



Core Assumptions About Current Practice

Initially, in the process of shifting teacher evaluation policy and practice, decision makers and policymakers, along with professional learning providers, falsely assumed the training they were providing to administrators would increase the capacity to coach, lead learning, and impact student outcomes. As we have the opportunity to witness the realities and results of those assumptions every day (see Tables 1.1–1.3), it has become clear to us why current evaluation and supervision practices are still leading to confirmation, status quo, and even retreat, and why the related training requires new thinking and revision.

TABLE 1.1 CORE ASSUMPTION 1

Assumption #1: That administrators, based on preparation programs and training they received, would be able to apply the skills they learned to observation in the classroom.

Reality: As we work with administrators in observation practices, we watch as many enter the rooms, find a seat somewhere in the back (and often remain), and begin to furiously script notes or tap at breakneck speed on a computer keyboard. When we ask them about these methods, most simply say, referring to the training they have received, “when we observe, we need to script everything that is said and seen so that we have a preponderance of evidence for rating the teacher.” However, with this method, the observer becomes a spectator or court reporter.

Additionally, we find that with existing training or preparation, there is an issue of transfer. When video-based training is used in isolation, observers do not or cannot always successfully apply essential strategies when observing in the classroom (such as how to interact with students).

When observers recognize the value and role of purposeful evidence collection and develop the necessary related strategies and skill sets, they understand how feedback to a teacher will result in more than just a regurgitated script (from the scripting method) or a summary (from the limited notetaking/interaction methods). This is complex work but critical to our efforts in providing teachers with a sense of how instruction is engaging students in the learning and, ultimately, what those students have learned.

TABLE 1.2 CORE ASSUMPTION 2

Assumption #2: That administrators, based on preparation programs and training they received, would be able to analyze the observed practice of a teacher against a set of teacher performance standards and determine the potential impact on students.

Reality: Instructional frameworks, or rubrics, are invaluable tools that serve to:

- Define effective practice.
- Provide look-fors for observations.
- Establish clear standards and expectations.
- Provide leverage for growth and action steps.

Yet we are finding that leaders are still developing a deep understanding of indicators, attributes, and differences between performance levels, not having had an opportunity to engage in a high-level deconstruction of effective teaching and learning outlined by the framework. This can result in inaccurate ratings, subjective feedback, frustration on both the leader's and teacher's part, and diminished trust. The lack of depth of knowledge leaves observers unable to utilize the instrument effectively or efficiently to promote growth in a region or school.

Ultimately, observers need professional learning, that they have not necessarily received, on how to use their most valuable tool—the framework—to leverage growth, build a teacher's understanding of effective practice, or promote reflection about expected practices. Without this, teachers are left with little understanding of how evidence is collected related to the learning in their classrooms or how/why they were given a specific rating.

W. James Popham (2013) asserted that feedback should be about “a teacher's instructional ability. [The] dominant factor to be employed in appraising a teacher should be a teacher's effectiveness in promoting worthwhile learning” (p. 28). But are the findings about effectiveness being conveyed to a teacher? Are leaders successfully promoting reflection, building a teacher's accuracy in self-perception, and impacting instructional practices? We came to recognize there was a belief about the leader's capacity to provide feedback after an observation—Assumption #3 (Table 1.3).

TABLE 1.3 CORE ASSUMPTION 3

Assumption #3: That administrators, based on preparation programs and training they received, would be able to provide feedback that would directly impact teacher effectiveness.

Reality: Though administrators receive training to watch instruction and provide a rating, there has been little to no direct support to build their capacity to go beyond conveyance of the number score or a summary. However, even when evaluators accurately select performance levels, it does not mean teachers are receiving feedback that ensures new learning. This is compounded by the fact that potentially less-than-impactful feedback is provided only two to four times during a typical school year.

When we assume evaluators are effectively collecting evidence, analyzing impact on learning, and utilizing the framework (Assumptions #1 and #2), and they are in fact *not* doing or *not* able to do these things, the realistic picture is this:

- Teachers are not leaving feedback meetings or reading feedback reports understanding their ratings.
- Observers are unable to determine high-leverage coaching points that
 - are realistic and attainable next steps for a teacher;
 - impact and/or connect multiple aspects of instruction (such as establishing a clear learning target to then determine clear criteria); and/or
 - impact a high number of students.
- Teachers are not recognizing from the feedback their effectiveness or what to do next or differently.
- Teachers are unable to reflect on their own practices or next steps.

We have many opportunities to observe teachers in feedback meetings or sit with them as they read a written report. They often bring pads into the meetings, holding a pen throughout, waiting to write down a new idea or next step. Yet many leave having never written a thing. We have watched teachers, when provided with written feedback, scan the report searching for the rating, or before an administrator can begin a feedback meeting, ask, "What was my overall rating?" Before meetings, we have asked leaders to provide an example of one thing the teacher was trying since the last meeting, and they are unable to tell us. The reality is that the process is generally not resulting in any significant changes in practice.