outcomes, such as achievement data, are inappropriate for the use of high stakes personnel decisions in light of the current lack of ability to capture the independent effects of principals apart from their school context (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2013).

Furthermore, evaluation processes are not as straightforward as some may believe, as superintendents and principals may perceive them differently. For instance, Harrison and Peterson (1986) found that principals did not have as clear of an understanding of the processes and procedures used for their evaluations as superintendents did. In addition, superintendents' perceptions of the important principal evaluative domains have differed from the actual criteria measured by the principal appraisal instrument used by their districts (Fletcher & McInerney, 1995), which again suggests misalignment.

Misalignments in the evaluation process may be perceived as a lack of procedural justice from the perspective of principals, and research has found evaluatees who perceive fairness in the evaluation process will more likely find their evaluator's feedback useful and consequently be more likely to take on professional development activities to improve their performance (Tuytens & Devos, 2014). Given perceptions of the general lack of quality and integrity in the evaluation process, it is no wonder that principals in Davis and Hensley's (1999) work suggested that their formal evaluations did not help with "shaping or directing their professional development or in promoting school effectiveness"(p. 399). In fact, in their study, principals criticized their evaluation processes, citing the lack of input from multiple stakeholders such as teachers and parents, as among the problems with the present system.

Similarly, principals have also emphasized the importance of their collaborations with a community of stakeholders, including parents and teachers (Medina, Martinez, Murakmai, Rodriguez, & Hernandez, 2014). Consequently, effective principal evaluations should include the perspective of parents and the school community. It is because of this widespread impact and the need for valid principal performance assessments that many are calling for a multiple stakeholder approach to principal evaluations (Brown-Sims, 2010; Lashway, 2004; Rinehart & Russo, 1995; Whaley 2002).

Multiple Stakeholder Perceptions

The 360-degree feedback is an increasingly popular human resource evaluation strategy for gathering feedback from co-workers, including supervisors, peers, subordinates, and others in the organization (Budman & Rice, 1994; Hoffman, 1995; Tyson & Ward, 2004). In the business sector, the 360-degree feedback is widely accepted as a beneficial evaluation instrument for managers and executives because it enables them to examine leadership behaviors and style from

multiple stakeholders (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000). One of the benefits of this evaluation process is the incorporation of the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, whose feedback is used to promote personal growth of the evaluatee as well as lead to positive outcomes for the organization (Brutus, Fleenor, & London, in press). According to Carey (1995), the business industry is split on whether the 360-feedback should be used for developmental purposes or accountability. Arguably, this multi-rater evaluation system has the potential to provide summative assessment data as well as formative developmental feedback if the measures are developed appropriately (Hoffman, 1995). The multiple stakeholder perspective has been identified as a critical component of accurately representing performance (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000) and understanding effectiveness as a leader (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998).

The 360-degree feedback strategy gained popularity in education as a feedback rich evaluation process for teachers (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; King, 2011) and principals (Brown-Sims, 2010; Moore, 2009). Mahar and Strobert (2010) contend that the 360-degree feedback process has been underutilized as well as under researched in the K-12 public education system. Based on teacher survey results, they report that teachers preferred the multi-source feedback process because it enhanced the development of professional growth goals while also focusing on student achievement. Indeed, a multiple stakeholder approach to evaluation feedback has been found to be related to improvement in performance (Edwards & Ewens, 1996). Moore (2009) advocates for adoption of the 360-degree feedback process for principals. He indicates that principals would benefit from knowing the perceptions of not only their supervisors but also of teachers, staff, and parents who are impacted by principals' leadership practices and decisions. Similarly in Minnesota, the collaborative efforts and survey responses of countless instructional personnel across the state have resulted in numerous recommendations for schools to adopt a

principal evaluation process that incorporates the perceptions of all critical stakeholders (VIVA Project Minnesota Teachers Idea Exchange, 2012).

As school leaders, principals are critical to building "strong community relationships with stakeholders within and outside the school" (Clifford & Ross, 2011). These key stakeholders include parents, faculty, district staff, and possibly students. Multiple stakeholder input in the evaluation process is viewed as beneficial to understanding the school leader's perceived performance in the organizational context of the school (Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006). Specifically, multiple stakeholders contribute differing viewpoints; helping to assess the multifaceted nature of the role and responsibility of school principals. In a review of the literature of the policies and practices of principal evaluations, Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas and Leon (2011) suggested that the quality of the principal appraisal process is more important than the actual content used for the evaluations themselves. To improve the principal evaluation process, numerous authors have recommended the inclusion of multiple stakeholders during its development and implementation, including peers, teachers and parents (Brown-Sims, 2010; Lashway, 2004; Rinehart & Russo, 1995; Whaley, 2002).

This study includes the perspectives of principals, parents, certificated, and classified staff members on the topic of the development of an effective principal evaluation system. When it comes to research and policy discussions on the issue of principal performance appraisals, classified staff members are often a neglected group whose voices are unheard, despite the fact they have much insight into the effectiveness of principals and principals have much impact on their professional work. In this study, we give special attention to the evaluation process given its important influence on evaluatees' utility of feedback, which may influence principal self-development behavior (Tuytens & Devos, 2014) and the consequent potential improvement of

school effectiveness. Drawing upon both professional and empirical principal evaluation research, we have carefully established the need for continued principal evaluation research that includes the voices of multiple stakeholders.

Methods

Given the evolving nature of principal evaluation, efforts to investigate this contemporary phenomenon should proceed within the real-life context of a school district environment (Yin, 2009). As Seidman (1998) suggests, in order to understand an educational organization and phenomenon, the researcher should collect perspectives directly from the people who make up that organization. Focus group interviews were chosen in order to draw upon the experiences and direct thoughts of selected participants, who represent multiple stakeholders's views, which are important to understanding a fuller picture of principal evaluation (Patton, 2002).

Through conversational dialogue during the focus group interviews, participants' perspectives are captured with minimal direct influence on the responses or discussion from the researcher (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). As Morgan (2002) describes, focus group interviews promote greater insight into areas of research that are relatively new or evolving in nature. The focus groups were conducted with homogenous groups to account for differences in authority and position within the school community (Morgan, 1997); specifically, all principals participated with each other in a focus group, all parents participated in separate focus groups, and so forth with the other educational professionals. By grouping individuals according to their positions and corresponding level of authority, we minimized potential discomfort and conflict among the focus group participants (Morgan & Krueger, 1993).

Procedures

A member of our research team was approached by an Assistant Superintendent of a large (7,000+ students) suburban school district in California for assistance with updating and improving the district's principal evaluation process. The Assistant Superintendent explained that the district uses a simplistic principal evaluation process consisting primarily of occasional observations and "walking around the site." There were two official principal evaluation forms that can be used for the appraisal process, one that consists of boxes that allow the option for evaluators to mark that performance was either satisfactory or not, and another form with several areas for evaluator comments such as strongest assets, recommendations, improvement needs, and additional evaluator comments.

Multiple Stakeholders

Participants (N=34) were selected to reflect numerous groups that would have insight into the performance of their school principal and the development of the evaluation process (Brown-Sims, 2010; Lashway, 2004; Whaley, 2002; Rinehart & Russo, 1995). Specifically, four focus groups were conducted with principals, parents, certificated employees (i.e., teachers and a school counselor) and classified employees (i.e., site secretaries). The parents, teachers, and principals represented every school level (i.e., elementary, middle and high school).

For purposes of developing focus group questions that were grounded in both practice and the literature, we consulted a wide-array of reference sources to aid in their construction: peer-reviewed academic journals, professional and best practice documents, research produced by non-profit public research agencies and institutions, policy briefs emerging from the wider field of education reformers, think-tanks, the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards and Indicators and numerous on the market principal evaluation instruments, including Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (n.d.), Marshall's Principal

Evaluation Rubric (2011), and Marzano's School Administration Rubric (Learning Sciences International, 2013). These questions were asked of all members of the focus groups, although the questions differed slightly for the principal focus group.

Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process as categories and themes were discovered along the way and contributed to the effort to explain the principal evaluation process. According to Merriam (2009) "data analysis is a complex process that involved moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation," and "the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your questions" (p. 176). The next step, coding data, is important for organizing the text of transcripts in such a way to reveal possible patterns emerging from the data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Through the coding process, possible themes begin to emerge and capture the data in an effort to explain the phenomenon under study. As Merriam (2009) explained, codes may be "single words, letters, numbers, phrases,…" (p. 173). Open coding was used for this case study in order to uncover information that may be expansive rather than restricting (Merriam, 2009).

Findings

After coding was completed, we worked together to develop emerging themes from the data segments, labels, and categories. Figure 1 demonstrates the nine dominant themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. In the following discussion we identify and define the themes, relying on the data that emerged across the four stakeholder groups: principals, certificated staff, classified staff, and parents. We also identify the themes that emerged in the principals and certificated staff focus group discussions, but not in the parents and classified staff focus groups.
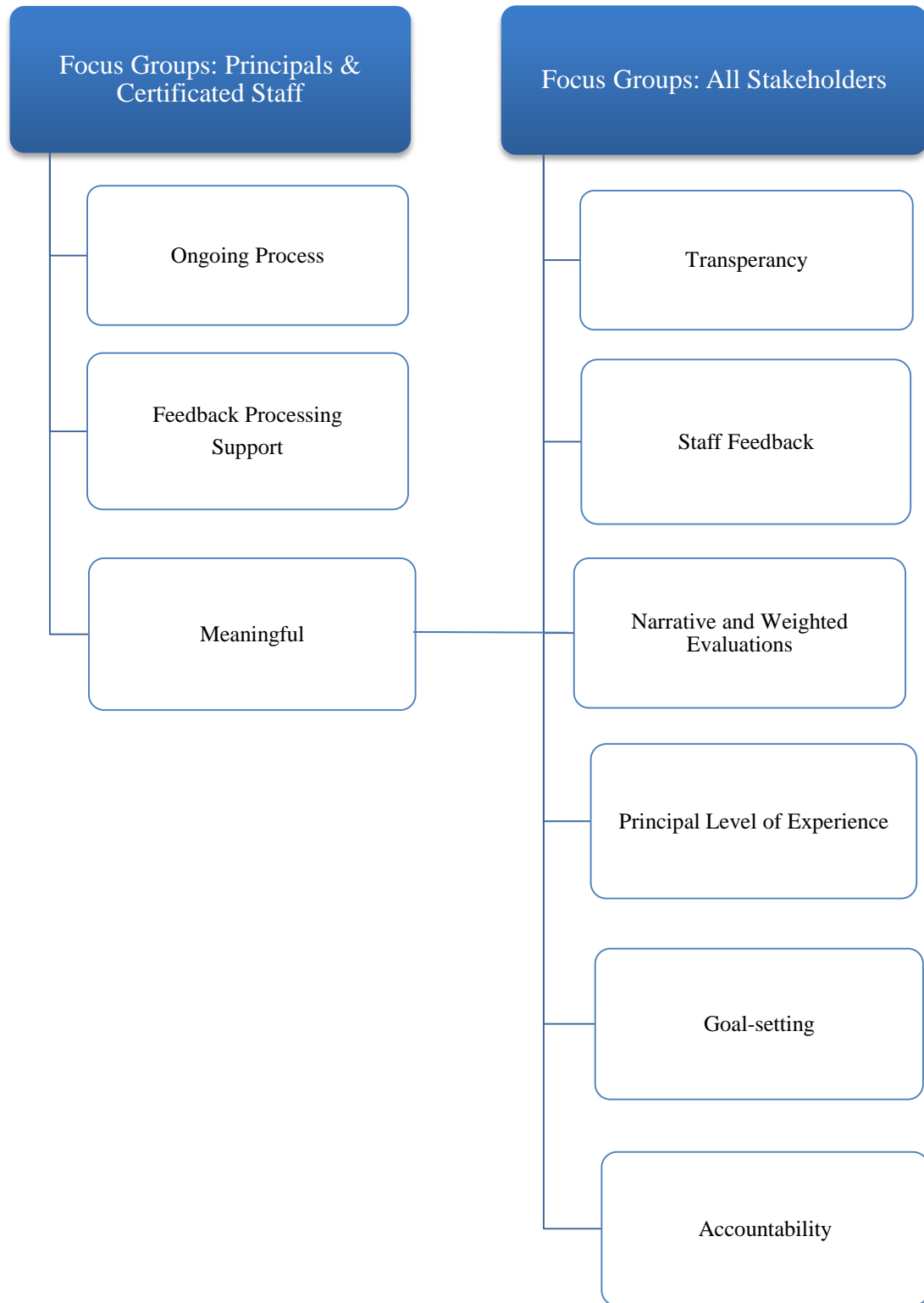
Figure 1. Focus Groups Themes

Transparency

The transparency theme is a genuine concern that quite clearly emerged from all of the stakeholders. Classified and certificated staff members, as well as the parents, expressed that they had very limited knowledge about the district's principal evaluation process. As one of the classified staff members reported "We [the staff] don't even know when it [principal evaluation] is happening." Collectively, the classified staff members expressed their desire for transparency because as one participant stated, "…it is not obvious that it [principal evaluation] is occurring because it appears to be done in a vacuum."

A certificated staff member stated emphatically that the principal evaluation system must "Be more transparent. None of the staff members knew what the purpose of the principal evaluation was for [sic]." Following this comment, another participant noted "I didn't know there was one [principal evaluation]." Parents likewise affirmed that they did not know much about the principal evaluation process or about its intended purpose.

Not only is the lack of transparency an issue, but sometimes the principal evaluation process does not even occur. For instance, one of the principals commented "I haven't been evaluated since [her former evaluator] left, it should be that is has to be done." Although the principals focused indirectly on the transparency issue, they were adamant in their belief that the evaluation should not be a snapshot of one point in time during the year. Instead, their focus group discussion indicated a desire to have an "on-going process" that is comprehensive and demonstrates appreciation for the work that has been done throughout the year. Certificated staff expressed agreement that the evaluation process should occur throughout the year rather than in a single high pressure event.

Feedback

The perceptions regarding feedback varied somewhat across the multiple stakeholder groups. While all groups advocated for the inclusion of feedback during the principal evaluation process, the principals and certificated staff stated that only feedback from teachers should be included. Yet, when parents and classified staff were asked about the evaluation process, they clearly indicated that their feedback should be included also. However, the individuals representing these two stakeholder groups were hesitant to provide feedback unless it was confidential.

According to the classified staff "It is important to solicit staff and parent feedback because they are the clients." Furthermore, the classified staff raised concern because there is "currently no staff/parent input" and therefore, they expressed that they lacked knowledge that the evaluation process was even occurring. Their concerns about the lack of staff/parent input into the principal evaluation process appeared to be connected to the lack of transparency in the principal evaluation process.

On the other hand, both principals and certificated staff expressed concern about parental/staff feedback that contained personal attacks. For example, one principal commented that feedback is beneficial only "if [staff feedback is] well written and professionally done and tied to skills and things to work on rather than personal attacks." The desire to eliminate personal attacks and to avoid unprofessional feedback emerged as a concern across all of the stakeholder groups. As a certificated staff member indicated "the staff survey should be shared with the principal. The disrespectful comments should be cleaned up so that it is not personal."

Finally, the principals added a slightly different perspective on the feedback received as it was typically directed at them. Specifically, they felt challenged to process and make sense of

the feedback on their own. Thus, several principals indicated that they "need support in processing those things [staff feedback]. If a supervisor could work directly with the principal and explain for example, here are areas, some concerns and some outliers … capturing trends and presenting that to us and have that conversation about that skill."

Narrative and weighted evaluations

The importance of providing narrative feedback as a part of the evaluation process emerged as a significant theme across all of the stakeholder focus group discussions. Principals, in particular, asserted that narrative feedback is far more valuable than weighted evaluations. For example, one of the principals explained, "I do not believe in weighting system… should do narrative …." Another principal agreed, "I don't think there should be weights. I am not necessarily evaluated on every piece every year. Depends on goals that year …" In fact, the principals stated that they were far more interested in the comments and would actually skip over the quantitative ratings in order to read the written feedback.

Even the classified staff believed that narrative feedback provided more meaningful information. The staff members asserted that weights failed to provide sufficient information about all aspects of the principal's job. One of the classified staff members explained this idea further, adding "don't include weights, as all aspects of the principal's job are important. An area that would usually be weighted ten percent could turn into a 90% problem if not addressed and nipped in the bud early on."

Certificated staff members and parents did not show the same opposition to weights as principals and classified staff members. In general, they did not seem as opposed to the idea of using weights in the evaluation process for principals. As one parent explained, "I think we can

give them sort of importance of categories of evaluations, but you know, focus groups in [school] sites generally lends itself to weighting questions and percentages.

Principal level of experience

The idea of accounting for the principal's level of experience or career spectrum in the evaluation process emerged as a common theme for this study across all of the focus groups. For example, one of the female principals reported that it is important to "take [experience] into consideration. This sentiment was affirmed by the other principals in the focus group and clarified further by one of the male principals who noted "…as new principal my needs [are] very different than experienced principal."

Parents, certificated staff, and classified staff members echoed these sentiments about the need to modify principal evaluations in order to reflect the principal's level of experience. In a discussion among several parents, they noted that "it [evaluation] depends on where they are in the process and the school." Another parent clarified, "whether you're brand new or whether you've been around twenty years." Likewise a teacher, one of the certificated staff member, discussed the importance of taking "into consideration whether the principal is new or not…somebody has to provide some protection for the new principals from the mob mentality that can set in from parents." In general, all of the focus group discussions reflected the idea that first year principals should be evaluated differently than veteran teachers.

Goal-setting

All of the stakeholders identified goal-setting as an important component of the principal evaluation process. The discussion among principals revealed a preference for including goal-setting as part of a collaborative effort between the supervisor and principal. In particular, the evaluation presents an important opportunity for the principal to reflect on and target areas of

growth for the coming year. When asked what has been useful in prior principal evaluations, the male principal responded "collaboratively generated goals set for myself with action plan with some type of frequency or follow-up to assess those goals."

A similar perspective was shared by many parents in the parent focus group, when they were asked about the evaluation process. Specifically, one of the parents identified goal-setting as a helpful component of the evaluation process for parents. Likewise, the certificated staff considered the goal-setting process as an opportunity to examine the progress that the principal has made towards achieving the goals. The identification of goals according to numerous parents is important to the feedback process because it provides an opportunity for principals to grow and "recognize their successes and failures."

Meaningful

According to principals, an important aspect of the evaluation process that is missing is meaningfulness, as they felt that current evaluations lacks depth and meaning. Specifically, one principal explained that evaluations should be "collaborative and ongoing and not just done in June. My former evaluator did them on time but only wrote 2-3 sentences. It should be more in-depth and meaningful." The meaningful theme encompassed all of the other themes to some extent because it encapsulated the notion that principal evaluations should matter and thus needs to incorporate components and efforts reflecting the depth, care, and time that is necessary to give meaning to the evaluation process.

Although the other stakeholder groups also implicated the meaningful theme, their perspectives differed slightly from the remarks made by principals and certificated staff. Principals and certificated staff alluded to the frequency of conducting evaluations as a manner by which the process might become more meaningful. While one of the certificated staff

members explained in her focus group discussion, that "there should be evaluations for new principals, but they do not need to all be formal, for example, there can be formative assessments and check-ins to see how things are." When a classified member was asked about the purpose of the principal evaluation system, she reported that "it should be to provide meaningful feedback…how to improve and grow and to provide support. It should also be an atta [sic] boy recognition of a job well-done." Unfortunately, the current evaluation process lacks the desired quality and depth. As succinctly remarked by one of the classified staff participants, the evaluation process "has to be done but it is not very meaningful."

Accountability

Accountability was emphasized in almost all of the themes. For instance, in the transparency theme, stakeholders expressed their desire not only for holding principals accountable for performance but also the district for developing a performance evaluation system that is transparent. Many stakeholders noted that they were not aware of the purpose of principal evaluations or whether evaluations even occurred, which suggested that the system was not accountable to its constituents. Although the feedback theme focused primarily on providing valuable feedback to principals, a classified member recommended that parent's feedback should be included in the evaluation process to hold principals accountable to the parents, who are the district's clients. In the goal-setting theme, the principal and parents noted that there should be accountability for assessment of whether principals met their goals. Finally, for the meaningful theme, a classified member identified the need for accountability "to determine if someone will continue in their role…." In the next section, we examine the themes to determine how they aligned with the existing evaluation research identifying the two primary purposes: accountability and professional development (Stronge, 1995). Specifically, we determined

whether the perceptions of multiple stakeholders revealed alignment or exposed additional aspects of the process that are necessary for the establishment of a comprehensive evaluation system using the multiple stakeholder process.

Alignment with Evaluation Purposes

As the findings above reveal, the themes differed to some extent across the stakeholder groups, revealing that perceptions and expectations about the principal evaluation process were very much tied to an individual's role in the school system. This result is, in fact, consistent with the 360-degree feedback research about multiple stakeholder perceptions. That is, the benefits of 360-degree feedback evaluations include disagreement (Hoffman & Woehr, 2009) and the provision of unique insights (Lance et al., 2008) from individuals in different roles. Figure 2 reflects how themes emerging from the multiple stakeholders' focus group discussion were aligned with the purposes of evaluation revealed in the literature. All stakeholders identified the accountability approach as an inherent component of the principal evaluation process and as a concept that was embedded across the themes. Transparency is related closely to accountability as evidenced by stakeholders' desires to be informed about and included in the evaluation process. The professional growth approach aligns with both the level of experience and goal-setting themes. Given the different needs of veteran versus new principals, the multiple stakeholders expressed their desire for an evaluation system that takes experience into consideration. By holding different expectations for principals based on experience level, there is an implicit evaluative perspective that emphasizes professional growth. The principals, as well as the other stakeholders, advocated for the opportunity to set goals as part of the evaluation process, which was perceived as essential to professional growth and individual improvement.

Despite the perceived tension between accountability and professional growth, a number of themes reflected emphases on both of the evaluation approaches. Specifically, meaningfulness, feedback and narrative/weighted evaluation were all identified by the multiple stakeholders as important components of the principal evaluation process. As explained in Figure 3, these three aspect of the principal evaluation process – meaningfulness, feedback, narrative/weighted evaluation – are important to include because they have the potential to address both accountability and professional growth foci of evaluation. For instance, while principals and classified staff members sought to avoid the use of weights, seeking instead to adopt a professional growth perspective, classified staff and parents did not have such reservations for using weights to hold principals accountable for performance.
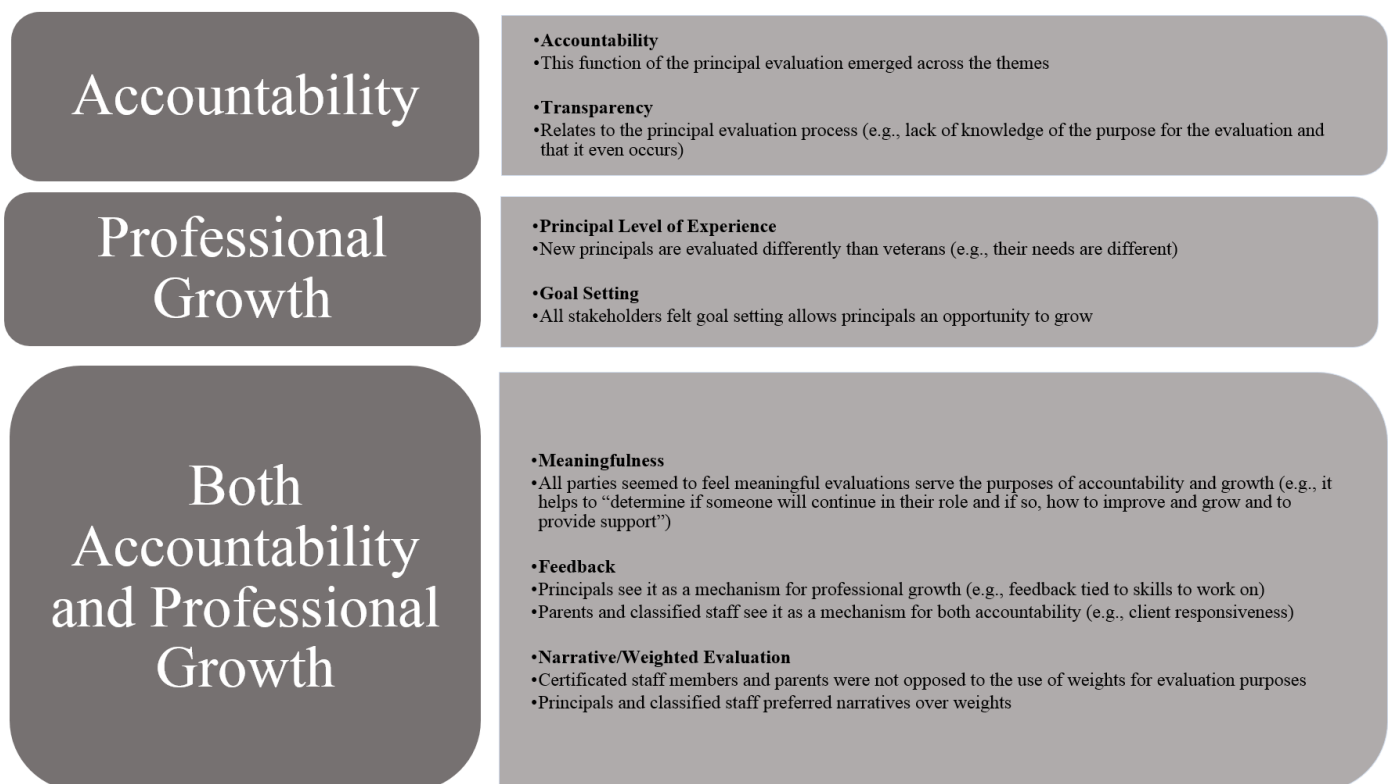
Accountability	•**Accountability** •This function of the principal evaluation emerged across the themes •**Transparency** •Relates to the principal evaluation process (e.g., lack of knowledge of the purpose for the evaluation and that it even occurs)
Professional Growth	•**Principal Level of Experience** •New principals are evaluated differently than veterans (e.g., their needs are different) •**Goal Setting** •All stakeholders felt goal setting allows principals an opportunity to grow
Both Accountability and Professional Growth	•**Meaningfulness** •All parties seemed to feel meaningful evaluations serve the purposes of accountability and growth (e.g., it helps to "determine if someone will continue in their role and if so, how to improve and grow and to provide support") •**Feedback** •Principals see it as a mechanism for professional growth (e.g., feedback tied to skills to work on) •Parents and classified staff see it as a mechanism for both accountability (e.g., client responsiveness) •**Narrative/Weighted Evaluation** •Certificated staff members and parents were not opposed to the use of weights for evaluation purposes •Principals and classified staff preferred narratives over weights

Figure 2. Evaluation Purposes and Theme Alignment

Discussion

In an effort to make sense of the findings, we examined the themes for consistency or

divergence from the professional and empirical literature (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Through

this process, we were able to determine whether the themes reflect the practical aspects of

effective principal evaluation processes as recommended by policy analysts as well as the

evidence based assertions made by researchers. Our findings are illuminating in several areas.

For instance, the perspective of the stakeholders in our study was aligned with much of what

professional practice and existing research has suggested. Further, by seeking feedback about the

evaluation process from multiple stakeholders, we discovered varying perceptions and

expectations across the different stakeholder groups.

The transparency theme has been identified as an especially important component of the

evaluation process in previous research studies (Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengston, 2012) and also

from all of the stakeholders in the present study. As Fuller and Hollingworth (2013) contend, the

principal evaluation process must be perceived as fair, particularly by school principals. In order

to determine if a process is fair, there must exist some degree of transparency so that the process

is trusted and perceived as valid. The transparency theme was particularly important among

classified employees, certificated staff, and parents, who expressed concern because they lacked

knowledge about the process. As Clifford, Hansen, and Wraight (2012) concluded, the

evaluation process should be transparent for stakeholders through clear communication about the

evaluation purpose and process. Although the principal focus group did not specifically discuss

transparency, they expressed their desire to be aware of and not surprised by the evaluation

process. The transparency theme, similar to the feedback theme, is an especially important issue

for multiple stakeholders who desired not only to understand, but also contribute to the principal evaluation process.

The critical importance of providing feedback to evaluatees has been noted by researchers (Sun et al., 2012), as well as by participants in our study. In fact, the participants in our study emphasized the importance of including feedback from multiple stakeholders. However, the certificated employees and principals expressed concern about parental/staff feedback potentially becoming an avenue for personal attacks rather than an avenue for professional and objective evaluative feedback. Consequently, effective principal evaluation must develop mechanisms to mitigate some of the problems associated with the usage of feedback. In the present study, the participants preferred narrative feedback as long as it included professional comments and not merely personal attacks. Previous researchers likewise reported that principals valued narrative feedback, whether oral or written, from their supervisors, regardless of whether it was positive or negative (Parylo et al., 2012). This difference in outcomes between the present study and previous research could be due to the inclusion of multiple stakeholder perceptions from parents and other staff members. Not all stakeholders are likely to have personal relationships with the principal; thus these individuals may think it is their right to include personal attacks if they are dissatisfied or dislike the principal for any reason. Although negative feedback from supervisors who are respected is viewed as constructive (Parylo et al., p. 227), negative feedback from parents, teachers and staff, is likely to be viewed as destructive when it is disrespectful and personally motivated.

Accounting for the principal's level of experience during the evaluation is premised on past research that supports a distinction between what is "expected performance for novice principals and more experienced principals" (Clifford et al., 2012, p. 42). The level of

experience, which is also referred to as the career spectrum was likewise reflected in focus group discussions among the multiple stakeholders in our study. According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, principal evaluation systems should reflect the principal's career spectrum in order to promote effectiveness (Clifford et al.).

The identification of explicit goals to strive towards was mentioned both in the literature (Clifford, et al., 2012; Huff & Goldring, 2012) and by participants in our study. Specifically, policy analysts (Clifford et al.) stressed the value of identifying clear, explicit goals as part of an effective principal evaluation system. Similarly, researchers report that planning and implementing agreed upon goals are part of the core school leadership tasks (Davis, Kerney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011; Huff & Goldring, 2012).

Despite the existence of much overlap between the professional literature and the perspective of participants regarding best practices for principal evaluations, the recommendations did not always align. For instance, while weights on various evaluative factors have been suggested by the literature (Davis et al., 2011), principals and classified staff were against the idea of implementing weights as they felt it would not lend itself to the multidimensional aspects of the principal's job. Principals were especially focused on the value of narrative feedback with focused support for information processing. Thus, it could be that weights have merit, but overall the potential benefits of the evaluation process are diminished without the desired narrative feedback and processing opportunity. Misalignments like these must be addressed during the design of the principal evaluation system because failing to do so may negatively impact buy-in from relevant stakeholders, particularly the principals themselves.

Whereas many of the themes aligned primarily with either the accountability or professional growth approaches, several themes: accountability, transparency, level of

experience, and goal-setting aligned with both the accountability and professional growth approaches. Given these alignments, we assert that our proposed multiple stakeholder approach to principal evaluations can serve as a mechanism to balance the accountability and professional growth purposes of school leadership assessment. Like all research, this study had limitations, which are presented in the following section.

Limitations

While the qualitative focus group research method was appropriate for the present study, it is not generalizable or representative (Morgan, 1988) of the greater population. Despite this, our study's participants provided perspectives that add significant detail about the principal evaluation process. Specifically, past researchers (Portin et al., 2006) have identified the positives and negatives of including multiple stakeholder perspectives in their recommendations to move principal evaluation in this direction. Yet, multiple stakeholders' perspectives regarding the evaluation process are glaringly absent. Their perspectives are important and could inform the development of evaluation models that are not only helpful to achieve school systems' accountability goals and principals' professional growth goals, but also promote positive school community relations and a collaborative school community (Clifford & Ross, 2011).

Another limitation of the study was that the focus groups were unbalanced relative to size. For instance, there were many more parents than principals in the district, and as a result, there were many more parents in the parent focus groups than principals in the principal focus group. Moreover, our study could have further benefited from the inclusion of more certificated staff members as their participation was not proportionate to the amount of certificated staff employees in the school district overall. However, we were able to obtain the perspectives of both classified and certificated employees, including principals and teachers from across school

levels. All participants were provided the opportunity to speak openly about the subject matter, allowing for a rich and in-depth exploration into the area of principal evaluations.

Finally, although one of the district's principal evaluators, the Assistant Superintendent of HR, worked alongside one of the authors of this paper throughout the data collection process, it would have been further enlightening to have the opportunity to conduct a focus group with all the principal evaluators in the district to gain further insight into their perspective about principal evaluations. That being said, the Assistant Superintendent of HR interacted regularly with one of the authors and expressed his desire to update the principal evaluation process and include the perspective of multiple stakeholders in its design.

Implications and Conclusion

In recent times, an increasing emphasis on accountability has permeated the education environment. It has been argued within the accountability context that performance measurement models must address stakeholder needs (Harrison et al., 2012). One way of doing this is to include their input into the evaluation process, as we have done. Discussions with the multiple stakeholders in this study reflect a keen interest among these participants to better understand as well as to contribute to making the principal evaluation process a meaningful experience for principals and for the greater school community.

The present work included the voices of many who are affected by principal performance, including classified staff members. The perspective of the latter group has often been ignored in the literature. By obtaining the input of several parties who are affected by the performance of principals, we are better able to holistically address how to evaluate the far-reaching impacts of principals. This philosophy is aligned with education evaluation research,

especially the principle regarding the necessity for stakeholders to be involved in the evaluation process (King & Ehlert, 2008).

Although this study produced rich conversations with multiple stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the principal evaluation process, not all members of the school community were represented in the focus groups. Consequently, future research might include additional perspectives, such as those from students, supervisors, and other staff members (e.g., custodians, nutritionists, other support staff).

The need to better understand how to improve the principal evaluation process cannot be understated. Evaluation processes are currently not based on evidence that ensures the promotion of effective leadership (Goldring et al., 2009) and because there is no one size fits all approach due to variation in districts' needs and capacity, school community members must have serious conversations regarding what performance expectations should principals be held accountable to and how to best proceed to evaluate that performance. This study complements the "growing trend of involving parents, teachers and principals themselves" (Sun et al., 2012) in the development and refinement of the principal evaluation process.

No matter how good an evaluation system is, if the employees are not on board with it, the system is doomed to fail. Districts must be cognizant of discrepancies between what they seek to accomplish and how their employees may feel about those endeavors. If designed correctly, the evaluation process offers employees the opportunity to gain substantive feedback on their performance, develop themselves and grow professionally (Tuytens & Devos, 2014). If employees are not enthusiastic about the process, discussions should be held between relevant stakeholders and the district to determine how to best address any conflicts and misunderstandings. Through the 360-degree feedback that includes multiple stakeholder

perspectives as well as principals' self-reflection, a model may be developed to serve as a mechanism to achieve the dual evaluation purposes of accountability and professional growth for principal evaluations.

Only by open conversation can the school community be actively engaged in the process that emphasizes the importance of each perspective and unique insight into how to further improve principal evaluations. It almost goes without saying that meaningful principal evaluations are critical for helping principals improve their effectiveness, and principals themselves are critical to the school community and all its stakeholders (Medina et al., 2014). Given the general consensus that principal performance does impact student learning (Waters et al., 2003), one way that we can improve the education of our students is to improve the evaluation process for our principals.

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