

Growth Not Gotcha: The Power of Feedback for Future-Readiness of Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

Feedback is powerful. Everybody needs feedback. The need for feedback includes teachers. It's time to transform delivery of instruction and teacher-education with a powerful, 2-step observation-feedback process. Clarity of expectations set the stage for observation. Feedback is delivered instantaneously and regularly. Actionable feedback gets results including growth from self-reflection, collaborative conversation, and differentiated professional learning. Self-efficacy of teacher candidates soars and retention in the profession finally has a fighting chance. Feedback, the breakfast of champions (Blanchard, 2015) gives teachers dollops (Marzano, 2007). Feedback, the missing piece in continuous improvement (Feldman, 2016) and preparation of future-ready teacher candidates.

So, what's all the fuss about feedback? It is clear in virtually all domains of human endeavor that feedback is a critical attribute for learning and continuous improvement. John Hattie (2012), indicated a key factor in supporting the ongoing improvement of teaching is

actionable performance feedback (effect size .79). Robert Marzano (2007) stated that teachers need *dollops* of feedback.

From sports, to the arts, to business, untold time and creative energy are devoted to figuring out how to provide useful, productive feedback, thus improving performance. But how about in schools and university teacher education programs, the very institutions dedicated to human learning? How much feedback do teachers and future teachers receive? How is this feedback designed and delivered?

Background

Regrettably, for the vast majority of practicing teachers, meaningful feedback is limited at best (Gates, 2013), consisting largely of ritualized annual evaluations that do not reliably lead to improved teaching and learning. Fortunately, a number of programs across the country are beginning to address the paucity of actionable instructional feedback in a variety of creative ways. These are producing impressive gains in both teacher satisfaction and student achievement; hence, the power of feedback is being discovered---growth, not gotcha!

While there is no single best structure for providing meaningful feedback, this paper will *celebrate the present and inspire the future* by addressing the *power of feedback*, including: (1) the observation-feedback cycle, (2) feedback best practice and design, as well as (3) lessons learned during implementation and implications for teacher preparation.

The model presented has been utilized in the field for the past seven years. A total of 15,714 instructors have been observed in 845 schools/institutions of higher education. Over

200,000 observations (Structured Walkthrough, 2017) have been completed including 8.4 million data points.

The Power of Feedback

The research is clear. The number one factor affecting student learning is quality of teaching (“Teachers Matter” as cited in Forsberg, Jenkins, & Gillespie, 2015). The number one factor affecting quality of teaching is instructional conversations (Danielson, 2009).

Instructional conversations are most effective when based on observation data.

Because instructional observation has such potential as a catalyst to support both excellent teaching and a positive shift in learning, this process is establishing itself as best practice in educational circles (Hopkins, 2010). Bottom line, student achievement is linked to collegial collaboration, which is clearly supported by classroom walkthroughs (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2013). When observation occurs and feedback is delivered based on the data, results happen. Program initiatives are actualized. Instructional strategies improve. Students become more engaged. Student success increases.

Observation-Feedback Cycle

Best practice recommends an observation system to monitor practice and expected outcomes; to generate dynamic data that drive decision-making; and to ensure program standards are met in a continuous improvement model (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007; Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston 2004). “A program of brief but frequent classroom walkthroughs has become an increasingly popular strategy in recent years for informally supervising teachers and observing classroom activities” (Protheroe, 2009, p. 30).

Fundamentally, walk-through observations are “focused on specific ‘look-fors’...[that provide] valuable information about what’s working--or NOT working” (Protheroe, 2009, p. 30) in the classroom. Observation is the first step in performing an effective *one-two punch* to support instructional improvement. The second step is delivery of feedback.

When implementing an observation-feedback system, the two components are interdependent and the process continuous. Data generated during observation of instruction are the basis for design of feedback. Actionable feedback is delivered and both self-reflection and conversation ensue. Observations continue and additional data are collected. New feedback is generated, and so on.

[See Figure 1]

Feedback Best Practice

To be effective, feedback from observations must be delivered frequently. Regular receipt of feedback offers a continuous thread of support through which success can be measured and growth monitored. Feedback must also be immediate. End of day, next day, or *Monday-morning* feedback is unlikely to produce the impact of feedback delivered immediately following an observation. Teachers are eager to receive instructional support. Opportunity for reflection and metacognition will be maximized when feedback is delivered within minutes of the completed observation.

Actionable feedback has been defined as focused, specific, and framed for implementation (Jacob, 2016). To be *actionable*, the feedback must be based on a set of

expectations understood by both the observer and the observed (Gillespie & Jenkins, 2016).

Bottom line, actionable feedback is best when it is rooted in evidence (Estes, 2016).

In order to leverage the power of feedback, two questions must be answered. What is being ‘looked-for?’ and what should the ‘look-for, look-like?’ Ideally, look-fors are directly aligned with the priorities and initiatives of the organization (David, 2008; Kaucher et al., 2013).

Professional development is delivered to enhance clarity of expectations, as needed. Calibration of observers is conducted regularly to ensure inter-rater reliability and collection of valid, reliable data. Calibration provides on-going refinement of exactly what each look-for should look-like. Ultimately, calibration guides the work of the observer as they view live instruction---the intersection of expectations and practice.

Designing Feedback

Once a system is in place whereby actionable feedback can be generated regularly, instantaneously, and based on clearly understood expectations, two powerful design tenets should be applied. First, effective feedback incorporates a genuine, evidence-based high-five (Gillespie & Jenkins, 2016). The focus of observation is to ‘catch the teacher in the act of excellent teaching!’ The intent is not to evaluate. Ideally, the observer witnesses the teacher delivering a look-for exactly as prescribed. High-five feedback serves as encouragement, recognition for a job well-done, and motivation to continue to grow as a professional.

The second design component of actionable feedback is one or two probing questions. These questions should be non-dichotomous and future-oriented. Probing questions are growth generating and foster metacognition. What if.... have you ever thought about....share the

rationale behind that instructional decision? These question starters will lead to ‘growth not gotcha!’”

Lessons Learned in the Field

A collaborative culture that welcomes feedback, engages teachers in an opportunity to grow professionally, and hones the skill set of teachers as they deliver instruction is essential for professional educators. “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much” (Helen Keller).

To ensure continuous growth and reinforce best practice, it is imperative that teachers be engaged in self-reflection and dialogue. In essence, the cornerstone of a thriving organization is a systematic process to support real-time observation. This system must naturally include regular feedback and collaboration between the observer and the teacher.

Utilizing the data from walkthroughs, teachers can chart growth in the quality of instruction delivered. Opportunity for success skyrockets and increased student learning becomes a given. Ultimately, observation data inform professional learning decisions to ensure that differentiated and individualized needs are addressed.

Currently, the Emporia Public School District utilizes an online observation tool created in collaboration with Southwest Plains Service Center. This tool represents the district priorities and initiatives for delivery of high-quality instruction. Over the past three years, eWalkthrough® data have been reviewed at both the building and district levels. District administration identify trends in delivery of instruction and design customized professional learning to support appropriate adjustments.

The importance of frequent observations, timely feedback, calibration of the observers, and analysis of the data represent necessary components for success of the collaborative culture.

Bottom line, focus and practice equals growth. Observation look-fors are priorities. Teachers are supported and coached. Quality of instruction continuously improves. Teaching and learning thrive.

Leveraging Feedback in Teacher Preparation

“The conception of clinical experience as a few weeks of student teaching not only is antiquated but runs counter to our professional commitment to quality. Instead, today’s teacher preparation programs are nurturing complex clinical partnerships....” (Robinson, 2015). This collaboration delivers high-quality education for students and therefore, produces beginning teachers who are classroom ready.

Collection of real-time data as teaching is being delivered, and as learning is taking place, is germane to the success of teacher preparation partnerships. These data serve as the basis for designing feedback to: (1) nurture self-reflection and collaborative dialogue; (2) metamorphose professional learning into differentiated, personalized support; and (3) support evidence-based growth and continuous improvement of the teacher candidate and the teacher education program. Additionally, self-efficacy of teacher candidates will likely increase. As overall satisfaction improves, retention in the profession may have a fighting chance.

Summary

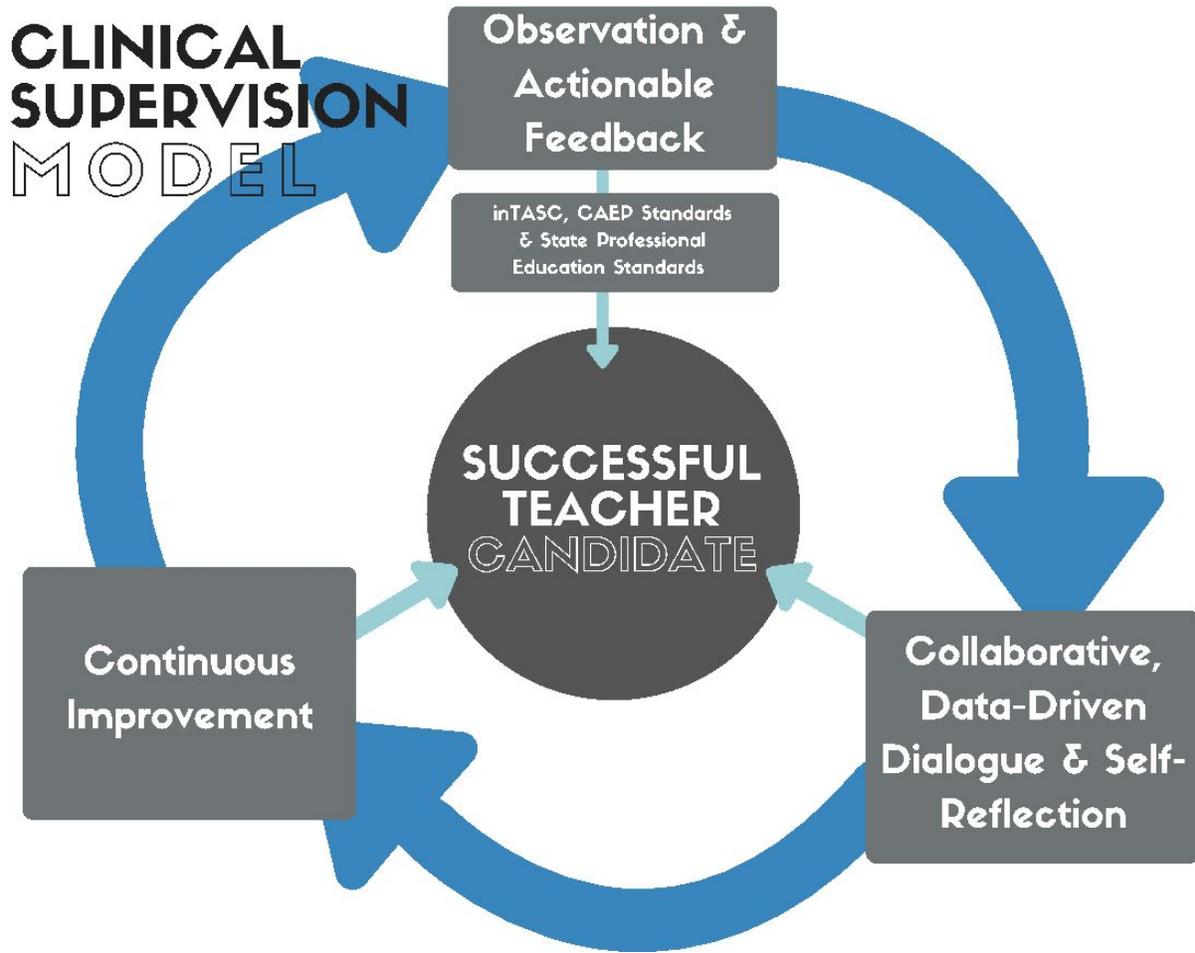
Bottom line, teacher preparation programs want to ensure accountability to InTASC (CCSSO, 2013) and CAEP (2015) standards, while simultaneously maximizing gains in the quality of instruction delivered by teacher candidates (Gillespie, Jenkins, & Hanzlicek, 2016).

Best practice for delivering actionable feedback includes a 2-step observation-feedback process.

To maximize effectiveness, actionable feedback must be delivered frequently, immediately after completion of the observation, and be focused on clearly articulated expectations.

Actionable feedback best serves the teacher candidate when it contains a (1) high-five based on performance standards and (2) probing questions that nurture self-reflection and can be used to engage collaborative conversation for mentoring and supporting professional growth of future teachers.

Figure 1



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