

ABSTRACT

JONES, BRAD ALEX. A Case Study of Peer Observation of Teaching: Implications for Evaluation and Professional Growth. (Under the direction of Kevin P. Brady).

Teacher effectiveness is the most influential factor to student achievement. Teacher evaluation has the dual purpose of assessing and improving teacher performance. Teachers, who need the most support in the first few years of practice, are required to have a peer observation as a part of their evaluation process in North Carolina. Using an interview, a focus group, and a survey, this multi-site case study sought to explore how peer observation of teaching is used to evaluate and promote teacher growth. Principals and teachers in a North Carolina school district participated in this study, which sought to explore their experiences with peer observation. The study found that peer observation provides an additional source of data for principals to examine teacher performance and for teachers to reflect on their own practice. Because teachers are uncomfortable judging their colleagues' performance and principals find peer observation ratings to be higher than those of administrators, these groups perceive the practice of peer observation to be more valuable for the purpose of professional growth, as opposed to evaluation.

The study discovered several practices that facilitate teacher growth through peer observation. Those practices include providing teacher training, allocating adequate time, and establishing a school culture inclusive of trust among teachers. The researcher concludes by recommending several state, district, and school-level supports to implement peer observation of teaching and suggesting further areas of research.

© Copyright 2015 by Brad A. Jones

All Rights Reserved

A Case Study of Peer Observation of Teaching: Implications for Evaluation and Professional Growth

by
Brad Alex Jones

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Supervision

Raleigh, North Carolina

2015

APPROVED BY:

Kevin P. Brady
Committee Chair

Lisa R. Bass

Lance D. Fusarelli

Gregory E. Hicks

DEDICATION

This work is respectfully and lovingly dedicated to my mother, the late Diane Cooper Jones, and my grandmother, the late Lillie Mae Parham Berry, who made me believe at an early age that education is important.

BIOGRAPHY

The author is an educator with fifteen years of experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, having served in the positions of teacher, assistant principal, and principal. He earned a Bachelor of Science in History and Master of School Administration from East Carolina University. Throughout his academic career, the author has received awards and recognitions including the North Carolina Prospective Teachers Scholarship, North Carolina Principal Fellows Program, and the Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education. The author's research interests include human resources in education, beginning teacher support, and teacher evaluation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to make the following acknowledgements to thank those who contributed most greatly to the completion of my Doctor of Education degree.

First and foremost, I thank God for guiding and keeping me through this journey as He always has and always will.

I extend the sincerest appreciation and respect to Dr. Kevin Brady, my dissertation chairman, as well as past and current dissertation committee members—Dr. Lance Fusarelli, Dr. Matt Militello, Dr. Ken Brinson, Dr. Lisa Bass, and Dr. Greg Hicks—your understanding, support, and advocacy made this possible.

Finally, I acknowledge all of the individuals and groups that I have had the opportunity to work with throughout the public schools of North Carolina—those who tore me down and built me up, criticized me and praised me, doubted me and believed in me. You all served as motivation toward completion of this endeavor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Study	5
Definition of Terms	7
Significance of the Study	8
Overview of Methodological Approach	10
Organization of the Study	11
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Teacher Evaluation Reform.....	13
Twofold Purpose of Teacher Evaluation	15
Trends in the Peer Observation of Teaching.....	17
Use of Peer Observation in Teacher Evaluation	18
Benefits of Teacher Peer Observation.....	21
Challenges of Teacher Peer Observation.....	24
Best Practices in the Peer Observation of Teaching	27
The Three Essential Steps of the Peer Teacher Observation Process.....	29
The Evolution of Teacher Evaluation in North Carolina	32
Chapter Summary	36

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY.....	39
Introduction to Research Methods.....	39
Research Questions.....	41
Site Selection and Sample Criteria.....	42
Quantitative Method—Survey.....	43
Specific Quantitative Methodological Approach.....	45
Appropriateness of Online Surveys.....	47
Sample Criteria.....	48
Reliability and Validity.....	49
Qualitative Method—Interviews.....	52
Limitations.....	57
Subjectivity Statement.....	58
Ethical Issues.....	59
Data Analysis.....	60
Chapter Summary.....	61
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS.....	63
Introduction.....	63
Participants.....	64
Research Question One.....	67
Research Question Two.....	83
Summary of Data.....	111

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	114
Review of Purpose of the Study	114
Summary of Key Findings	116
Limitations.....	123
Recommendations for Practice.....	131
Recommendations for Future Research	135
Conclusions.....	136
REFERENCES.....	133
APPENDICES	142
Appendix A. NC Principals Peer Observation of Teaching Survey.....	143
Appendix B. IRB Letter	148
Appendix C. Informed Consent.....	150
Appendix D. Informed Consent.....	152
Appendix E. NCDPI Peer Observation Note Taking Page	154
Appendix F. North Carolina Peer Observation of Teaching Interview Protocol.....	155
Appendix G. Focus Group Interview Protocol.....	157

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1. Breakdown of Survey Questions by Category.....	46
Table 3.2. Breakdown of Survey Questions by Research Question	46
Table 4.1. Sample of Interview Participants (Principals)	64
Table 4.2. Sample of Focus Group Participants (Peer Observers)	65
Table 4.3. Sample of Survey Respondents (Principals).....	65
Table 4.4. Survey Question 4 Responses.....	69
Table 4.5. Survey Question 7 Responses.....	75
Table 4.6. Survey Question 8 Responses.....	75
Table 4.7. Survey Question 11 Responses.....	87
Table 4.8. Survey Question 12 Responses.....	87
Table 4.9. Survey Question 17 Responses.....	91
Table 4.10. Survey Question 10 Responses.....	93
Table 4.11. Survey Question 19 Responses.....	97
Table 4.12. Survey Question 20 Responses.....	98
Table 4.13. Survey Question 13 Responses.....	101
Table 4.14. Teacher Isolation.....	105
Table 4.15. Teacher Instructional Practices	105
Table 4.16. Survey Question 21 Responses.....	110
Table 4.17. Summary of Qualitative Research Themes	112

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1. Survey Question 6 Responses 73

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Teacher effectiveness is at the forefront of public education for improved student achievement (Looney, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011; Weisburg et al., 2009). Retaining high-quality teachers is a challenge in public education (Kelley, 2004); this problem is magnified by the research indicating that most teachers' performance is lowest during their beginning years (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Weisburg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). At the national level, out of 3,377,900 public school teachers, 8 percent employed during the 2011-2012 school year decided to leave the profession; while 7 percent of teachers who had between one and three years of experience left public education in 2012-2013 (Goldring, Taie, and Riddles, 2014). Each year, the North Carolina State Board of Education is required to report the number of teacher drop out. According to the *2013-2014 Annual Report on Teachers Leaving the Profession*, required by GS. 115C-12(2), the overall state turnover rate out of the 96,010 teachers employed in North Carolina is 14.12%. The report indicates that 68 teachers left because they were dissatisfied with the profession, while 53 probationary teachers' contracts were non-renewed at the end of the school year (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2014). As of publication date, this is the most current state teacher dropout data.

Even worse, many new teachers do not receive adequate support during their initial years (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Weems & Rogers, 2010). Responses the 2014 North

Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) Survey exemplify this notion. Under the section of the survey measuring the degree of new teacher support, only 43 percent of the 14,778 respondents indicated that they received release time to observe other teachers. Out of 13,951 teachers, 25 percent reported never having been observed by their mentor. In another survey item completed by 13,945 new teachers, 52 percent indicated that they had never observed their mentor's teaching (New Teacher Center, 2014). However, teacher evaluation systems designed to promote professional development can help improve the quality of teaching and student achievement (Looney, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). The goal of developing teachers through the observation of their peers is inherent in North Carolina's inclusion of a peer classroom observation as part of the evaluation process for probationary teachers. According to Lam (2001), peer observation in classrooms has widely been recognized as a tool to improve teacher quality. Therefore, the extent to which administrators support teachers in the use peer observations as a part of their ongoing development is of great significance to that overarching goal.

Teacher accountability and professional development have been of recent interest at all school levels, which has resulted in various models of observation being implemented (Cosh, 1999). The increased standards that followed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which required schools to ensure teacher quality, suggests that a definite connection exists between the influence of professional improvement on performance ratings in the teacher evaluation process (Matula, 2011; Matynski, 2012; Weems & Rogers, 2010). Currently,

school administrators are tightening the instructional process in response to the high-stakes policies (Militello, Fusarelli, Alsbury, & Warren, 2011) that continue to emerge at the federal and state levels in this era of accountability.

A report from The New Teacher Project (2010) also attributes the revamping of teacher evaluation systems to the federal Race to the Top competition for funding. As a part of these changes and the recent increase in teacher layoffs due to state and local budget deficits, the National Council on Teacher Quality (2010) calls for teacher performance, rather than seniority, to be a factor in making employment decisions for teachers, which could have positive implications for new teachers who may improve practice as a result of peer observation included in their evaluation and/or professional development model. Conversely, it could also harm them because of low ratings on the evaluation rubric.

Scholars and practitioners have long criticized the ineffectiveness of teacher evaluation (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). Research on the effectiveness of teacher evaluation practices indicates that teachers report that they do not receive meaningful evaluations on a regular and consistent basis (Stumbo & McWalters, 2010; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). According to Danielson (2001), educators have increased their use of teacher evaluation to support teacher quality. Implementing sound teacher evaluation procedures, Matula (2011) suggests, is the best way to provide substantive due process measures. Chism (2007) acknowledges that the nature of evaluation is complex and can be further complicated by its potential to involve emotions of parties on both sides of the process. Although substantial

research has been established, the daily implementation of teacher evaluation in schools continues to be a challenge. Research on principals' perceptions of their standards indicates that policies are not always implemented with fidelity despite ramped-up standards (Militello et al., 2011). Goldrick (2002) maintains that educators must both understand and have confidence in the evaluation process to ensure long-term sustainability. Therefore, identifying best practices and understanding educators' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process has far-reaching implications to policymakers and practitioners to support accountability and improvement in public schools. As Militello et al. (2011) conclude, "studies that seek to understand how standards are lived in one's practice are vital" and "how school principals perceive their [professional standards in their] practice is timely and important" (p. 87). Understanding how peer observations are used in schools is significant for several reasons. It is important to know how peer observations may affect how teachers are evaluated. Moreover, the research through this study seeks to give insight into how peer observations conducted in schools may be changed to best meet the needs for evaluation and continued improvement for teachers, especially in their beginning years. Ultimately, discovering how principals use peer observations in schools both as an evaluative tool and for the professional growth of teachers is of primary concern due to its ultimate impact on student achievement. At this point, Taylor (2012) affirmed that very little is known about how evaluations may influence teacher effectiveness. This study aims to contribute to the research on this aspect of the administration of school human resources.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to discover how the peer observation of teaching is used by school principals to evaluate and improve teacher performance. Furthermore, the study will give insight on how the various ways in which peer observation is practiced in schools has implications for teacher growth and evaluation. Teacher quality is regarded as a priority area in education policy (Weems & Rogers, 2010). The purpose of this study is to examine how school administrators use peer observations in the evaluation and professional development of probationary teachers. The study will explore both perspectives of both school administrators who are responsible for implementing the evaluation process and teachers who have direct experience with conducting peer observations as a part of the state-mandated guidelines. This study will use a combination of research methods including individual interviews, a focus group, and a survey to gain insight on how principals use the current peer observation process in helping to assess and enhance the performance of their teachers during this time of transition in educational policy. Furthermore, the study will conclude with research-based recommendations that how school and district leaders may consider for implementing peer observations in addition to directions for future research.

Teacher observations as part of an effective evaluation system lay the groundwork for professional development (TNTP, 2010). Peer observation of teaching can be implemented for both the purposes of accountability and improved practice (Hammersly-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004). As such, this study considers professional development to be an expected

by-product of the peer observation component of the teacher evaluation process. Peer observations have traditionally been practiced in higher education (Bourne-Hayes, 2010); however, systems of peer review are increasing in secondary schools nationwide. Following this trend, probationary teachers in North Carolina public schools are required to receive one formal observation from a peer as a part of the teacher evaluation process adopted in 2008 (NCSBOE). Based on the researcher's professional experience as a school administrator and the somewhat vague NC State Board of Education policy, the peer observation process allows for varying practices. The research questions for this study will provide insight into exactly how peer observations are used to evaluate and improve the performance of probationary and beginning teachers.

The following research questions will guide this study: (1) *What practices do school principals and teachers use to implement peer observations as mandated in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process?* (2) *How do principals use peer observation to assess and improve teacher performance?* This information will be gathered through an electronic survey taken by North Carolina school principals on their views about peer observations as a part of the NC Teacher Evaluation process and for professional development of teachers. Furthermore, qualitative data will be acquired through interviews with North Carolina school principals to gain further insight into how their teachers conduct peer observations and compared to what is gleaned from the survey data. The perspectives of these principals will

be measured against those of experienced teachers who have conducted peer observations directly through a focus group interview.

In examining survey responses from administrators, along with individual interviews of school principals and a focus group involving teachers, this study will add to the existing body of research that addresses the challenge of merging the twofold purpose of accountability and professional growth in teacher evaluation.

Definition of Terms

An understanding of several terms is necessary to comprehend this study. Definitions of terms integral to this study's research focus are included below.

Beginning teachers: Teachers who are in the first three years of teaching and who hold a Standard Professional I license (McREL, 2009)

Career Status Teachers: Teachers who have been granted Career Status in their current North Carolina school district (McREL, 2009); tenured.

Formal observation: A classroom observation that lasts 45 minutes or an entire class period (McREL, 2009).

NCTEP: The Teacher Evaluation Process approved by the North Carolina State Board of Education Policy.

Peer: A teacher who has been trained on the NCTEP (McREL, 2009); a fellow teacher in the same school or school district.

Peer Review: Evaluation of teaching performance by peer observation (Blackmore, 2005); in this study, used interchangeably with “peer observation,” a part of the evaluation process for probationary teachers in North Carolina

Post-Observation Conference: A conversation occurring after the observation in which the teacher and observer discuss and document on the evaluation rubric the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher’s performance during the observed lesson (McREL, 2009).

Pre-Observation Conference: A teacher meeting before the observation to establish guidelines regarding the observation. The observer is briefed on the nature of the lesson to be observed (Bourne-Hayes, 2010).

Probationary Teachers: Teachers who have not yet been granted Career Status in their current North Carolina school district (McREL, 2009).

Professional Development: Staff development based on research, data, practice, and reflection that focuses on deepening knowledge and pedagogical skills in a collegial and collaborative environment.

Significance of the Study

Consensus in the educational community suggests that the information gained from a reliable system of teacher evaluation is paramount to student success (TNTP, 2011). This study will add to the research on how peer observations are implemented in the probationary teacher evaluation process. Used mainly in higher education, the practice of peer observation to improve classroom instruction is a new field of study at all levels of education (Bourne-

Hayes, 2010; Bowers, 1999; Chamberlain, D'Artrey, & Rowe, 2011; Kahut, Burnap, Kilic, & Cakan, 2006; Shortland, 2004). Therefore, this study will extract experiences from higher education instructors to fill a gap in the research on the practice of peer observation among K-12 school teachers (Bourne-Hayes, 2010).

According to The New Teacher Project report, evaluations should support teacher development. Peer observations are characteristic of credible models of teacher performance evaluations in that they add a sense of objectivity to the administrator's judgment (TNTP, 2011). Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) contend that schools need to have common purposes and perceptions about peer observation systems. Evaluation models that solely emphasize appraisal, as opposed to development, are widely criticized in the educational community (Cosh, 1999). The information gained in this study will contribute to the research on peer observation in both the contexts of the evaluation and professional development of teachers and may guide future practice for policymakers and school-based administrators. The potential gains from peer observations will ultimately benefit students, according to Donnelly (2007), which adds to the significance of this study.

Studies conducted on both a national scale and on the state level concur that the quality and consistency of evaluations led to problems with effectively implementing new evaluation models. With the state's current budget shortfall and focus on teacher effectiveness, the expectation for effective monitoring of North Carolina's teacher evaluation practices and the importance of administrator commitment to the process is heightened

(Breedlove, 2010). Because principals “may adhere to their own views on evaluation despite the rational expectations of policy makers,” Painter (2000) emphasized the importance of considering “the key role that school principals’ attitudes and beliefs may play in the implementation of effective evaluation policies” and “may provide insight into effective policy formation and implementation” (p. 370). As Olah asserted (2013) in a dissertation centered on the evaluation of technology teachers, the teacher evaluation process will only be as effective as the administrator who is implementing it. This study will be significant in gauging the degree to which school administrators consistently implement the state’s teacher evaluation practices. Teachers are aware of their colleagues’ job performances from daily interactions, and research has shown benefits of implementing peer review, which further adds to the significance of this study (Marczely, 2001).

A final consideration in the significance of examining how North Carolina principals implement the peer observation process is the potential cost-saving impact on school budgets. The cost of quality professional development can be limited and peer observation is one form of professional development that can be practical and help novice and experienced teachers understand data-driven practices and their impact on student achievement (Wilkins and Shin, 2011).

Overview of Methodological Approach

To answer the research questions, the researcher will employ qualitative methods with a descriptive survey. The quantitative method employed will be an online survey

comprised of both nominal background questions and five-point Likert-type items regarding school administrators' implementation and perceptions of the required peer observation process. Findings from the collected data will be analyzed using descriptive data. A series of individual interviews with school principals in North Carolina will be conducted either face-to-face or via telephone provide a deeper understanding how principals use peer observations for the evaluation and professional growth of teachers. The researcher facilitated a focus group with teachers to gain further insight on their experiences .The interviews were conducted by the researcher as the primary investigator and were facilitated by a structured interview guide developed by the researcher from the existing literature and professional experience as a school administrator. A survey was developed using information gained from the interviews and focus group. Insights gained from the interviewees and survey responses are be presented in a table that shows the emergent themes extracted from the coded interview transcripts.

Organization of the Study

The following chapters of this study will include a literature review in Chapter 2 organized into the following themes: history of peer observation, the use of peer observation in teacher evaluation, advantages and disadvantages of peer observation, best practices in teacher evaluation, best practices in peer observation, and the evolution of teacher evaluation in North Carolina. Chapter 3 will explain the rationale for and describe the methodological approaches used to collect and analyze the data. The chapter will also discuss limitations of

the study and how the researcher will seek to offset those limitations. Chapter 4 will present the data and interpret the research findings related to the three research questions. Data analysis will be presented using both tables and graphs to describe survey item responses. Qualitative data will be presented in narrative form and tables to categorize themes that emerge from the rich descriptions characteristic of focus groups. Finally, Chapter 5 will summarize the researcher's conclusions and discuss implications for research, practice, and policy on the use of peer observations for the evaluation and professional development of teachers.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the body of existing literature, little has been written about the peer observation of teaching (Blackmore, 2005). According to Brown and Crumpler (2013), peer observation and teacher assessment has been a topic of theoretical and practical research for just over two decades. This review of literature makes parallels from research of peer observation of teaching in higher education, where the bulk of the literature exists, to practices in K-12 education. The existing literature relevant to this study centers on the following themes: (1) teacher evaluation reform, (2) the twofold purpose of teacher evaluation, (3) trends in peer observation of teaching, (4) the use of peer observation in teacher evaluation, (4) the benefits of peer observation, (6) the challenges of peer observation, (7) research-based practices in peer observation of teaching, (8) the essential steps in the peer observation process, and (9) the evolution of teacher evaluation in North Carolina.

Teacher Evaluation Reform

Since the 1980s, local teacher evaluation policies have changed with the direction of federal initiatives, with states in the Southeastern United States leading the nation in the extent of policy revisions (Hazi & Arredondo Rucinski, 2009). In a report for The New Teacher Project that included survey responses from 15,000 teachers and 1,300 administrators in four states that lead teacher evaluation reform policies, Weisburg et al. (2009) place flawed evaluation systems at the center of the failure to provide credible and accurate information about teachers' instructional performance. Most states have operated

under an evaluation system that results in inflated teacher ratings based on inconsistent standards (Olah, 2013), causing the impetus for reform. The National Governors Association, one of the most influential organizations to educational policy, focused on evaluation as a tool for improvement, thus shifting teacher evaluation from a local to a state and nationally regulated issue, with California as a shining example having enacted the first state peer review law in 1999 (Goldrick, 2002; Hazi & Arrendondo Rucinski, 2009; Kumrow & Dahlen, 2002).

Educational policy is increasing its emphasis on the teacher evaluation process, requiring a deeper contextual understanding of the association between teacher performance and student learning. More research indicates that school environments can encourage or hinder good teaching and as a result, student achievement outcomes. According to New Teacher Center survey data, students in low-income, high-minority schools had better academic outcomes when teachers perceived positive teaching condition. Schools which indicated more communication and collaboration among teachers had higher reading and mathematics scores than schools where these conditions are decreased. The research briefing from the New Teacher Center (2015) asserts that “this evidence suggests that, overall, teaching conditions are consistently related to improved learning and teacher retention.”

In the past decade of federal education policy, both the No Child Left Behind Act signed into law by President George W. Bush and the Race to the Top competitive grant program as a part of President Barack Obama’s education initiatives include peer observation

being identified by scholars as a means to improve teacher evaluation (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Kumrow & Dahlen, 2002; Learning Point Associates, 2010).

Twofold Purpose of Teacher Evaluation

The lines between formative and summative evaluation purposes are blurred. Lam (2001) makes the distinction between these purposes clear in that “summative evaluation is concerned with judging teachers’ performance at a given point of time whereas formative evaluation is concerned with helping teachers develop” (p. 169). Matula (2011) goes further to distinguish summative ratings as those which attach a final label to performance appraisals. In Peterson’s (2004) professional journal article written for secondary school principals, the author argued that teacher evaluation is most effective when the distinctions are clear but further acknowledged that restraints on people and time make it difficult to achieve such clarity. In a study of promising teacher evaluation practices in two California charter schools, Morelock (2008) has found that many schools that implement peer review do so as part of the formative process, though results may also be used for summative decisions. In Looney’s (2011) definition of teacher peer evaluation, feedback may be used in both a formative or summative manner to supplement a formal evaluation conducted by the school-level administrator. In their professional journal article, Stumbo and McWalters (2011) recommended that teacher quality refer to inputs, such as professional credentials, as opposed to teacher effectiveness, which focuses on how well teachers perform with students. However, most of the literature reviewed uses the terms “quality” and “effectiveness”

interchangeably with regard to the degree of teacher performance. In their professional journal article, Kumrow and Dahlen (2002) suggested that systems using a mixture of both summative and formative evaluation are ideal.

Several researchers acknowledge that there is a twofold purpose of evaluation—professional growth and accountability (Lam, 2001; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011; Weems & Rogers, 2010). Since 1920, scholars have recognized the challenge of merging the dual purposes of teacher evaluation, helping versus evaluating, as a serious and unresolved problem in the field of education (Danielson, 2012a; Hazi & Arredondo Rucinski, 2009). In Lam’s (2001) survey of Hong Kong educators, 80% of respondents indicated that there was no conflict between professional development and appraisal. In an article written to inform policy makers and educational researchers about trends in teacher evaluation to improve teacher quality, Looney (2011) contended that “there are real tensions between those dual goals for evaluation” and called for school systems “to find an appropriate balance” (p. 440). Taylor and Tyler (2012), in their research on the effectiveness and growth of experienced teachers, concluded that “if done well, performance evaluation can be an effective form of teacher professional development” (p. 84). Overall, the notion of using evaluation to support and improve teacher quality is a consensus among scholars, practitioners, and legislators (Breedlove, 2011; Calabrese, Sherwood, Fast, & Womack, 2004; Danielson, 2001; Danielson, 2011; Goldrick, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Hammersly-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten,

2011; Kumrow & Dahlen, 2002; Lam, 2001; Shreeve, 1993; TNTP, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011; Weems & Rogers, 2010). This study is designed to examine what practices North Carolina principals are using for peer observation to fulfill both goals of evaluation and improvement of teacher performance.

Trends in the Peer Observation of Teaching

Historically, principals have been solely responsible for evaluating teachers. However, the practice of peers having a role in the evaluation of their colleagues has been successfully practiced in many professions outside of education (Marcezyly, 2001; Weems & Rogers, 2010), such as the medical field. Peer observation of teaching has been practiced since the 1950s (Atkinson & Bolt, 2010). The concept of using public school teachers to observe, evaluate, and improve the performance of their peers was originated in the Toledo, Ohio, public schools in 1981. The “Toledo Plan” of peer review was originated as a part of union negotiations to provide support for ineffective teachers. Although modified with various names and procedures, Toledo’s original model of veteran teachers supporting new teachers is considered the blueprint for peer review (Goldstein, 2007; Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Weems & Rogers, 2010).

In the decades that followed the emergence of the Toledo model, which involved panels of expert teachers who collaborate with principals, union representatives, and personnel departments to assess teacher performance, districts in California, New York, and Florida implemented peer review processes, creating their own versions (Goldstein, 2007).

Other locations that have implemented peer observations as a part of the teacher evaluation model include Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington, DC (Morelock, 2008). Peer review for non-tenured teachers and for low-performing tenured teachers has been proposed to improve the evaluative process (Goldstein, 2007; Kumrow & Dahlen, 2002). Although Marcezely (2001) maintained the conflict with teachers simultaneously assuming roles as both colleagues and assessors, the use of peers in evaluation is becoming more popular within schools to measure and improve performance (Blackmore, 2005).

Use of Peer Observation in Teacher Evaluation

A major criticism of teacher evaluation is that its focus is primarily summative, in which a principal determines a level of performance for decisions about continued employment. Furthermore, many authors contend that it is contradictory for principals to fulfill the roles of both supporter and evaluator. However, using teachers to observe their peers is worthwhile in focusing on the formative aspect of evaluation to help improve teacher performance (Goldstein, 2007). In an article that proposes the Framework for Teacher Evaluation and Professional Growth based on research-based and implemented programs, Weems and Rogers (2010) asserted that the goal of peer review programs is to use the interaction with colleagues to support and improve instruction, which is thought to decrease teacher turnover. In recent years, peer review has become more common as a part of performance evaluations, in conjunction with observations by administrators (Morelock, 2008). In a single-case design study of a peer review program in California, Goldstein (2007)

found that combining support and evaluation did not appear to have a negative effect between teachers conducting and receiving classroom observations. Governors across the nation have gone on record to suggest peer review as an effective model of teacher evaluation reform (Goldrick, 2009). When used to conduct evaluations, including the component of peer review provides substantive due process to teachers because multiple data sources are used to assess performance (Matula, 2011).

In her training manual, Malderez (2003) identified four main purposes of observation—professional development, training, evaluation, and research. The purpose of the observation influences every procedural aspect of the process. In the model described by Malderez, a peer is often involved when observations are conducted for development, but the teacher being observed dictates what the observer should look for and what feedback he or she wants to receive. In contrast, an observation conducted for evaluation may dictate more specific checklists of teacher performance descriptors, feedback is in written and verbal form, and the observer takes the role as learner to the extent that he or she is gaining information to make a judgment.

Peer observations as practiced in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process is a hybrid of several of the models studied but best falls under Gosling's (2002) description of the peer review, which is one of his three identified models of peer observation and involves teachers observing other teachers, regardless of experience, tenure, or level of expertise (Blackmore, 2005; Byrne, Brown, & Challen, 2010). The evaluation model usually involves

a senior colleague conducting the observation; however, the context of peer observations in North Carolina's evaluation process is unique in that any teacher trained in the evaluation standards is regarded as a qualified peer observer (McREL, 2009). Inasmuch as teachers assign ratings based on the evaluation rubric, some peer observations may be further characterized as a formative supervisory relationship, in which a peer offers summative information to assist for the purpose of improving performance (Marczely, 2001). Overlap exists between the evaluative and collaborative models of peer observation— both possess evaluative elements because they involve judging the quality of another colleague's teaching practice (Chamberlain, D'Artrey, & Rowe, 2011).

Historically, the widespread use of teacher observation has been for evaluation (Malderez, 2003). Having characteristics of various models, at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, peer observations in North Carolina's teacher evaluation process is best explained by Chism (2007), who clarified in her manual on peer review at the collegiate level that "the distinction between formative and summative evaluation is not always as clear in practice as it is in the literature" and "in practice, peer reviewers are often using information collected for formative purposes to make summative judgments" (p. 6). Peer review models provide insight into a new trend in teacher evaluation and development in the United States, according to Weems and Rogers (2010).

Benefits of Teacher Peer Observation

Goldstein (2007) determined, in her study of a California peer review program, that peer observers, called “Consulting Teachers,” had more time to conduct classroom observations than principals, who were often overwhelmed with time constraints from other duties that detract from their ability to effectively monitor instruction. In an interview for the School Leadership Briefing Audio Journal (2013), Darling-Hammond spoke to the burden particular to principals in the United States to carry out the teacher evaluation process in the midst of multiple administrative duties. She further suggests that school districts implement peer review systems as a remedy to this problem by allowing teachers to be an added resource to implement the evaluation process, which traditionally has been left explicitly to the principal. As school administrators and teachers team up to take responsibility for the evaluation process, more time is provided to carry out the various steps.

Timely feedback to teachers after observations that occur at regular intervals is a characteristic of effective evaluation system (Cicchinelli, 2013). The need for more time to give thorough and timely feedback to teachers is a dominant theme in an article about revamping teacher evaluation in which Zatynski (2012) identified time as the biggest barrier to useful evaluations. A study that included North Carolina principals indicated that they need district support and resources to transform the traditional evaluation model into one that allows teachers to take a more active role (Derrington, 2011). Several educators cite the potential for professional growth through colleague support as an advantage of peer

observations (Morelock, 2008, Hammersly-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004). In a 1998 article about peer observation, Munson described the method as a new trend in professional development. In her book about supervisory techniques in education, Marzely (2001), regarded peer assessments as “powerful influences on teacher practices and attitudes” because they do not want “to be perceived as the weak link” among their colleagues (p. 108). To further this claim, a study of a Southeastern United States school district spoke to the influence of teachers on each other’s instructional performance; the researchers identified peer observation focused on professional development goals as a means of active collaboration that positively influences teaching and learning (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). In a study examining educators’ opinions on classroom observation as staff development and appraisal, Lam (2001) noted that peer observations are widely regarded as a tool to improve teacher quality. Blackmore (2005) also noted that teachers can use peer observations as method to assess performance to help each other improve while ensuring compliance to standards. Munson (1998) found that many teachers actually prefer peer observations because the focus is on taking ownership of professional growth not evaluation.

Professional isolation is one of the main challenges in teaching (Lam, 2001; Marzely, 2001). Teachers rarely have adequate chances to discuss their practice with peers. As such, peer review systems can be effective in reducing the isolation of classroom teachers according to Goldstein and Noguera (2006) in an article highlighting approaches to teacher support. In an article to examine attitudes toward peer observation and make a case for

increased teacher reflection, Cosh (1999) lauded the observation process for “play[ing] a crucial role in preventing teachers from becoming routinized and isolated” (p.25). Several researchers have found that the inherent collaborative nature of peer observations can provide benefits for both the observer and observed” (Weller, 2009).

Recent professional journals in specialized areas within K-12 education have begun paying attention to peer observations and providing recommendations about how to best implement them to improve teaching. For example, due to the complexity of their work, special education teachers were advised to pay close attention to fostering a good relationship with their more experienced colleagues to improve their practice in an article for the Council of Exceptional Children (Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling, & Leko, 2013). Similarly, Brown and Crumpler (2013) argue for peer review as part of a model that most importantly provides feedback to improve the quality of high school foreign language teachers, and ultimately student achievement, because of the specialized content knowledge than can be best gleaned from a peer.

Peer observation is also used as a way to include multiple data sources in the evaluation process. According to Matula (2011), multiple data sources are necessary to evaluate the complex practice of teaching. Williams and Shin (2011) found that the use of feedback from peers to focus on the instructional process, the promotion of collaboration, and usefulness among teachers with various levels of experience, grade levels, and content areas are included in the benefits of peer observations.

Challenges of Teacher Peer Observation

The research cites various challenges to including peer observations in the teacher evaluation process such as the lack of critical feedback, conflicts of interest for teachers as evaluators, observer subjectivity, the reliability of feedback, and a general negative perception of being observed. All of these challenges are linked to school culture; more specifically, the degree to which teachers collaborate with each other and their administrators to have a common understanding of what effective teaching and learning looks like. Under ideal conditions, teachers prefer to receive peer observations in the context of professional growth, rather than a part of their evaluation (Munson, 1998). If the conclusions of such existing research hold true, then the peer observation requirement in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process could present a challenge to achieving the purpose of professional growth. The literature identifies the notion that many teachers do not feel comfortable giving critical feedback to peers as a disadvantage of peer observations. Feedback that includes inflated ratings causes the assessment to be inaccurate (Blackmore, 2005; Chamberlain, D'Artery, & Rowe, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Because most teachers have seldom conducted or received peer observations, Cosh (1999) held that they are confused about what is required of their role and found a number of teachers to be uneasy about offending colleagues. However, the importance of developing a critical discourse in higher education is also applicable to the K-12 sector (Weller, 2007).

Along the same viewpoint, many teachers hold steady to the ingrained hierarchy in schools that require principals to be primarily responsible for evaluation; as such, teachers may be unwilling to assess each other's performance (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). In an article that explores peer observations through the lens of professional development among teaching colleagues in higher education, Byrne, Brown, and Challen (2010) asserted that observation processes that are managed from a top-down approach have little benefit with regard to professional development. To this end, without engagement in the process, teachers view peer observation as an activity of compliance rather than a means to improve or assess performance. However, this challenge is not exclusive to peer observations, extending to classroom observations as a whole. In a study of educators' opinions on classroom observation for staff development and appraisal, Lam (2001) discussed the well-known phenomenon that teachers do not welcome classroom observations, although it is a commonly accepted component in both contexts of evaluation and training. Matula (2011) placed classroom observations at the foundation of the current dissatisfaction with the inflation of teacher evaluation ratings. Cosh (1999) cautioned that peer observation conducted for appraisal can be detrimental to a supportive teaching environment. According to Shields (2007),

teachers have a certain amount of concern about peers coming into their classrooms to observe. Although the intent of a peer visit is for a positive

experience, the teacher often sees it as being a high anxiety experience. It is important for teachers to view the experience as being nonjudgmental. (p. 4)

Observer subjectivity is another challenge to implementing effective systems of peer observation. To this point, some researchers assert that no concrete evidence exists proving that people improve through others' assessment and feedback (Donnelly, 2007; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). However, as Danielson (2012b) explained, although some degree of subjectivity is unavoidable in a practical sense, evaluators' judgments about teacher performance should be based on fact rather than interpretations and opinions; she further emphasized the importance of different evaluators agreeing on the same levels of teacher quality based on performance during classroom observations. A final consideration for observers is the capacity to be open-minded enough to willingly accept and even change his or her interpretation of the evidence based on alternative viewpoints offered by the teacher (Danielson, 2012b). Despite the unwillingness of observers to offer criticism and concerns with observer subjectivity, evaluations based on well-executed classroom observations are useful to identify effective teachers and teaching practices (Kane et al., 2011). According to Darling-Hammond, not only can teachers learn some strategies through peer observations, but if taken even further to establish peer assistance and review systems, districts can more clearly define which teachers are proficient and facilitate employment decisions (School Leadership Briefing Audio Journal, 2013).

Best Practices in the Peer Observation of Teaching

Education scholars have identified multiple practices that facilitate an effective system of peer observations. Such practices include training for teachers who serve both roles in the observation process, the establishment of trusting relationships, and using colleagues in the same content area. Other procedural recommendations include pre-conferences, post-conferences, and critical feedback.

The literature emphasizes the importance of a mutually trusting relationship between the observer and the observed (Atkinson & Bolt, 2010; Blackmore, 2005; Chism, 2007; Donnelly, 2007; Morelock, 2008; Shields, 2007). Donnelly (2007), in a study of peer observation of teaching in higher education, suggested that development of trust among participants allows for honesty and openness to encourage reflection about teaching. The emphasis in the literature on relationship between colleagues makes it clear that if peers are not comfortable observing or being observed, they will not learn from the process. Shortland (2010) supports the notion of trust by suggesting that teachers on both sides of the observation process act as “critical friends,” characterized by trusting relationships and respect. Shields (2007), in a dissertation that studied peer coaching in elementary schools, established that trust must be a part of the school culture for the teachers to collaborate and take charge of their own professional growth.

To further add credibility to the evaluation process, some scholars suggest that practitioners use colleagues who teach the same discipline to conduct peer observations.

Administrators should include a variety of subject specialists when pairing observers and the observed (Blackmore, 2005). In an article directed toward secondary school principals, Matula (2011) proposed that having an expert in the content area increases teachers' confidence in the evaluator's judgment, leading to a greater opportunity for professional growth on a formative basis. Some respondents to a questionnaire developed by Weller (2007) preferred observers from the same content area due to their familiarity with subject-specific instructional techniques. Peterson (2004) reported that researchers conclusively recommend the use of a subject matter peer teacher in observations in middle and high schools.

Other respondents to Weller's (2007) questionnaire reported that using an observer outside the content area of the teacher being observed is preferred for the sake of neutrality in that an "outside" observer may provide more honest and objective feedback. In her mixed methods evaluative study about the use of peer observations as a form of professional development in higher education, Weller further deemphasized the need for observers to share the same content area of the observed, stating that benefits for the improvement of teaching practices can transcend disciplines. In its teacher evaluation policy, North Carolina provides no guidance to administrators with regard to assigning peer observers in the same content area that they are observing (NCSBOE, 2008).

Teachers must receive adequate training in conducting evaluations based on common standards. The lack of training could lend itself to observer bias, bringing the validity and

reliability of the appraisal conducted into question (Morelock, 2008; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011). The subjective nature of conducting classroom observations further justifies the need for training (Donnelly, 2007). In addition to both observers and the teachers being observed receiving training on the purposes of the observation, common performance standards, and evaluation methods (Blackmore, 2005; Kumrow & Dahlen, 2002), all teachers should be trained and used as observers at some point to improve teaching school-wide (Hammersly-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004). In an issue brief on “Improving Teacher Evaluation to Improve Teacher Quality,” the National Governors Association called for evaluators to be trained to produce more accurate and effective evaluations (Goldrick, 2002). Recently, North Carolina has been acknowledged for being among the states that has made evaluator training a priority (Stumbo & McWalters, 2011). In a study of Cincinnati’s teacher evaluation model, which entails thorough training of peer evaluators, Taylor and Tyler (2012) concluded that a well-executed performance evaluation “can be an effective form of teacher professional development” (p. 84). Moreover, recent literature points to peer observation in its purest form as a means of professional development. Munson (1998) recommended a model of teachers observing other teachers without the element of judgment that is present in peer coaching or evaluative models.

The Three Essential Steps of the Peer Teacher Observation Process

The majority of scholars who have studied peer observation of teaching agree that a three-step process including a pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-

observation conference is a necessary component of the process to maximize the professional growth of teachers (Chism, 2007; Marcezely, 2001; Munson, 1996; Shortland, 2010; Wilkins & Shin, 2011). In a study that included pre-service elementary school teachers, the three-step process was used. The data from this study indicated that teachers benefited from peer feedback. This process also promoted reflection and collaboration. Although student teachers were used as the subject of the study, the authors explain that the process is adaptable to all levels of experience, grade levels, and content areas (Wilkins & Shin, 2011).

The three essential steps of the observation process transcend public school education, as shown in a professional journal for the teaching of medical students where the authors mirror the pre-observation, observation, and post-observation stages among their suggested practices. The conference before observing the teacher's class is helpful for clarifying the roles of both teachers, establishing evaluation criteria, and agreeing on the process. During the pre-observation conference phase, the teachers may agree upon specific areas to look for during the observation (Munson, 1998). In the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process, the rubric specifically identifies Standards Two, Three, and Four as observable by a peer. It is noteworthy that the state provides a note-taking page for peer observers with the identified standards in the Professional Development section of its Web site, which may suggest the larger use of peer observation within this evaluation model as a means of improving performance (Public Schools of North Carolina, n.d.-d).

After the observation, the post-conference is regarded in the existing research as an important part of the peer observation process that leads to improved teaching (Chism, 2007). Much attention is given in the literature to the complexity of post-observation feedback. Most researchers in both public education and post-secondary education agree that feedback is an integral part of the process (Blackmore, 2005; Calabrese et al., 2004; Chism, 2007; Shortland, 2010; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). In a paper describing a collaborative peer observation model as a means of professional development for teachers, Stillwell (2008) emphasized both the difficulty of delivering feedback to colleagues and their need to receive it. The post-conference is an important part of the observation process, but evaluators are hesitant to provide evaluative and potentially subjective comments. Despite a peer's discomfort in giving feedback, teachers want and need to receive such verbal post-observation comments. Although observers may find it demanding to provide feedback, the observation serves little purpose if this step is omitted. In her case study of peer observation of teaching among lecturers in higher education, Shortland (2010) determined that the most effective feedback is characterized by a post-observation conversation that is focused, constructive, honest, criterion-based, context-specific, balanced with positive and negative comments, and non-judgmental. Discussions that contain these traits can lead to future improvement in teaching and may also strengthen relationships.

The Evolution of Teacher Evaluation in North Carolina

Article IX of the North Carolina Constitution holds the state's legislative body, the General Assembly, and the State Board of Education (NCSBOE) responsible for enacting policies governing public schools. Since 1978, these political entities have taken continuous steps to improve accountability through appraisal and have mandated a statewide teacher evaluation tool since the 1980s (Holdzkom, 1987). The mid-1980s brought about even more comprehensive education reforms in the statewide testing program, professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2000), and teacher evaluation. Namely, the Teacher Performance Appraisal System (TPAI/S), which assessed teachers in eight major domains based on effective teaching research, was implemented across the state in 1985 to replace the previous summative checklist of teacher behaviors, which was not believed to have promoted professional growth (Stacey, Holdzkom, & Kuliogowski, 1989; Holdzkom, 1987, 1991). Danielson (2012) described such checklists as deficient and out-of-date. In keeping with this idea, TPAI/S improved teacher evaluations by setting standards for observations, conferences, and evaluation training, and including both formative and summative evaluations (Breedlove, 2011).

Under provisions of the Excellent Schools Act of 1997, North Carolina adopted the TPAI-R, which would be used statewide in 2001. The TPAI-R was significant in that it differentiated between the evaluation process for beginning and experienced teachers. At this point, the new process would also require one peer observation for all beginning and

probationary teachers in the state (NCDPI, 2001). It was understood that the TPAI-R would be only the beginning of teacher evaluation reform in North Carolina, with the new legislation resulting in the allocation of \$1.6 million in the 1998 budget for the development of new evaluation criteria and instruments.

The NCSBOE publicized a new mission in 2006, which cemented the next phase in the progression of teacher evaluation in North Carolina. The mission stated that “every public school student will graduate from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st Century” (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006). In 2007, the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission worked with Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) to align standards, the evaluation process, and evaluation instrument with the student-centered mission (McREL, 2009).

Under the NCSBOE approval, over a rollout process of three years, all 115 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in North Carolina had implemented the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process by the 2010-2011 school year and is currently in practice. This evaluation system is based on the foundation of professional growth, as evidenced by observations and artifacts. This process builds on the progress made in the TPAI-R, continuing to stipulate observations, conferences, and different procedures based on teacher experience, maintaining the peer observation requirement. A higher expectation for the fidelity of the evaluation process is evidenced by the advent of the time specifications for each step of the process and

the internet-based McREL online tool, which maintains evaluation data and records evaluation activities for every LEA in the state (Breedlove, 2011; McREL, 2009; NCDPI, 2001).

A prominent feature in the new evaluation model is the *Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers* and the use of artifacts to supplement classroom observations. The rubric itself is noteworthy in that it provides a format that describes varying levels of teacher performance demonstrated in classroom observations conducted by both administrators and peers. The first version of the *Rubric* included five broad standards that contained three to eight sub-standards, called elements. The five original standards were:

Standard I: Teachers demonstrate leadership,

Standard II: Teachers establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students,

Standard III: Teachers know the content they teach,

Standard IV: Teachers facilitate learning for their students, and

Standard V: Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

Standard VI: Teachers Contribute to the Academic Success of Students
(McREL, 2012).

The *Rubric* has five rating levels: Not Demonstrated, Developing, Proficient, Accomplished, and Distinguished (McREL, 2009). In its training materials for the NC Teacher Evaluation Process, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) acknowledges that a peer observer is not expected to assign a rating in all standards, as an administrator would, suggesting that peers rate their colleagues in only those standards that can be demonstrated by the teacher in a typical classroom observation (NCDPI, n.d.-b).

In a 2011 briefing on educator effectiveness policy to the Governor's Education Transformation Commission, NCDPI announced plans to adopt a new sixth standard; *Teachers contribute to the academic success of students*, which will be measured by student growth. This new standard, adopted in February 2012, also comes with three new rating categories, Does Not Meet Expected Growth, Meets Expected Growth, and Exceeds Expected Growth, to be assessed annually. Under this new measure of teacher performance, ratings from the past three years of student achievement data in Standard Six will be combined with the rating on the annual summary evaluation in Standards One through Five to determine an educator effectiveness status of In Need of Improvement, Effective, or Highly Effective. These data will be reported in the SAS® Educator Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS), a customized software system available to all NC school districts that "basically answers the question of how effective a schooling experience is" (NCDPI, n.d.-c).

Currently, EVAAS has populated the initial sets of data that will comprise the first three years of teacher ratings under Standard Six. With the implications that are brought about by the teacher evaluation rubric to the overall status of a teacher's effectiveness, the extent to which principals consider peer evaluation ratings and feedback to promote professional growth and as a part of their overall ratings of a teacher is worthy of examination. In its policy briefing, NCDPI (2011) suggests "a need for more training on the teacher evaluation instrument." Although the NC Excellent Public Schools Act of 2013

eliminated teacher tenure in the state, it maintains the requirement of observation by a teacher at least once a year in low-performing schools for all teachers employed less than three consecutive years. The fourth year of teaching was also the threshold for local school districts under the former tenure law, essentially meaning little change for the peer observation requirement for beginning teachers, at least in low-performing schools.

Currently, the teacher evaluation process in North Carolina stipulates a 45-minute classroom observation by a peer for all beginning and probationary teachers. The training requirement for peer observers is limited to the training of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process (NCTEP) afforded to all teachers. Although evaluation practices are suggested specifically for peer evaluators, they are not mandated (McREL, 2009). Inasmuch as the charge for additional training to understand the NCTEP has been issued, the benefits, challenges, and best practices indicated in the research literature about peer observations should be considered on a broader scale for its potential influence on a teacher's professional growth and how administrators can use this data to evaluate teachers' performance.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a thorough review of the existing literature relevant to a principal's implementation of peer observations for the evaluation and professional development of teachers. The literature review is to be taken in the context of the significant gap in the literature on the specific practice of peer observation among teachers in public elementary and secondary schools. This study attempts to add to the body of research on the

topic, using the following themes that emerged from the literature as a foundation: (1) teacher evaluation reform, (2) the twofold purpose of teacher evaluation, (3) trends in peer observation of teaching, (4) the use of peer observation in teacher evaluation, (4) the benefits of peer observation, (6) the challenges of peer observation, (7) research-based practices in peer observation of teaching, (8) the essential steps in the peer observation process, and (9) the evolution of teacher evaluation in North Carolina.

In this broad spectrum of professional and research literature, the context of peer observation is examined from the standpoint of why teacher evaluation is necessary to assess and promote the improvement of teachers, which is directly related to increased student achievement. Peer observation of teaching is further examined in the literature as a strategy in teacher evaluation reform and professional development of teachers, which are again aligned to the purposes of teacher evaluation. The literature provides several models of how peer observation is used as a part of nationwide teacher evaluation processes. Practitioner journals and research from journals and dissertations were examined to identify the advantages and challenges to implementing peer observation of teaching. This information, along with the best practices recommended in the literature provided a foundation for the interview questions and survey items used in this study.

Finally, a more specific lens of how peer observation is used in North Carolina was examined through a review of publications such as teacher evaluation manuals, state reports, and legislation passed by the state legislature and policies enacted by the North Carolina

State Board of Education. The review of this literature is important for a full understanding of the standards and criteria teachers and administrators are responsible for demonstrating and evaluating. This level of understanding is crucial for the subjects of this study, principals in a North Carolina Local Educational Agency.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Research Methods

The research methods selected for this study are driven by the research questions and the themes that emerged from the literature in the preceding chapter, with particular emphasis on practices recommended by scholars to implement peer observations and the use of peer observation of teaching as it is used to evaluate and improve teacher performance. The selected methods will seek to design research instruments that will uncover how North Carolina principals implement peer observations within their schools and the practical role that peer observation has in the evaluation and improvement of teacher performance.

This research will be conducted using a case study approach, which is a form of qualitative research that seeks to discover meaning, investigate processes, and gain an in-depth understanding of an individual group or situation (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). This approach is appropriate because this study endeavors to investigate the process of peer observation and to gain insight on how principals use this process to evaluate and improve the performance of teachers. The use of case studies is popular in education because it has offered a number of ways to address the complex nature of several topics in education, including teaching and administration (Nath, 2005). Also according to Creswell (2007), when the case is clearly identifiable, case study is an effective approach to develop an in-depth understanding of the case.

The study will be conducted using ten individual interviews with principals, an online survey of those ten principals, a focus group interview with five teachers, observation field notes from the interviews, and document analysis of evaluation and training instruments. This study will draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Lodico et al., 2006). Terrell (2012) succinctly points out that quantitative research tells us “if” and qualitative methods explain “how” or “why.” As in the example that Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) cite, the open-ended interview questions will supplement the factors measured in the survey instrument that are identified as important in the relevant research literature. In this case study, the quantitative survey data will provide a broad picture of principals’ attitudes and practices while the qualitative interviews with principals and focus group with veteran teachers will provide a context for understanding those perceptions.

The research will be conducted using an exploratory design. This is a popular design that is used by researchers to develop surveys for use in studies in which not enough is known about the topic. Considering that peer observation of teaching in elementary and secondary schools is a relatively new topic of educational research, an exploratory design is appropriate for this study. In this research model, the qualitative data will be collected first. Themes that emerge from the ten individual interviews with principals and the focus group interview with mentor teachers will inform the quantitative survey questions that will be administered to the principals interviewed at a later time. This is advantageous because

language from the detailed descriptions was used in the survey instrument questions. A key characteristic of this design is its emphasis on qualitative data (Lodico et al., 2006).

Ercikan and Roth (2006) suggested that the research questions, rather than a solid commitment to one method, should drive educational research. They further explain that research can be classified to answer questions to describe a phenomenon in terms of what is happening, its effect, and why or how it is happening. This study's employment of individual interviews, a focus group, and a survey follows this recommendation to find out how peer observations are used to evaluate and improve teacher performance. Additionally, this study seeks to obtain information from a variety of sources, in a variety of ways, and from the viewpoints of different groups, to provide a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). The inclusion of principals from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, with the addition of the teacher perspective accomplishes this goal.

Research Questions

To gain the answers to the research questions, the researcher administered a survey to current North Carolina school principals and conduct individual interviews with a total of 10 school principals from the selected North Carolina school district. The twenty-one survey questions are based on the professional experience of the researcher, recommendations of research-based practices for conducting peer teaching observations, research literature on peer observation of teaching, and responses from the interviews and focus group. Participants

for the focus group interview included five teachers who have experience as peer observers to gain a deeper understanding of how principals use peer observation to assess and develop teachers under their leadership. The purpose of the study is to answer the following questions: (1) *What practices do school principals and teachers use to implement peer observations as mandated in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process?* (2) *How do principals use peer observation to assess and improve teacher performance?* Each question in the interview guide will be correlated to one of the three aforementioned research questions. For the interest of the reader, the research questions are coded in the appendix as “R1 and R2.” These codes will not be in the survey to potential respondents.

Site Selection and Sample Criteria

A North Carolina school district was selected as the site for this study due to the state’s extensive and continuous efforts toward improving teacher evaluation as a part of its overall educational reform agenda, initiated in the State Board of Education’s new standards adopted in 2008 and even further mandates for improvement in the state’s federal Race to the Top application in 2010. North Carolina’s educational directory identifies 115 LEAs in current operation. With the relative newness of the topic of peer observation of teaching in the K-12 setting and the importance of improving these schools responsible for developing the basic skills needed for students to thrive in future education and careers, the results from this study in this geographic region could inform the practices of other schools.

The school district selected for this study is located in the northeastern region of North Carolina. It has 29 schools (17 elementary, 6 middle schools, 5 high schools, and 1 alternative school). The selected LEA currently employs 954 full-time teachers. The variation in schools and staff within this district will allow for a relatively broad cross-section of participants without becoming so oversaturated as to make the study impractical.

Quantitative Method—Survey

The purpose of quantitative research is “explain, predict, or control phenomena through focused collection of numerical data” (Borland, 2001, p. 112). Maxwell (2010) praised quantitative data because it enables the researcher to identify and correctly characterize the various “actions, perceptions, or beliefs in the setting or group studied.” He further explained that “individuals are often unaware of larger patterns beyond their immediate experience, and quantitative data can thus compliment the participants’ perspectives in providing a clearer and more in depth understanding of what’s going on in a particular setting or for individuals who belong to a particular category.” The researcher, who has ten years of experience as a school administrator in North Carolina, is the instrument for the qualitative research and will be able to bring that experience into this study.

Burke defines non-experimental research as “systematic empirical inquiry in which the scientist does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because they are inherently nonmanipulable.” This study of how peer observations are currently implemented for teacher evaluation and

professional growth by administrators in schools fits this definition. Furthermore, Burke (2001) makes a strong case for the merit of non-experimental quantitative research in education because there are many non-manipulable independent variables that need further study in education. Peer observation of teaching in the elementary and secondary school settings, as a newer topic in educational research, certainly meets this criterion.

Under the quantitative paradigm, Borland (2001) distinguishes that the researcher attempts to identify “relationships between variables that explain behaviors that define specific populations of individuals.” He further explained, “the keys are to accurately define the specific population of interest and to select a sample that accurately represents it.” To meet these criteria, potential survey respondents were drawn from a sampling frame of public school principals in the selected North Carolina school district.

According to Lodico, et al. (2006), descriptive-survey research in education has the common purpose of “gathering opinions, beliefs, or perceptions about a current issue from a large group of people” (p. 157). Descriptive surveys also share the following characteristics:

- (1) A pre-established instrument has most likely been developed by the researcher,
- (2) Most responses to the questions on the survey are quantitative (e.g., ratings) or will be summarized in a quantitative way, and
- (3) The sample is selected from a larger population or group to allow the study’s findings to be generalized back to the larger group (p. 156).

The instrument and methods used for this study contains all the above elements of descriptive-survey research.

Specific Quantitative Methodological Approach

The researcher was unable to locate any existing survey instruments that measure the phenomenon of how principals use peer observation of teaching to evaluate and improve teacher performance; therefore, the researcher designed questions based on his knowledge from being a school administrator from the onset of the current NCTEP and from the research-based recommendations stemming from the literature reviewed in the preceding chapter. Survey questions were developed using the following procedures identified in developing effective survey instruments. Patton (1990) identified six categories of questions a researcher can ask—behaviors, opinions or values, feelings, knowledge, sensory information, and background demographics. The survey questions are structured as follows. The first two questions will ask background information on the responding principals' years of experience and the number of probationary and career teachers in their schools during the past school year. Sixteen questions are categorized as behavior questions, which inquire about the implementation of peer observations in the North Carolina teacher evaluation process. Seven questions seek to gain opinions and values regarding school administrators' views about the peer observation component of the evaluation process. Table 3.1 below provides a breakdown of the survey questions (in Appendix A) according to the aforementioned categories. Depending on their school practices with peer observations,

survey respondents can answer a minimum of 4 questions and a maximum of all 21 items. This survey instrument gives priority to the professional practices that principals employ in their schools to implement peer observations. It is important to gain a thorough understanding of practitioners to compare them to research-based recommendations and to begin to explore opportunities for improved leadership strategies for administrators. To reduce the likelihood of the Hawthorne effect, or participants behaving uncharacteristically by providing what they perceive to be desired responses (Fink, 2009), the respondents were not privy to the categories of the questions as they respond.

Table 3.1. Breakdown of Survey Questions by Category

Demographics	Behaviors	Opinions
1, 2, 3	3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	6,15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

Furthermore, each question on the survey is aligned with a research question. The table below illustrates the breakdown of questions by research question.

Table 3.2. Breakdown of Survey Questions by Research Question

Research Question	Corresponding Survey Questions
1. What practices do school principals use to implement peer observations as mandated in the NCTEP?	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
2. How do principals use peer observations to assess and improve teacher performance?	11, 12, 13, 14, 15,16,17, 18,19, 20, 21

The format of survey questions vary based on the question type. For example, background demographic and behavior questions will only produce nominal data. However, questions designed to measure values and beliefs will be measured on a Likert-type scale. Psychologist Rensis Likert developed the scale bearing his name to measure attitudes. Researchers have modified his five-point scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to include rating descriptors to measure such factors as satisfaction, frequency, similarity, etc. Most researchers use Likert-type rating scales for their survey projects (Thomas, 1999) and surveys following this format are useful in social sciences and attitude research (Croasmun & Ostrum, 2011).

Appropriateness of Online Surveys

When selecting the methodology for this research study, the advantages and disadvantages of surveying and specifically its employment via the Internet were considered. The approach is appropriate for this particular study, especially in its use to answer questions important to school administrators (Trotter, 2005). According to Solomon (2001), Web-based surveying is becoming more popular in social science and educational research. The researcher will use Qualtrics online survey platform to conduct the quantitative portion of this study. Data storage and analysis will be facilitated by using a Web-based survey. Data are easily collected and transferred into databases for analysis, thus eliminating the possibility of human error through manual entry (Mertler, 2002). As Umbach (2004) noted, “the ability to collect survey data quickly and inexpensively via the Web seems to have

enticed many to launch Web-based surveys.” The societal trend toward self-administered surveys has rapidly increased the acceptance and use of Web-based surveys (Dillman, 2007).

Another advantage for researchers who choose Web-based surveys is access to an unlimited area of global coverage to respondents. The geographic scope of this Internet survey will be beneficial to this study, in which principals schools within one North Carolina LEA will be invited to participate. The use of Web-based surveys has been proven to be beneficial to respondents in addition to researchers (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Mertler, 2003,). The researcher also benefitted from the design flexibility, such as the ability to add features like pop-up instructions, skip patterns, and check boxes to provide a more dynamic survey process and these advantages could increase response rate (Dillman, 2007; Umbach, 2004).

Sample Criteria

In this study, the researcher obtained a sample from the principals in the selected school district. Principals in the same North Carolina public school district selected for this case study will be recruited as potential respondents to a survey administered in electronic format. Potential respondents were contacted via an e-mail message and provided a hyperlink to the Web site that contains the survey. This purposeful sampling strategy is described by Patton (2002) as criterion sampling, in which the researcher picks all cases that meet some criterion. Borland (2001) warns against sampling error, which is defined as not selecting a sufficiently representative sampling to accurately apply the survey responses to the general population. This non-random sampling strategy was designed with the purpose of avoiding

sampling error. Furthermore, a number of studies have used non-probability sampling to recruit survey respondents through listservs, discussion forums, and newsgroups (Castleberry, 2010). The researcher's use of the school district directory satisfied this sampling strategy.

Reliability and Validity

A survey is considered valid if it provides an accurate measure that is free from error. Reliability refers to the level of consistency in measuring important characteristics despite fluctuations due to random change in attitudes or experiences. Fink (2009) contends that a valid survey is always reliable.

Because scholars agree that validity takes precedence over reliability, the researcher will satisfy the validity criteria first. The survey for this study satisfies the requirements to have content validity. According to Fink (2009), the content of a survey is valid if its items “accurately represent the characteristics or attitudes they are intended to measure” and “contains a reasonable sample of facts, words, ideas, and theories commonly used” when discussing a particular topic of study (p. 4). She further posits that “content validity is usually established by referring to theories about...behavior.” The terminology used in the survey items is seen throughout the literature regarding teacher evaluation, peer evaluations, and public schools. Furthermore, the application of survey responses of school administrators' views about and the use of peer observations in the context of teacher evaluation and

professional development conceptual framework of adult learning meets the criteria for content validity.

Bias

Compared to tradition survey methods, online surveys require special attention to bias resulting from coverage error, sampling error, and nonresponse error (Dillman, 2000); however, this survey will contain safeguards suggested from researchers to reduce the effect of any potential bias. Sampling error is a major limitation for Web-based surveys (Groves et al., 2009). To avoid sampling error, the researcher will use a list of valid e-mail addresses of potential respondents provided by the appropriate district personnel to ensure that the potential respondents are currently practicing NC public school principals appropriate to participate in the study.

Measurement, or the extent to which the questions measure the constructs for which they are intended, is a prominent error in survey methods (Groves et al., 2009). To reduce measurement error, research literature suggests that surveys are peer reviewed by a pilot group before being administered (Castleberry, 2010; Fink, 2009; Thomas, 1999). Fink (2009) suggests that the researcher try to anticipate the actual circumstances in which the survey will be conducted. She further advises the researcher to choose respondents similar to the ones who will eventually complete the survey in regards to relevant factors such as age and education level. Adhering to this recommendation, the survey will be administered to principals who will not be included in the target population before being distributed to the

selected sample. The pilot test will alert the researcher to technical problems with the online transmission of the survey and the reliability of the questions.

The target population, or larger group about which the researcher wishes to make inferences, is North Carolina public school principals. The frame population, or subset of this population, is school principals in the selected LEA. Because all selected principals will have access to the survey instrument, bias due to incorrect e-mail addresses, personnel changes, technical problems, etc. will be avoided as a factor in this study before the data is collected. Similarly, sampling error can occur if all members of the population are not given an equal chance to be included in the sample; therefore, results cannot be said to represent the population, no matter how large. Nonresponse bias will be introduced into the study when the respondents to the survey are different from those who did not respond in terms of demographics and attitudes (Umbach, 2004). Because people have become more Web-literate and the prevalence of the Internet in the daily work of school principals has grown, threats to coverage is likely diminished in this study.

Dillman (2007) made the following recommendations that will be used in the design of the instrument used in this study to deflect the aforementioned bias and survey error. The survey will: provide clear and specific instructions; avoid the use of too much color to increase readability; contain an interesting, easily answered first question; allow respondents to scroll from question to question; avoid the use of drop-down boxes; and limit the use of open-ended and “check all that apply” questions. Additionally, the survey includes the

neutral option for respondents to answer “I don’t know” to avoid bias by forcing an affirmative or negative response (Croasmun & Ostrum, 2011).

Following Umbach’s (2004) synthesis of best practices for Web surveys, an initial e-mail followed by one or two reminders will be sent if necessary to increase response rate. To further increase response rate, the survey will take no longer than 20 minutes for respondents to complete. Finally, it is noteworthy that although tangible rewards will not be provided for survey respondents, Dillman (2007) recommended several techniques to establish trust with respondents, thus increasing response rate. Such techniques include common courtesies as saying “thank you” in the correspondence. Furthermore, acknowledging group identity and the social usefulness of the survey to that particular group can also motivate members of the target frame to respond. Following this notion, the researcher sharing his identity as a school principal could possibly increase response rate.

Qualitative Method—Interviews

Qualitative interviews are used when the researcher wants to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular experiences. To assist in obtaining this knowledge, implementation of this method of data collection is contingent on the researcher developing a rapport with the interview participants (deMarrias, 2004). In the collection of this data, the researcher being an educator significantly contributes to the goal of learning about the aspects of peer observation being studied.

A focus group consists of any group discussion in which the moderator actively encourages and is aware of group interactions to gather specific information (Cheng, 2008, Packer-Muti, 2010). In the formation of focus groups, particular emphasis is given to ensuring that the participants feel relaxed. To further add to the likelihood of rich, descriptive data emerging from the discussion, focus group participants usually have homogeneous characteristics related to the topic of study. As the researcher anticipated, the group members' familiarity with each other, as suggested by Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996), stimulated more interaction, synergy, and generation of ideas. Additionally, focus groups were appropriate due to the time constraints on teachers.

As an appropriate complement to survey research, focus groups are useful indicators of the participants' knowledge and range of experiences relating to the survey topic (Groves et al., 2009). Morgan (1996) identifies the use of focus groups as a widely used method to complement survey research to gain a better understanding of survey results. Because survey data could only identify a problem, focus groups will provide an elaboration on the problem and provide the researcher a more in-depth understanding of the issue (Vaughn et al., 1996), from the teachers' perspective. Specific to this study, to gain an understanding of mentor teachers' experiences "in the trenches" with conducting peer observations in their schools along with principals' perceptions indicated in the survey will provide a better understanding of implications for future practice.

Focus group and individual interviewees will be selected through purposeful sampling. This selection method will be used due to geographic and time constraints for both the researcher and potential participants. The researcher will make an effort to ensure that both mentor teachers and principals recruited to participate in the study are practicing at a variety of grade levels and school demographics within the school district are included.

Access to participants was first requested through North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix B). Once initial access is gained, key informants will be used to facilitate contact with the potential interviewees and to establish a location for the focus group interviews. Interviewees for focus groups were selected using purposeful sampling, because focus group interviews are most beneficial when the participants are similar and the interaction is likely to produce the best information. This sampling procedure is best because the individuals can purposefully provide an understanding of the research problem and main focus of the study. The researcher gained access to focus group participants through gatekeepers who have insider status and served as the initial contacts to lead the researcher to other participants (Creswell, 2007).

A total of five career-status teachers were selected to participate in a focus group interview to inform the researcher on their experiences with peer observations to evaluate and improve the performance of the probationary teachers they are assigned to observe. The ideal number of participants for a focus group interview is inconclusive throughout the literature, ranging from 5 to 12; however, smaller groups are recommended for emotionally

charged issues and larger groups are more acceptable for neutral topics (Chen, 2007; Groves et al., 2009; Krueger, 1996; Morgan, 1996). To avoid data saturation, no more than six focus group interviews should be conducted in a single study (Morgan, 1996). The focus group was limited to no more than 90 minutes to prevent participant fatigue (Chen, 2007; Packer-Multi, 2010). In this study, the researcher seeks to conduct one focus group with mentor teachers to add a degree of triangulation to the research. The primary focus of this study is to examine how school principals use the process of peer observation to evaluate and improve teacher performance. However, it is important to the study to add the teacher voice, more specifically, the voices of those who many principals entrust to carry out the peer observations in their schools. Therefore, the amount of data gained from teachers who participated in this study is appropriate based on the main focus of the research questions.

To promote consistency through the researcher used a script that describes the informed consent (See Appendix B) and standard set of procedures of data collection and recording. Although an interview guide will be used, deMarrias (2004) pointed out the need for the questioning process to be fluid and flexible based on responses to gain the most depth of knowledge in this semi-structured interview. The interview guide was structured to include the following question-type sequence, recommended by Kreuger (1995), to obtain the personal perspectives of each participant related to the topic: (1) opening, (2) introductory, (3) transfer questions, (4) key questions, (5) specific questions, (6) closing questions, and (7) final questions. The researcher served as the instrument for data collection,

because the discussion was moderated, audio recorded with two devices, and observation field notes were taken during the discussion. The researcher complied with all requirements of the North Carolina State University IRB for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (Appendix B).

Research Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2007) contends validity is the researchers attempt to gain the accuracy of findings. This is important to present the most accurate description of issues in educational research. To this level of accuracy, the researcher must work to find the perspectives of those involved in the study, uncover the complexity of human behavior in the proper context, and present a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

It is difficult in a qualitative study to guarantee validity, as the researcher must rely upon the interview subjects for valid measures. A variation in answers depending on the feelings or mood of the subject could have an adverse impact on research validity. The researcher enhanced validity by utilizing interview and focus group protocols and by personally transcribing the interviews. As the work was transcribed verbatim, the researcher was able to judge if the interview questions were uncovering the information that they are intended to uncover. In addition, the researcher was able to check validity by interviewing several participants within the selected school district.

Establishing internal validity is imperative for a qualitative researcher to provide a clear view of the study. Triangulation is one way that internal validity can be established

through using multiple investigators, sources of data or data collection methods to present findings. This study accomplishes internal validity with the inclusion of both principals who participated in interviews and a survey and experienced teachers who participated in the focus group. Document review and observation field notes also comprised the data collected. The research methods will provide a holistic, more complete understanding of the study. Merriam (2002) views reliability as the extent to which research findings can be replicated. Furthermore, reliability asks whether the results of the study are consistent with the data collected. The methods used to obtain internal validity can also be used to obtain reliability.

External validity examines the extent to which the findings can apply to other situations (Merriam, 2002). In qualitative studies, external validity becomes evident when the reader can transfer lessons learned from the analysis of one situation to other situations. Including maximum variation in the sites, times, and participants for the interview and focus groups as well as providing rich, thick descriptions are ways to create external validity. In this study the use of rich, thick description gives readers enough information to relate the findings to school systems across the state and country.

Limitations

In focus groups, the role of the moderator is a potential limitation of this study to the extent of finding a balance between allowing a free flow of group contributions to the discussion and maintaining the focus of the research questions (Morgan, 1996). The researcher attempted to minimize these limitations by using a structured interview guide to

moderate the discussion but implemented a semi-structured interview process to allow the researcher to probe beyond the questions in the protocol. To ensure that the environment is amenable to an open discourse, the researcher used the purposeful selection of focus group participants who work in the same school district and use a site within the participants' respective school district to allow for easy discussion and comfort in a natural environment (Morgan, 1996, Packer-Muti, 2010).

The qualitative methods in this study are limited because of the small sample size of survey participants. Because the sample size included fewer than thirty respondents, it may be difficult to generalize some of the practices and beliefs that are indicated in the survey beyond the site selected for this case study.

Subjectivity Statement

Researcher bias may be introduced into this study in the interviews. Having the perspective of a career educator and current school administrator, in addition to having reviewed extensive literature on the subject, the researcher will bring preconceived notions of how peer observations are best implemented in schools as a tool for both the assessment and improvement of teacher performance. To reduce the researcher's bias being introduced into the study, being guided by the interview protocol was important to keep the focus of the conversation on the research questions while assuming role as a discussion facilitator.

As the research instrument of the focus group in this study, the researcher was also cautious of anticipating how interview subjects may respond to the questions and prompts

based on previously collected data; at the same time, a semi-structured interview process was used to allow the researcher to probe beyond the interview protocol to gain insight into the research questions (Lodico et al., 2006).

The semi-structured interview process was advantageous due to the professional background of the researcher. In past experience, the researcher has received multiple training sessions from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction on the teacher evaluation process. Having served as an administrator for ten years responsible for implementing the various components required to evaluate teachers, the researcher has a deeper insight into the terminology, practices, and overall context within which peer observation of teaching occurs. The researcher's background and experiences lend increased credibility to the study, especially in terms of interviewing study participants—principals and teachers.

Ethical Issues

There was minimal harm and risk to any party as a result of this study being conducted. Survey respondents, interview and focus group participants participated voluntarily. Subjects included in this study were exclusively comprised of adults, eliminating any IRB concerns that center on questioning any at-risk populations. Before beginning the collection of data, the researcher obtained the written approval of the North Carolina State University IRB (Appendices B and C). Informed consent was transmitted via e-mail to the potential survey respondents and accompanied the link to the online survey instrument.

Additionally, school district procedure for gaining permission to conduct research was followed for the districts providing focus group interview locations and subjects.

The findings of the survey were written in aggregate terms, providing elaboration with data collected from focus group interview responses. Participants are not be identifiable by their responses to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, no demographic factors were used to describe individual responses.

Data Analysis

Dillman (2007) noted the reduced chance of data loss as an advantage of Web-based surveys. Data will be collected in this survey through Qualtrics in real-time as respondents self-administer the survey. The data collected from the survey were be analyzed using descriptive statistics, which are the basic units for describing a survey's respondents and responses. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the responses to the questions. Along with graphic analysis, such as pie charts and bar graphs, they establish the foundation of practically every quantitative analysis of survey data (Fink, 2009).

The descriptive data presented in this study include frequency distributions, which are computations of how many respondents are included in various categories of nominal data. With the responses from the Likert-type survey providing the broad picture of administrative practices and perceptions in the implementation of peer observations and the interviews providing more details, descriptive statistics is an appropriate representation of the survey data collected in this study because of its focus on the qualitative data.

From the notes and audio recording transcript, the researcher implemented the coding process described by Creswell (2007) to identify common themes that emerge from the interviews. The researcher was also able to monitor validity by doing his own transcription work. Because the work was transcribed verbatim, the researcher was able to judge if the interview questions were uncovering the information they were intended to uncover. In addition, the researcher was able to check validity by ensuring that he interviews seven principals and five mentor teachers in the school district.

The coding process resulted in the researcher identifying themes, which represented the major ideas that derived from the focus group and interview discussions and provide a deeper insight to practices and attitudes indicated in the survey data. These themes are presented in narrative form that organizes the rich, thick data that is characteristic of qualitative research. Organizing the text into a thematic format provides flexibility and is recognized as the most common methods of presenting qualitative data (Lodico et al., 2006). The researcher anticipates, as Morgan (1996) suggests of most survey–focus group research combinations, that the data collected from the interviews confirm what emerges from the surveys.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided justification for the appropriateness of methods to answer the research questions in this study. A description of the both the quantitative and qualitative methods selected for the study was provided. Steps in the selection the population sample,

designing the survey, survey distribution, collection of data were also described. The process for selecting individual interview and focus group participants, developing the interview guide, and conducting the interview, collecting and analyzing qualitative data were explained. The researcher identified limitations of the chosen methods and strategies that were implemented to offset those limitations, and concluded with a description of how the data collected is analyzed and reported in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Introduction

Almost all researchers agree that effective teachers are critical to student achievement (TNTP, 2010). In North Carolina, principals are tasked with ensuring that processes are in place to recruit, induct, support, evaluate, develop, and retain a high-quality staff (McREL-b, 2009). This is particularly challenging to accomplish with beginning and probationary teachers, those with fewer than four years of teaching experience in a Local Educational Agency. As an added measure of support, a peer observation is required for all beginning and probationary teachers as a part of their evaluation process. The purpose of any effective teacher evaluation system is twofold—to assess and improve performance. This study sought to discover how principals use peer observation of teaching for the evaluation and professional development of teachers.

This study included seven principals and five peer observers who participated in individual and focus group interviews, respectively. All participants were purposively selected to include principals and teachers employed in the same school district as a part of the multi-site case study. Principals were able to discuss how they implement peer observation under the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process, how they use peer observation to improve teacher performance, and how they use that observation data to evaluate teachers. To gain further insight, five teachers who had served as peer observers during their careers elaborated on their experiences with peer observation. Chapter 4

highlights the common themes and answers to the research questions elicited from the interviews.

Participants

The participants in this study are all principals and teachers in a large school district in northeastern North Carolina who agreed to be interviewed. Individual interviews were conducted face-to-face or via telephone with ten principals. The five teachers were interviewed in a focus group format, with the researcher being guided by separate interview protocols for principals and teachers, conducted in a semi-structured format.

Table 4.1. Sample of Interview Participants (Principals)

Participant Pseudonym	Grade Level	Years of Administrative Experience	Percentage of Probationary Teachers
Heather	Elementary	12	17
Francine	Elementary	8	10
Harriet	Middle	14	80
Otis	Elementary	4	14
Nadine	Elementary	10	90
Wanda	Elementary	10	5
Emily	Elementary	3	10

Participants in this study were provided pseudonyms to protect anonymity, while providing a personalized approach to the narrative. The length of the participants' administrative experience is relevant to their experiences with teacher evaluation and peer observation of teaching, although elementary and middle school principals, some were able

to draw upon previous experiences in the high school setting. The percentage of probationary teachers also indicates amount of administrator experience with peer observations, since that is a requirement in the evaluation process of all probationary teachers.

Table 4.2. Sample of Focus Group Participants (Peer Observers)

Participant Pseudonym	Grade Level	Years of Experience
Beth	Elementary	21
Kate	Elementary	17
Sandra	Elementary	11
Jessica	Elementary	20
Carol	Elementary	15

Table 4.3. Sample of Survey Respondents (Principals)

Which grades are served at your school? (Please select all that apply.)

Answer	Response
PK	5
K	6
1	5
2	5
3	6
4	6
5	6
6	2
7	2
8	2
9	1
10	1
11	1
12	1

Total Survey Participants- 10

Research Question One

The first research question sought to answer, “*What practices do school principals and teachers use to implement peer observations as mandated in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process?*” In discussing the practices used when implementing peer observations, the data indicates varying practices in peer observation among administrators in the same school district along with several challenges to implementation. The key themes that emerged were: selection of peer observers, peer observation training, and challenges to implementation.

Peer observer selection criteria varied among principals, largely depending on the number of probationary teachers compared to career-status teachers. Participants cited various criteria used to select the peer observer, including the content area or grade level of both teachers, ability to build trusting relationships, mentor training, and the teaching performance of the peer observer. Administrators of schools with a relatively low number of probationary teachers had more experienced teachers to choose from in their pool of peer observers. Of the principals interviewed, there was a huge disparity between the numbers of career-status teachers available in each school; participants indicated that they had either under 20% or over 80% probationary teachers on their staffs. This number affected how mentors are used to conduct peer observations. Wanda, a principal of a school with only 5% probationary teachers, stated, “I have my mentors or a veteran teacher that has experience as far as academic growth and classroom management as peer observers.” This is not an

uncommon practice, as Francine, with 10% of probationary teachers, explained: “All along before the peer observation ever happens, they’ve [mentors] already started working with that teacher, and the beginning teacher has already established that relationship with them.” Principals with smaller numbers of probationary teachers tend to be administrators of smaller schools and appear to be more able to capitalize on their pool of mentor teachers to build positive relationships. Otis, the principal of a school with 14% probationary teachers remarked on the importance of considering relationships with other teachers when selecting peer observers, affirming that “I also look at the personalities, and who would make a good relationship—not only as someone to talk to—but someone who will push that person... to do the very best job for the students in the classroom.”

It is noteworthy that according to the NCTEP manual, any teacher trained in the evaluation standards may serve as peer observers (McREL, 2009); however, the perceptions of the principals largely indicate a preference to use career-status teachers to observe their colleagues’ classrooms. The survey results displayed below best illustrates this trend, in which all principals indicate that they use career status teachers to conduct peer observations in the NCTEP, with only one principal who indicated using probationary teachers for this purpose.

Table 4.4. Survey Question 4 Responses

Which of the following groups served as peer observers in the NC Teacher Evaluation Process? (Please select all that apply.)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Career Status (tenured) teachers	10	100%
2	Probationary teachers	1	10%
3	I do not know	0	0%

All five teachers who participated in the focus group cited their experience as a reason they believed their principals had selected them in the past to observe their peers. It is important to note that although the principals with a smaller percentage of probationary teachers tend to use mentors to conduct peer observations, they do not necessarily use the mentors to observe their own mentees. Emily, a principal with 10% of probationary teachers on staff, explained,

“I do not use mentors to conduct peer observations because of the evaluative roles. I want them to be able to continue to trust going to their mentors when they need assistance for different things, so most of the time I will choose someone else who has been trained in that peer observation tool and that particular process, but not the teacher’s mentor.”

The study uncovered arguments both in favor and against using mentors to observe their assigned mentees as a part of the beginning teacher program, which requires the assignment of a mentor during a teacher’s first four years of teaching. Principals who participated in this study varied on the appropriateness of using mentors to observe their

mentees as a part of the NCTEP. When questioned about the mentor’s role in peer observation, Harriet asserted, “Mentor and mentee factor into it because *of course* I don’t let the mentor observe their mentee.” However, other principals intentionally use mentors for peer observations to help strengthen their influence to improve probationary teachers. Otis pointed out, “I only have the mentor do that one [peer observation] that is required through the evaluation process.” Francine explained, “I have had it where my mentors—peer observers—come to me and say, ‘I’m seeing such and such with this person, come in and see if you see the same thing.’ And I’ve done the same thing to the peer observers—‘Okay, I’m seeing this; I know you’ve built that relationship. I want you to go in there and try to help.’ It just makes it stronger for all of us.” The fact that several principals throughout the interviews used the terms “mentors” and “peer observers” interchangeably emphasizes the tendency to rely on experienced teachers to conduct peer observations (Table 4.4).

When the number of experienced teachers in a school to conduct peer observations is limited or when practiced as a part of a school-wide peer observation initiative, principals tend to consider other criteria such as content area to assign that role. When asked why content area was used as a determining factor, Harriet, a middle school principal gave a specific example of selecting a peer observer for an art teacher, “I try to think about another fine arts person or elective teacher who can observe this person because they all operate under the same type guidelines. I think they would know better what to look for rather than just pulling someone out of a hat randomly.” She further explained, “Good teaching is good

teaching, but sometimes if you are thinking about it from your discipline standpoint, you can say, ‘Okay I saw this, I understand this part.’” The special education teacher who was interviewed stated that she believed content played a role in her selection as a peer observer, “when I go into a classroom I know exactly what is going on because of the exposure to so many content areas.”

Another factor that goes into principal selection of teachers to conduct peer observations is the performance of the peer observer and the probationary teacher. According to the survey participants, this is the most important criterion (See Figure 4.1). Ideally, a peer observer has demonstrated his or her own proficiency in the teaching standards and can assist probationary teachers toward this end. With this goal in mind, Francine indicated having a conversation with mentors about the strengths and weaknesses of their mentees before the peer observation, stating, “This is your mentee, the person who you’re going to do your peer observation on. This is what I’m seeing so I need you to work with them on these areas.” A middle school principal added, “I think the peer observers who have high expectations for their students and their classrooms, theirs are more akin to the observations that I do and the assistant principal does.” Wanda explained, “I try to align somebody that has strong curriculum in certain areas... so that we can have good conversation across grade levels to promote some of those teaching strategies and suggestions along the process.”

In the survey, principals were asked to rank selection criteria in order of importance when matching teachers with peer observers. According to the results illustrated in Figure

4.1, the primary selection criterion for peer observers is the professional competence of the peer observer, as indicated by almost 80% of respondents. The next important factor is a trusting relationship between teachers. Although several principals use mentor-trained teachers to conduct peer observations, mentor training is the least important factor to consider for selection, as indicated by almost 70% of respondents. As the qualitative data indicated, mentor training in this particular district has changed because teachers have begun to use the online state training. This could either indicate a lack of confidence in the quality of the mentor training or principals could consider a teacher's overall professional competence as a by-product of having received mentor training.

Please rank the following in order of importance when matching teachers with peer observers.

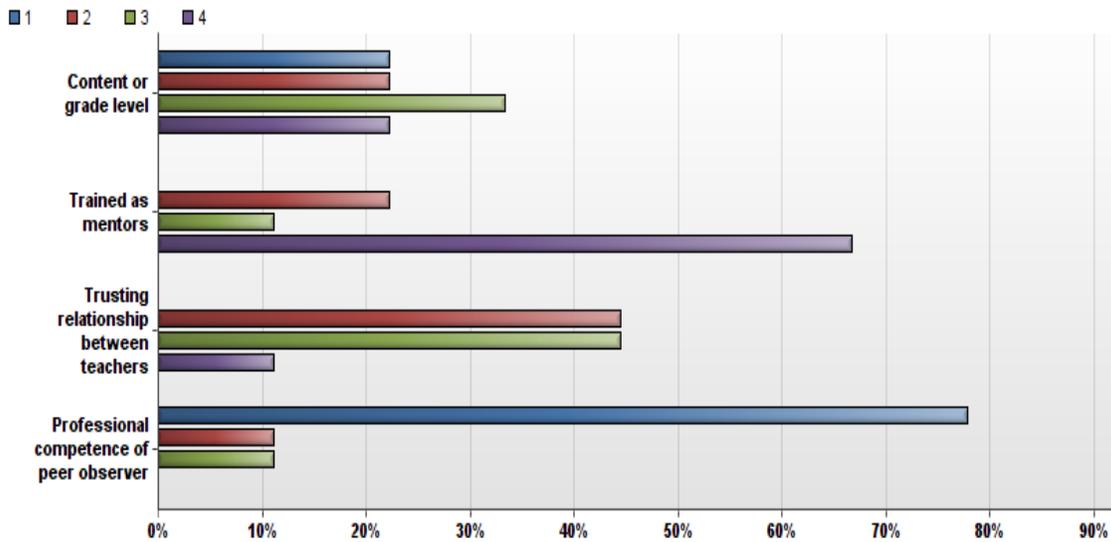


Figure 4.1. Survey Question 6 Responses

The final major factor that principals considered when selecting peer observers is teacher personality. One key trait that principals look for in peer observers is the ability to deliver feedback in a tactful manner. The skill of feedback delivery is important. As Emily pointed out, “You have some personalities that they may know a lot of information and they may be really good at objectively looking at different things, but if someone is not going to receive that information from you, sometimes it becomes moot.” Along the same viewpoint, Wanda added, “Some teachers are very opinionated and they won’t be able to relay the message as a growing piece. I need someone to be able to tell it like it is, but not, ‘I’m the

end all, be all.” Teachers who were interviewed also touched on the theme of tactful delivery of feedback. Kate, a first-grade teacher with seventeen years of experience said, “I always like to go over the positives first and just set the mood.” She further explained of the feedback process, “I always try to relate it to something from my own experience so they won’t think I’m saying, ‘that’s just *you*.’ Word it so they know they are not the only one to encounter that [problem].” Sandra, a teacher with eleven years of experience, said, “You have to remember that there’s a person with feelings and emotions and you don’t want to crush their spirit. You want to leave a person feeling whole as if they’re doing what they’re supposed to do and what they were trained to do.”

The need to **provide adequate training** to perform peer observations is another theme that emerged from examining how principals implement peer observation of teaching in their schools. All of the study participants—both principals and teachers—indicated that they received the training and orientation required within the first two weeks of the teacher’s first workday in the school year. Under the NCTEP guidelines simply providing teachers an electronic copy of the evaluation rubric, the NC State Board Policy on the NCTEP, and the district evaluation timeline satisfies the requirements for training. With respect to the enormity of the task of observing and evaluating the performance of one’s peers, all principals interviewed also revealed that they rely on more in-depth training than what is required by the North Carolina State Board of Education. This information was also supported by the findings in the quantitative data, as indicated in Table 4.5. Based on the

survey data, most principals indicate that peer observers receive additional training for peer observations, which is provided at the school level. It is interesting to note that although all principals indicated either peer observers or probationary teachers received peer observation training, only 30% were able to identify the training source. This, along with open-ended comments, suggests a need for additional and more consistent training sources for peer observation of teaching.

Table 4.5. Survey Question 7 Responses

Which of the following groups received training beyond the NC Teacher Evaluation orientation on conducting peer observations? (Please select all that apply.)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Peer observers	8	80%
2	Probationary Teachers	3	30%
3	No specific training was provided	2	20%
4	I do not know.	0	0%

Table 4.6. Survey Question 8 Responses

What was the source of the specialized training for peer observations? (Please select all that apply.)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	District evaluation training	0	0%
2	School-level training	3	100%
3	NCDPI training	0	0%
4	Other Professional organization	0	0%
5	Mentor training	0	0%
6	I do not know	0	0%

Four of the principals interviewed mentioned the mentor training provided to teachers at the district level. On speaking to the teacher participants, three of the five were trained as mentors as some point in their careers. Teachers alluded to two different types of mentor training—an older model, facilitated at the district level that included several nights of videotaped exemplars of a classroom observation and discussion and resulted in a mentor designation on the teacher’s license, and a new exclusively online model that is provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, devoid of interaction. The adequacy of this training will be explained further in the theme of challenges with implementation of peer observation.

In addition to mentor training, all of the principal participants indicated that they review the specific evaluation standards that can be observed in the classroom. According to the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Rubric and the NCDPI’s Peer Observation and Notetaking Page (Appendix D), Standard II (Teachers establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students), Standard III (Teachers know the content they teach), and Standard IV (Teachers facilitate learning for their students) are the observable standards. The teacher evaluation rubric goes further to identify the following elements under those standards that can be observed:

- I a- Teachers lead in their classroom.
- II a- Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults.
- II b- Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world.
- II c- Teachers treat students as individuals.

- II d- Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs.
- III a- Teachers align their instruction with the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*.
- III b- Teachers know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty.
- III c- Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.
- III d- Teachers make instruction relevant to students.
- IV a- Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students.
- IV b- Teachers plan appropriate instruction for their students.
- IVc- Teachers use a variety of instructional methods.
- IVd- Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction.
- IV e- Teachers help students develop critical-thinking and problem solving-skills.
- IV f- Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities.
- IV h- Teachers communicate effectively.
- IV g- Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned. (McREL-a, 2009)

On the need to focus peer observation training on these observable standards, Nadine revealed, “I basically go by what is provided at the district or state level, but I ask them to look for certain standards when they go into the classroom. I don’t want anyone to go in and look at all five standards.” In addition to training on the standards, Emily provides guidance on the rating scale and explained,

“What you don’t want to happen is that the peer evaluators go in and it’s something totally different from what the administration does. So I give them a resource that’s a chart that outlines the different activities you will see in the

classroom if a teacher is developing, proficient, accomplished, for each one of those elements...so they will have a good idea for what they are looking for.”

The focus on training peer observers to look for observable behaviors in the classroom was shared by Harriet, a former high school principal who explained, “Mainly I want them to look at content, what’s happening in the classroom, how the teacher is facilitating instruction for the students, how the new teacher is differentiating instruction for the student.” She further rationalized why it is important for peer observations to be solely based on the classroom observation,

“There are some parts of the instrument that they don’t need to talk to the teacher about. They don’t know if that teacher is one that comes in late all the time. That’s the piece that I always ask the peer observers to work with—those things that they can observe—and then help that teacher with the concerns and challenges they see at that time.”

Francine summarized the notion for training on specific observable standards: “I want to make sure they understand all of the components and what they’re looking at in that classroom, because if they don’t understand what they’re looking at, there’s no way they can help my beginning teachers.”

As principals and teachers provided detailed descriptions of the practices they use when carrying out the peer observation component of the NCTEP, several **implementation challenges** were gleaned.

As previously mentioned, schools with a relatively small proportion of probationary teachers tend to use mentor-trained teachers to conduct peer observations, whether with their own mentees or among all the probationary teachers on staff. On the other side of the coin, principals of schools with higher percentages of probationary teachers do not always have the same privilege to select experienced, proven teachers to conduct peer observations. Nadine, a principal with 90% probationary teachers lamented,

“I understand the way it’s supposed to work, you’re supposed to get that teacher who’s tried, true, and proven. You’re not supposed to have a probationary teacher do a peer observation, and it has to be a teacher in your building, that changes the dynamic completely. You only have three [mentors] to choose from and fifteen teachers who need mentors, so you just start assigning and it loses its purpose.”

Even schools with an abundance of experienced teachers understand the ongoing challenge of a teacher shortage, as Francine, with 90% of teachers on her staff having more than four years of experience—affirmed: “I’m so concerned about the fact that most of my teachers are going to retire and I’m going to have a mass exodus at one time. I’m *really* concerned about that.” Although the state board policy allows the flexibility for any trained teacher to conduct peer observations, that most principals perceive the need to have experienced teachers serve as peer observers makes the shortage of experienced teachers a challenge to implementing that component of the teacher evaluation process.

Another challenge perceived by principals and confirmed by teachers in this study and well documented in previous research is that of professional isolation among teachers (Lam, 2001; Marczely, 2001). Describing the teachers' attitudes toward collaboration, according to Harriet, "A lot of my teachers have a high school background, which is more departmentalized, 'I get in my room and close my door... and if I have some good ideas I'm not going to share it with you because I want my students to outscore your students.'" However, the hesitancy for teachers to collaborate can also be shared by teachers at the elementary level, as Heather admitted: "It's just one of the things that we don't do well right now is get in each other's classrooms—they just kind of go in and do their own thing and they're okay with that."

The sense of isolation appears to increase as a teacher becomes more experienced. This can affect a teacher's attitude toward peer observation. Beth explained, "With veteran teachers, you don't always get the 'lovey-dovey, oh you're here to observe' feeling." Sandra, a special education teacher added to the discussion, "You should want good feedback, but sometimes they look at you like, 'What are you doing in here?'" But with new teachers, they're glad to get your feedback." Data collected from the principals indicate that peer observation can be beneficial in breaking down professional barriers between teachers.

Perhaps the most threatening implementation challenge is that in some cases the peer observation is completed out of mere compliance to the required evaluation policy for probationary teachers. Conversations with the principals and career-status teachers reveal

two primary reasons for the compliance mentality—time and the complexity of the electronic North Carolina Educator Evaluation System. Ideally, teachers who are assigned to carry out the task of observing a peer would like to do a thorough job. However, as several of teachers described, that can be difficult. When asked about the challenges they have experienced with the peer observation process, Carol replied, “The only challenge I can think of is time. Time away from your class; it’s a four-letter word, especially when you’re teaching. And it’s just one more thing during the school day.” Jessica chimed in, “and oftentimes you’re giving up your planning [period], so it’s a Catch-22.” Kate added, “I think the time factor limited my feedback. I didn’t give feedback on every standard, I was more general.” Beth summarized, peer observation can be a practice of “just trying to get it done.” Kate enthusiastically described an innovative way that her principal used to create more time by hiring substitute teachers to cover classes for their school-wide peer observations.

“We had a sub, the sub came in, we weren’t losing our planning, [and] we weren’t rushing around. It felt like a very nice—(*pause*) I didn’t feel stressed about having to go to another room and watch them and then come back and give feedback.”

The sense of relief expressed in this participant’s tone in the researcher’s field notes is noteworthy to the importance of providing adequate time for teachers to conduct peer observations.

The other factor that contributes to the peer observation being viewed as an act of compliance is the online North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System (NCEES) database. This tool is commonly known to principals in this district by the name True North Logic, the company that operates the online performance management system. An overall sentiment among principals is one expressed by Emily, who stated, “The system itself, TNL [True North Logic] is hard to navigate; even my teachers that do peer observations have a hard time Harriet commented in richer detail,

“I know when we first started with McREL [the former online evaluation database], I had the other one [TPAI] down to a science, but it drove me crazy trying to figure it out, and as soon as I got comfortable with that and being able to use the tool, then here comes TNL where you’ve got to do this before the other person can do that.”

Peer observers and principals must access the NCEES system to enter and view peer observation data, which includes an online version of the rubric with accompanying checkboxes and comment field. Additionally, the program is designed so that the next step cannot be completed until an individual completes his or her part with an electronic signature. The principals’ and teachers’ frustration with how the online evaluation is navigated can be a major hindrance to the fidelity of the peer observation and detracts from its purpose of evaluating and improving teacher performance.

Research Question Two

The next research question asked, “*How do principals use peer observations to assess and improve teacher performance?*” Both principals and teachers were quite clear about administrator versus peer observer roles in the evaluation process. Other themes that emerged from the interviews were inflated peer observation ratings, the lack of conflict in the peer observation process, and the types of peer observation data that teachers provide and principals consider for probationary teachers.

The traditional notion that the **principal is ultimately responsible for teacher evaluation** is shared by administrators and teachers alike, in spite of the peer observation component in the probationary teacher evaluation cycle in North Carolina. As mentioned in Chapter 2, many teachers hold steady to the ingrained hierarchy in schools that require principals to be primarily responsible for evaluation. As such, teachers may be unwilling to assess each other’s performance (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). Alongside this perception is that the process of evaluation belongs to the principal, and that it is a critical, negative one, as opposed to peer observation. Teachers shed more light on this phenomenon during the focus group. Kate described being observed by a peer versus being observed by the principal as “less intimidating.” Sandra went on to say,

“I think everybody has had an administrator at one time that didn’t come at you the right way when you were doing your post-conference. I remember my

first year, I didn't know anything! It was not like, 'this is where we need to grow...it was just like, 'bang, bang, bang!'"

When conducting peer observations, teachers take great measures to ensure that they are not perceived as an administrator or an evaluator. As Kate explained, "I always want them to feel like I'm not here to judge, I'm just here doing what I have to do. So hopefully they don't perceive me like, 'Oh no!'" Jessica continued, "I would hope that they would feel it as being nonthreatening." Principals also expressed the need for their roles to be clearly defined as the chief evaluator.

"It's very easy for them [peer observers] to talk to them [probationary teachers] and say, 'let's look at his particular area...because this is how [the principal] is going to look at you' and it's always in a nonthreatening way. I never want it to be threatening because they already see me in that way."

Emily specified that she wanted peer observers to "go in with that mentality that when [they] talk with the probationary teacher that they understand that this is for growth, and coming in with the lens of a teacher versus that of an administrator." She further explained, "If you have someone who's just, I hate to say it, horrible, and teaching is just not for them, and you've put all the things in place to help them grow, then you as a leader should be the one to tell them, not a peer." Otis echoed the perception of peer observation feedback being drastically less critical than from administrators stating, "They [peer observers] might not be as straightforward sometimes as I may be. They remember that they

were one time young teachers as well. That mentor does not want to crush a probationary teacher. If the crushing occurs, it should come from the administrator.”

Wanda found the same notion to be true during the post-conference process stating, “I think a teacher will ask another teacher questions if I’m not there. If I’m there, they’re on defense.” Principals support teachers as they minimize their own roles in their less-experienced colleagues’ evaluation process. Heather explained, “One of my peer observers says, ‘I’m not the one that decides anything, but I want to let you know that if I can help you, I will.’” Clearly principals and teachers still hold to traditional views of the evaluation process.

As teachers perceive the principal as being the ruler of the teacher evaluation process and strive to further distinguish their roles among peers, principals indicate that **peer observation ratings tend to be higher** on the evaluation rubric for probationary teachers and, as a byproduct, there are few conflicts between teachers over peer observation ratings. In fact, only one principal indicated having ever been made aware of a conflict between a peer observer and probationary teacher. That principal revealed that as a result, she regularly attends the post-conference as a part of the peer observation process. Even still, that particular principal noticed that peer observation ratings are “sometimes overly positive.” Nadine described peer observation data compared to administrative observation data as “completely different—when teachers go in to observe each other, what I’m seeing is that they’re giving them what they want to see on *their* [own] evaluation.” This concept of

teacher empathy resonated in the teacher focus group interviews. Kate described the process of completing the evaluation rubric from the teacher perspective: “It can be intimidating when you go to write it up, but if you’re positive overall, I believe the positive outweighs the negative.” Another teacher said of her feelings during the post-observation conference, “If it’s positive, comfortable, if it’s negative very *uncomfortable*.”

According to the survey responses related to peer observation data, 80% of principals indicated that they review all or most of the data from the probationary teachers’ evaluation rubric (Table 4.7). However, on reviewing peer observation data, this study also found that ratings peer observers assign on the rubric do not often agree with those of principals. Seventy percent of respondents stated that peer observation ratings rarely or sometimes agree with those of administrators (Table 4.7). Conversations with the teachers uncovered several possible reasons that peer observations ratings do not agree with those of administrators more frequently.

Table 4.7. Survey Question 11 Responses

To what extent did you review peer observation data on probationary teachers in the **NC Teacher Evaluation Process**?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	All		7	70%
2	Most		1	10%
3	Some		0	0%
4	A few		2	20%
5	None		0	0%
	Total		10	100%

Table 4.8. Survey Question 12 Responses

How frequently did performance ratings from peer observers agree with the administrator’s overall assessment of probationary teachers’ performance?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Never		0	0%
2	Rarely		1	10%
3	Sometimes		6	60%
4	Often		3	30%
5	All of the Time		0	0%
	Total		10	100%

Teacher empathy is a significant aspect in the role they assume as peer observers. As Kate explained, “I think from a teacher’s standpoint there’s a perceived understanding that this person walks in my shoes so they’re going to see things more on the same wavelength.” Another teacher added, “Johnny’s acting bad, they’ve got a Johnny in their group too! (*Participants laugh*)” The laughter of the teachers noted in the researcher’s observation field notes is important because it strongly exemplifies the camaraderie among teachers due to

their shared experience of being observed when circumstances, such as student behavior, are not ideal.

Another factor that principals consider when looking at inflated ratings on peer observation data is the teachers' desire to maintain positive collegial relationships. Harriet explained that she believes "it has something to do with the fact that they are peers" and teachers take the position of "I don't want anyone to get upset with me or I don't want anyone to think I'm a better teacher than they are." Wanda added,

"I think sometimes when you're talking about a teacher evaluating another teacher, because they have the same role, you may see the tendency that some of their ratings are a little bit higher than the administrators would give, because they're thinking, 'I know what it's like to be in the classroom.' They just don't want to hurt feelings."

As Carol pointed out, "You really want to show compassion to your colleagues and let them know you don't have it all, we're all learning." Beth, the eldest teacher, further described the importance of collegial relationships and stated,

"I think you have to tread lightly somewhat because these are your colleagues and these are the people that you could have relationships with not only for a year but professionally for several years. [*To another participant*] How many years have we been working together? Seventeen years! It would have been

horrible if we had started out year one on a bad note having to work together for seventeen years.”

The teacher engaging her colleague in dialogue as a response to this interview question, as other teachers nodded in approval and highlighted in the researcher’s observation field notes, emphasizes the importance of teachers’ desire to maintain positive relationships with each other. Emily touched on the theme of teacher empathy when she suggested, “I think sometimes when you get to the—putting it in a tool and knowing that the state may use this particular data, sometimes there’s a formality to it.” When asked about the value of peer observation data, Nadine concluded, “At the end of the day, I think they still want to be friends with their co-workers, and that’s going to trump anything else.”

With the realization that evaluations from peers tend to be higher than those of administrators, further discussion uncovered **how principals use peer observation data to evaluate the performance of probationary teachers**. Principals who participated in this study indicated frequent checking of peer observation data when determining summative evaluation ratings but find its use limited. “For the most part, it’s just another data point,” explained a middle school principal. Francine clarified, “I’m the principal, and my rating is—I don’t want to say—‘what counts,’—but I’m going to have to see what they [peer observers] saw. Even if a teacher rates a teacher down, I have to see that too.” Nadine revealed, “I’ve sent tenured teachers to do peer observations of teachers who I already know are good, and their [the peer observer’s] evaluation, I don’t put any weight into it.”

Because the principal has a more holistic view of teacher performance, they understand the limitations of a single peer observation, as Heather explained: “The peer is not going to be able to see everything in forty-five minutes.” This is connected to the implementation challenge of the lack of time to complete peer observations. Probationary teachers are required to have four observations in North Carolina, three from an administrator and one from a peer. Otis described a process for analyzing this data.

“What I do is make a spreadsheet for every teacher. I go through and put all four observations on the spreadsheet and the ratings for each one. If I see that it’s skewed, I look at three versus one, because if I went in three times and didn’t see this, I can’t believe that you went in one time and saw this as being accomplished or distinguished.”

Qualitative data collected from principals show that peer observation data is limited in its ability to help them evaluate teachers; only 10% of the survey respondents agreed that peer observation data is useful to help them evaluate teachers, with half of the respondents indicating only partial agreement with the statement, “The data from peer observations were helpful in my evaluation of teacher performance.” This data indicates that it may be helpful to re-examine how peer observations can be more helpful to principals as they make decisions to provide the needed support for probationary teachers (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9. Survey Question 17 Responses

The data from peer observations were helpful in my evaluation of teacher performance.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Disagree	0	0%
2	Somewhat Disagree	1	10%
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	30%
4	Somewhat Agree	5	50%
5	Agree	1	10%
	Total	10	100%

The interview responses also indicate that principals find greater use from the narrative comments in the observation instrument. Principal 3 rationalized,

“Theirs [peer observers’ ratings] are more favorable, so rather than just looking at the marks, I try to look at the comments so I can use that data when I look at the summative piece as a whole. That’s when I start deferring to look at the comments, especially when I see a great discrepancy between what I’m seeing and what was seen in the peer observation. If there’s a huge discrepancy, I usually tend to stick with what I’ve seen.”

Because most teachers are trained to focus on observable classroom standards and practices, they also have a proclivity to write comments as opposed to rating their colleagues’ performance on a scale. In the focus group interview, when the discussion led to marking the rubric in comparison to writing comments, Carol remarked, “[*To another participant*] Would you say one is subjective and one is objective? If you just check it off you don’t really see the

person, but if you put some comments on it, you can really get a feel for how the person actually viewed it on the evaluation.” Kate added, “It shows that they were actually paying attention to the details instead of just checking boxes.” Furthermore, “It gives a person a better opportunity to gauge themselves, ‘Okay I see you wrote this comment; what can I do to improve?’” This interview topic became one for discussion; the researcher noted that teachers engaged each other in conversation and provided head nods as affirmation to their responses around this common theme.

Both teachers and principals indicate a preference to narrative comments in the peer observation as opposed to markings on the rating scale. As concluded by Heather, “The comments have more factual type things that happened in the classroom from what they actually saw, so it tends to let me see what is going on.” This principal described her comments as being more thought-provoking, but stated,

“With peers I get, ‘Vocabulary was posted on the board.’ But they didn’t see anything happening with it. So it tends to be more factual, but it tells me a whole lot. The peer may have rated it as ‘accomplished,’ I will rate it lower because it’s something I’ve seen on a regular basis.”

Both principals and teachers perceive narrative comments provided in peer observations to be more objective. Quantitative data supports this claim, with 60% of principals describing peer observation feedback provided about the teachers’ strengths and weaknesses as “too little” or “far too little” (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10. Survey Question 10 Responses

To what extent did peer observers record specific written feedback on the strengths or weaknesses of the teacher on the evaluation rubric?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Far too little		1	10%
2	Too little		5	50%
3	About right		4	40%
4	Too much		0	0%
5	Far too much		0	0%
	Total		10	100%

The findings this data suggest support the qualitative data collected from principals and teachers in which both groups indicated taking on their traditional roles in the evaluation process, which places principals in charge of providing any needed critical feedback, whereas teachers are encouraged to take on a less judgmental stance to the feedback they provide.

In an exemplar of how a completed peer observation rubric may look, which is housed on the North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System Web site, the researcher noted the same observable standards looked for in peer observations indicated in interviews with principals. However, a significant difference is the quality of feedback provided. In the exemplar, the peer observer entered comments in the narrative section that referenced not only factual information about activities that occurred in the lesson, but also included suggestions for improvement. For example, feedback for Standard IV to a fifth grade teacher stated,

“By using students’ formative assessment data, you can differentiate assignments that better meets the needs of each student. Some students needed

more time to practice new skills while others started to get restless because they easily mastered this. Planning to differentiate assignments or using students who have mastered materials as peer tutors could be a better use of resources and instructional time.”

Responses to the survey and interview questions about the feedback provided by peer observers when compared to the exemplar of a completed peer observation rubric may also bring into context other data collected within this study about a lack of training and time provided for peer observations. Teachers who have not been adequately prepared for peer observations may not be equipped to give quality feedback for their colleagues and administrators to consider. For the quality of feedback based on real-life classrooms to match what is presented in the exemplar rubric, as one survey respondent suggests, more training is needed for peers on how to “coach their colleagues in effective ways.” Similarly, if enough time is not provided or the online evaluation tool is too complicated, this could decrease the quality of feedback provided within the peer observation required of the NCTEP.

School administrators cited numerous examples from their practical experiences in response to the questions designed to discover how principals use peer observation to improve teacher performance. As was found in the previous research questions, the teachers’ voices provided through the focus group interview oftentimes confirmed the findings extrapolated from the interviews with principals. From these conversations, school-based instructional staff revealed the perception that **professional growth is the primary purpose**

for peer observations, cited **mutual benefits of peer observations** to the observer and the colleague being observed, and described its **impact on teacher performance** and the **ideal conditions for peer observation** to be practiced most effectively.

Notwithstanding the evaluation component for probationary teachers, principals and teachers alike concur that professional growth is the primary purpose for peer observations. As mentioned previously, some principals focus this growth on beginning teachers. Francine asserted, “It’s always about growing, learning, [and] improving.” Wanda explained, “I put it in place as a growth model because I think you need someone from the outside looking in to help you grow. Because that’s a first or second year teacher, and they need that, because they’re just coming out of college and they may have all the book and technology sense, but they still don’t have that experience.” Harriet also affirmed, “That’s probably the biggest piece more than the instructional presentation, it’s been the classroom management. I would say that more teachers pick up on those pointers.”

Even in whole-school efforts toward peer observation, benefits such as teacher growth and teambuilding, as opposed to evaluation, are the outcomes expected by administrators. When asked, “What is the primary purpose of peer observation in your school?,” Otis responded, “Collaboration, growth, and teamwork and improving those relationships.” Heather replied, “To get us out of our classrooms and see other things that are going on because we’ve got other things that are really good that they [teachers] don’t get to see. So it gives them a chance to see those things... and share them.” Although Nadine

shared difficulties implementing peer observations as a part of the evaluation process, she shared that “peer walkthroughs is what I’m hoping to use to get them to observe best practice and to also be able to make suggestions and to understand the other’s curriculum—and I use those to build the teachers up.” Sharing a similar intent, Emily elaborated,

“The first goal is to build collegiality between different teams and grade levels across the board but to also impact student learning. I’d like them to see some things that they may not be doing on a regular basis so their performance will continue to grow and they can expand their repertoire of strategies and curriculum and interconnectedness—and more of a feeling of a team and their own efficacy. All of that impacts their performance.”

The experienced teachers succinctly stated that the primary purpose of peer observation is “to make teachers better.” The researcher highlighted in the observation field notes that one veteran teacher quickly responded to this question, and her colleagues concurred quickly with comments such as “Yes” and “Can’t say it any better.” The definitive nature of the teachers’ response makes it clear that they, along with principals, view teacher growth as the main purpose for peer observation. As previously stated in Chapter 2, researchers have recommended a model of teachers observing other teachers without the element of judgment that is present in peer coaching or evaluative models (Munson, 1998).

The common goal of improvement of teacher performance was also shown in the analysis of survey data. Eighty percent of survey participants agree that peer observations are

beneficial for professional development and teacher evaluation (Table 4.11). Similarly, an overwhelming majority of 80% of principals indicated that the practice is most useful for teacher growth (Table 4.12), with no principals indicating that the primary value in peer observation is for evaluating teachers. This survey data agrees with existing research cited in Chapter 2 suggesting that peer observation can facilitate the tasks of both evaluating and improving teacher performance (Breedlove, 2011; Calabrese, Sherwood, Fast, & Womack, 2004; Danielson, 2001; Danielson, 2011; Goldrick, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Hammersly-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011; Kumrow & Dahlen, 2002; Lam, 2001; Shreeve, 1993; TNTP, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011; Weems & Rogers, 2010).

Table 4.11. Survey Question 19 Responses
Peer observations are beneficial **both** for professional development and teacher evaluation.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Disagree		1	10%
2	Somewhat Disagree		1	10%
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree		0	0%
4	Somewhat Agree		5	50%
5	Agree		3	30%
	Total		10	100%

Table 4.12. Survey Question 20 Responses
 In your opinion, which is the **most** valuable purpose of peer observation of teachers?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Peer observation is most valuable for teacher evaluation.		0	0%
2	Peer observation is most valuable for professional growth.		8	80%
3	Peer observation is equally valuable for evaluation and professional growth of teachers.		2	20%
4	Neither purpose has value		0	0%
	Total		10	100%

Peer observation also serves as a strategy in school professional development plans. Six of the principals interviewed have engaged their staffs in ongoing peer observation as a part of whole-staff professional development initiatives practiced by both experienced and novice teachers. Of those principals, some indicated that they have a separate rubric for peer observations that was developed by the school leadership team while others use a district-provided walkthrough observation form used by administrators. The focus of these training documents developed as a part of school initiatives tend to focus on specific observable standards, as understood by the teachers. Nadine explained that “the teachers created the rubric and they identified what they should see at the beginning, middle, and end of a lesson,” whereas Heather described a process in which the school leadership team created a definition of student engagement as a springboard for peer observations among all teachers. She elaborated,

“We’re going to go back and observe to see if we have an increase as a result of this process, and if so what are we doing well; and if not, why not and what we can do to improve student engagement; what pieces are missing and what professional development we can use as we go into next year.”

Oftentimes, peer observation is practiced by teachers to coincide with the improvement goals of the school. As Harriet explained, “What we instituted this year so it won’t be a one-shot, in-and-out deal, was peer observation amongst the whole staff.” She further described her school’s implementation process as follows. “Each nine weeks they were responsible for doing at least six peer observations so that when the peer observer comes in for the formal observation, then the teacher doesn’t feel uncomfortable because they’ve seen people coming in and out all along.” Otis echoed, “They do walkthroughs sometimes. From time to time, I tell mentors if you get a chance this week, do a walkthrough, because again, that’s a part of building that relationship piece.”

Other principals use peer observations as a foundation for discussion in staff meetings and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Wanda stated, “If a teacher shares a best practice during a staff meeting, they can go observe that practice during their planning time. They share practices during our PLCs. Also, if I observe a best practice, I will say to Teacher A, you need to visit Teacher B.”

In addition to school-wide professional development, principals also affirmed the practice of using peer observations to target an individual teacher’s areas of needed growth.

Emily described the use of peer observations outside of the evaluation process in which she paired a first-year teacher with two teachers who were strong in a particular instructional strategy.

“I sent her to observe another teacher that was really strong in that [instructional strategy], and I would have that same teacher about a week later to observe her and look at her lesson, and they would meet up later and just do some comparative notes. It was very informal...and those two teachers became a go-to resource for that probationary teacher.”

The survey data presented in Table 4.13 show the various reasons that peer observation is practiced among the respondents' schools. Eighty percent of principals indicate using peer observation of teaching outside of the evaluation process. A vast majority of these principals, 70% and 80% respectively, use peer observations for school-wide and individual professional development plans.

Table 4.13. Survey Question 13 Responses
 In what capacities were peer observations conducted at your school **outside of the NC Teacher Evaluation Process**? (Please select all that apply.)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Peer observations are used for schoolwide professional development.	7	70%
2	Peer observations are practiced as a part of the mentor/mentee program.	3	30%
3	Peer observations are used for individual teachers' professional development plan.	8	80%
4	Peer observations were not conducted outside of the NC Teacher Evaluation Process.	2	20%
5	I do not know.	0	0%

Principals who use peer observations as a part of individual and school-wide professional development plans indicate that it is useful in establishing a greater cohesion among school faculty. Francine clarified,

“I’ve always said to them that we’re only strong as our weakest link. They are contributing to our big picture here, which is success for every student and for every student being on grade level if we can get them there and making sure that we are improving consistently every day.”

Most school administrators and teachers realize that peer observation has mutual benefits to both teachers involved in the process when used specifically for professional growth. In describing these advantages, Wanda stated,

“That’s not just probationary, that’s for teachers who’ve been where for a while. For instance, my staff is seasoned, and is reluctant with technology. I brought in some of my new teachers to help some of my veteran teachers with technology, and my older teachers have worked with my younger teachers on how to manage their classroom...so they all help each other.”

Harriet mentioned, “I told them to go in and steal some ideas.” Teachers also affirmed the practice of gleaning best practices from their colleagues through peer observations. Kate, who described her positive experience as a peer observer said,

“You get to see everybody else’s classroom and you’re picking up ideas from everybody else’s work (*laughs*) and you’re saying ‘ooh, I like that’ or ‘I don’t think I like that.’ And instead of you[r] doing it and then it not work, you can kind of watch and gauge how they’re doing it and see if you want to put it in your technique.”

Added Beth to the discussion, “I think along those same lines it can be a little rejuvenating... just to see something different. Then you leave and say ‘that was so nice to get to experience different children, different strategies, [and] different teachers; I sort of look forward to it.”

Although peer observation can be used to promote the professional growth of all teachers, this holds particularly true for beginning teachers. As Carol described of the experience, “I personally enjoy the beginning teachers better because I don’t think there’s any expectation there. They’re always so eager to know what [they] did well, what [they] can

work on.” The feeling that inexperienced teachers gain more from peer observation is one that was shared by Harriet who stated,

“I’ve seen some changes especially with the new teachers and Teach for America [teachers]. I’ve seen them go in and come back and say, ‘Miss So-and-So was doing this’ or I’ve heard conversations like, ‘How did you do that?’ And I’ve noticed some teachers going back to the same teacher from time to time because they’ve seen something that they like and they’re trying to figure out ‘How can I make this work?’ and I think that’s deliberate.”

Although most principals interviewed are in the beginning stages of implementing peer observation on a school-wide level and have yet to assess its full potential, overall responses indicated positive outcomes when questioned about its impact on teacher performance. Illustrating this opinion, Wanda summarized, “I don’t want to say that it has hurt, I can only say that it’s helped.” Harriet recounted, “I think that for the teachers who have done it religiously, I’ve seen them put more structure into their classrooms. In addition, I’ve seen some of the teachers try to implement ideas that they’ve learned from others.” However, Otis, who implemented peer observation as an ongoing part of the beginning teacher support program, had a more detailed analysis and said, “I would say that it has helped increase teacher performance. The reason I say that, is for this year, two of the probationary teachers made expected or high growth and I know that came through a lot of work and effort from the mentor.” To that same point, Emily explained,

“Reflecting on last year, the probationary teachers were happy to receive the feedback they did receive from their peers because it’s different when another teachers, someone who is on that same level, comes into your classroom and is able to give you some growth-producing feedback. So I’ve seen it as having a positive benefit.”

The results of the survey data indicate that principals have noticed positive outcomes from peer observation’s potential for reducing isolation and improving instructional practice as shared in the interviews. According to survey respondents, 80% agreed to some extent that peer observation reduced teacher isolation; whereas 70% indicated that peer observations helped improve instructional practices. In this instance, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data was beneficial because principals spoke in detail about the positive aspects that peer observation can bring to promote teacher collaboration and learning instructional strategies, and the survey data asked participants to make specific judgments about the overall impact of peer observation on teachers.

Table 4.14. Teacher Isolation

Peer observations decreased teacher isolation at my school.

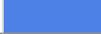
#	Answer		Response	%
1	Disagree		1	10%
2	Somewhat Disagree		0	0%
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree		1	10%
4	Somewhat Agree		6	60%
5	Agree		2	20%
	Total		10	100%

Table 4.15. Teacher Instructional Practices

Peer observations helped improve teacher instructional practices at my school.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Disagree		0	0%
2	Somewhat Disagree		1	10%
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree		2	20%
4	Somewhat Agree		4	40%
5	Agree		3	30%
	Total		10	100%

The final theme emerging from the exploration of how peer observation of teaching is used for professional growth is the ideal conditions that must take place for this practice to be effective. Although this was not an explicit question in the interview protocol, the detailed descriptions of the experiences with peer observations shared by principals and teachers revealed both practical and cultural aspects that are in place to fulfill the goal of improving

teacher performance. Adequate training and an atmosphere of trust are among the key elements that create an atmosphere conducive for peer observation of teaching.

According to the existing research cited in Chapter 2, adequate training is important for peer observation to be carried out effectively (Blackmore, 2005; Donnelly, 2007; Goldrick, 2002; Kumrow & Dahlen; Morelock, 2008; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011). Teachers' responses to their feelings about how adequately their training prepared them to conduct peer observations illuminated this notion. Reflecting on her level of preparedness after training, Kate recalled, "I actually remember discussing that (*group laughs*) with several people at the workshop. We observed a video of a classroom where the teacher was having a lot of difficulty, and then we had to fill out the form based on that classroom observation." She added, "I remember thinking that we would have rather seen a video of a productive classroom and better classroom situation." The focus group participants' response of laughter to their colleague's account of the training that focused on poor teacher performance perhaps indicated a sense that the training did not fully prepare some teachers for the role of peer observer.

Carol, who had undergone a different training model shared, "I felt prepared because when I went into my peer's classroom I knew what to look for. I wasn't just focusing on the child that wasn't paying attention, but I was focused on the whole picture instead of pulling out the negatives." As noted previously, some teachers underwent the most recent online version of training, which some perceive lacks rigor. Beth, a participant in both the

previous mentor training (provided by the district) and the new state mentor training, compared them and stated, “The first one that I went to was several nights, it was after school.” Kate interjected, “It was district-based and very intense.” Beth continued, “And you had to learn how to approach different aspects of good situations, negative situations. I thought it was very in-depth. The current one—(*group laughs*)—you’re just at your computer listening.” Again, the laughter observed by the researcher in response to the teacher describing the current training for mentors indicates that it could be perceived as insufficient. The teacher’s account of the mentor training is important because as previously mentioned, several principals assign the role of peer observers to mentors, based on the assumption that they have been trained for the task as a part of the mentor training process. Harriet, speaking in detail about the training process said,

“We need to go back to what they did when they first started with mentors. I remember when we first went through mentor training getting that certification on my teaching license. I felt like when I became I mentor I really knew what to do and how to do it. Now, we’re putting them in the classroom and saying ‘go observe your peer’ and they haven’t had any training—and not even the mentor. So we’re asking people to do what they don’t know how to do and I don’t know what they’re doing is really credible.”

Mentor training was cited by both principals and teachers in their responses about training for peer observations, which brings concern to the adequacy of current practices,

especially because the numbers of experienced teachers are dwindling in some schools. Some teachers could benefit from training “using the Common Core standards—the new curriculum,” Sandra suggested. She further stated, “Let’s see a positive one [classroom observation] and a negative one so we’ll know what to look at because the curriculum has changed for us.” As noted earlier in this chapter, principals referred to training peer observers to focus on certain observable evaluation standards, which is supported by existing research (Hammersly-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004). As Beth concluded in the focus group, “a refresher is always good.”

The existing research literature emphasizes the importance of a mutually trusting relationship between teachers involved with the peer observation process (Atkinson & Bolt, 2010; Blackmore, 2005; Chism, 2007; Donnelly, 2007; Morelock, 2008; Shields, 2007). Trust between teachers was also a major theme extracted from the researcher’s interviews with the principal and teacher participants in this study. From speaking with principals, trust is not built through the practice of peer observation but must be embedded within the school culture to create the atmosphere necessary to promote teacher growth. On the importance of peers building a rapport prior to the peer observation Harriet explained, “What we try to do is to establish relationships. I encourage them to collaborate with the vertical and horizontal PLCs, talk and trust one another.” The understanding that peer observation is non-evaluative is an integral part of building trust. As she added, “It’s for help rather than to evaluate someone or critique them.” Wanda, sharing the same sentiment said, “I think when they

know it's not an '*I gotcha*.' They tend to look at it a little differently. In her description of an informal process of allowing teachers to simply observe each other for growth, Emily recalled,

“There wasn't an '*I gotcha*' kind of thing. I don't look at the North Carolina evaluation tool as an 'I gotcha', but sometimes it's formalized to the point that it takes on a very formal and serious tone. And this was something just between this teacher and a couple of others and they were able to go beyond just what I had set up.”

Francine used similar language in describing how peer observations are set up and reasoned, “We're here for improving instruction for students. There are not '*gotchas*', we take all of that out early. So there's no such thing as 'I'm going to get her.' It's always about growing, learning, and improving.” As mentioned earlier in this chapter, teachers who had experience with conducting peer observations shared a similar viewpoint to that of the principals in regard to establishing trust among their colleagues to the extent that they are empathetic and want to be perceived as compassionate, nonjudgmental, and nonthreatening. Otis described the relationship between teachers, “They know that their peer observer has their back and they're going to help them the whole time. The beginning teacher understands that the peer observer knows that they are interested in them improving.” Heather explained, “the peer is observing, but they are also providing guidance, so you don't want to dampen that.” Perhaps the concept of building trust between teachers to support peer observation can

be best rationalized as Francine stated, “The relationship is so crucial to me. That’s the part I focus on more than anything else, because if I get that part straight, everything else will fall into place.

Table 4.16. Survey Question 21 Responses
Peer observations could better help me improve teacher performance if...

Text Response
Peer observers are trained prior to assigned to observe.
....the peer observer had time to observe, model, and give feedback daily.
Observers were comfortable with being honest, and had a deeper understanding of the evaluation tool. It would also be more helpful if teachers being observed understood that the purpose is to enhance their pedagogy and content knowledge.
both the peer observer and the probationary teacher apply growth recommendations and learn from the process.
I had the time (and buy-in) from staff to perform more of them. If they are informal and can showcase positive lessons and ideas going on in classrooms.
It was not used to judge performance.
a formalized training program for doing peer observations and if the element of evaluation was not a factor.
There was a statewide model for training peers. The training would need to be rigorous and train the peers on how to more effectively coach their colleagues in effective ways.
there was a statewide training model for giving peer feedback

A final piece of data collected solicited suggestions from principals for how peer observations could be effective in helping them evaluate and improve teacher performance. In their open-ended responses, respondents touched on several of the themes extracted from the qualitative data collected in the interviews. Fifty percent of respondents made comments that call for more training for teachers to conduct peer observations. Other themes from these

open-ended responses referred to the teachers' ability to give each other quality feedback, a focus on growth rather than evaluation, and having more time for peer observation.

Summary of Data

In this study, qualitative research methods included individual interviews, focus group interviews, observation field notes, and document analysis. Seven principals currently serving at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, who were interviewed individually either by phone or in person, participated in this study. The five elementary school teachers who participated in this study had previously served as peer observers in their respective schools. All participants in the study were employed in the same large school district, located in northeastern North Carolina.

The researcher served as the primary tool for collecting data, by audio recording and transcribing all interviews. Audio recording the interviews allowed the researcher to take detailed observation field notes, which captured body language and tone of participants, adding to the rich, thick descriptions of their experiences and perceptions relating to the research questions. The documents analyzed provided exemplars of peer observation and training tools cited by interview participants and added to a more robust collection of data.

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher analyzed these data to identify themes from the lens of answering the research questions. Table 4.17 summarizes the themes and subcategories identified in the data analysis process and discussed in this chapter.

Table 4.17. Summary of Qualitative Research Themes

Research Questions	Themes/Subcategories
<p><i>What practices do school principals and teachers use to implement peer observations as mandated in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process?</i></p>	<p>Theme: Selection of Peer Observers Subcategories: experience/training, content area , personality, <u>performance of peer</u></p> <p>Theme: Training Subcategories: school-level beyond state training, review of observable standards, mentor training</p> <p>Theme: Implementation Challenges Subcategories: teacher shortage, teacher isolation, evaluation rubric completed for compliance, complexity of online tool, inadequate training, time</p>
<p><i>How do principals use peer observations to assess and improve teacher performance?</i></p>	<p>Theme: Peer Observation Ratings Inflation Subcategories, Principals feedback more stringent, teacher empathy, positive relationship among teachers</p> <p>Theme: How Principals Use Data Subcategories: narrative comments, principals' observations take precedent, another data source</p> <p>Theme: Purposes of Peer Observation Subcategories: teacher growth, school improvement goals, collaboration</p> <p>Theme: Ideal Conditions for Implementation Subcategories: Training, Trust</p> <p>Theme: Impact on Teacher Performance Subcategories: teacher resistance, teacher-initiated collaboration, new strategies, improvement of beginning teachers</p>

Quantitative data were used in this study as a part of an exploratory design of research in which the qualitative data is used to inform the items used in the survey instrument distributed to a larger group. According to Lodico et al. (2006), one indication of the effectiveness of the exploratory design is a low number of respondents selecting the

option “other” in the survey. In this survey, the equivalent response to “other” was “I do not know.” No respondents selected “I do not know” as an answer to survey items.

The survey data provided an additional layer of information to analyze in the content of the information gained from the interviews and focus group. Whereas the interviews provided great detail about the various aspects surrounding peer observation, the survey questions allowed respondents to make more decisive judgments and provided a context for statements made in the interviews, because all interview participants were included in the survey sample.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study followed by a summary of the key findings. The summary of the key findings presents the information in analysis of the data gleaned from the site selected for this study, disaggregated by the research questions. Limitations of the study are presented followed by its implications for practice. The chapter concludes with directions for further research.

Review of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine how principals use peer observation to evaluate and improve teacher performance in a North Carolina school district. Specifically, this study included principals and teachers who have had experience implementing the peer observation process in their schools. Effectively designed teacher evaluation systems are paramount to improving teacher quality and, ultimately, student achievement (Looney, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). The responsibility of principals to evaluate and support struggling teachers, especially those in their beginning years of practice, is enormous (School Leadership Briefing Audio Journal, 2013). As Militello et al. (2011) conclude, “studies that seek to understand how standards are lived in one’s practice are vital” and “how school principals perceive their [professional standards in their] practice is timely and important” (p. 87). This makes the peer observation component that is required for probationary teachers in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process a significant topic of exploration.

Peer observation of teaching can be implemented for both the purposes of accountability and improved practice (Hammersly-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004). Similarly, this study found that professional development is inherent with peer observations, especially when used outside of the evaluation process. Therefore, discovering how principals and teachers use peer observation to further professional growth serves as a dual purpose of this study.

To fulfill these purposes, this study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What practices do school principals and teachers use to implement peer observations as mandated in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process?
- (2) How do principals use peer observations to assess and improve teacher performance?

To answer these questions, this study took on a multi-site case study research approach. Using an exploratory design, purposive sampling was used to identify seven principals who participated in the interviews, ten who responded to online surveys, and five teachers in a focus group. Interviews and the focus group were facilitated by the researcher using a semi-structured format, guided by an interview and focus group protocols (Appendix E and Appendix F). Survey questions and interview protocols were all aligned with the research questions. Field notes and documents were also collected and open coding was used to

identify themes related to the research questions. Survey data were analyzed with a focus on descriptive statistics, supporting themes from the qualitative data. These methods were used to better understand the phenomenon of peer observation of teaching.

Summary of Key Findings

With the goal of discovering how principals use peer observation to evaluate and improve teacher performance, the findings were presented in detail, first organized by qualitative data from the interviews and focus group followed by survey data. Each interview and focus group protocol question and each survey item was aligned so that responses would correlate to the research questions. The data were organized and presented with the goal of answering those questions.

The first research question asked, “*What practices do school principals and teachers use to implement peer observations as mandated in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process?*” This question was proposed because several factors outside of a teacher simply observing a colleague’s class go into the process of peer observation and are influenced by school administrators. This research question sought to identify what those practices are and describe how they are implemented by principals in the Local Educational Agency (LEA) selected for this case study. The major practices discussed were the selection of peer observers and training for peer observers. Additionally, the analysis of the interview and focus group data uncovered several challenges to implementing peer observations.

Teacher selection for peer observation in the classrooms of probationary teachers is a primary responsibility for administrators. All participants indicated in both the qualitative and quantitative analyses that a school administrator selects and matches teachers to conduct peer observations at their respective school sites. Principals indicated considering several factors to decide who will be assigned as peer observers including teacher content area, performance of peer observers, teacher personality traits, and peer observer classroom performance. The researcher found that the availability of staff greatly influences the decision of which teachers the principal selects for this task. Larger schools are impacted more by the shortage of experienced teachers available to observe probationary teachers' classrooms. The data show that principals consider the observing teacher's performance as the top criteria when selecting peer observers. Some existing research deemphasizes the need for teachers to have similar content areas for peer observations, but most research agrees that doing so adds credibility to the process, particularly at the secondary level (Blackmore, 2005; Matula, 2011; Peterson, 2004; Weller, 2007). Another major peer observer selection criterion that emerged from this research is teacher experience. Although state evaluation policy allows any teacher trained in the NCTEP to conduct peer observations, including probationary teachers, principals overwhelmingly support the practice of using career-status teachers, especially those who are assigned as beginning teacher mentors, to conduct peer observations. The proclivity to use experienced teachers to observe peers creates an additional barrier in hard-to-staff schools.

Another major finding in this study was how teachers are trained to conduct peer observations. In the interviews conducted with both principals and teachers, several examples of training were cited, including the state-mandated training and orientation to the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process, district-level training, state training, mentor training, and school-level training. However, the quantitative data showed that all principals selected school-level activities as the primary source of training. As principals and teachers revealed, most of the training centers on the observable North Carolina Professional Teacher Standards indicated on the evaluation rubric, which research indicates is essential to provide valid and reliable performance appraisals (Morelock, 2008; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011). Although training is provided on the evaluation process in general, principals indicated no additional training was provided specifically for conducting peer observations. This information, coupled with some of the open-ended responses at the end of the survey, indicates that principals supplement training in various ways due to a lack of adequate training support at the district and state levels specifically for the practice of peer observation.

Data collected from principals and teachers also indicated several challenges to implementing peer observations with fidelity. Among these challenges include teacher shortage, teacher isolation, and the perception of compliance. As previously mentioned, some schools have an overwhelming majority of probationary teachers. According to the NC School Report Card data, these schools tend to have higher turnover rates than those with fewer beginning teachers. When there is a lack of teachers who the principals perceive as

qualified to conduct peer observations, other less-important criteria discussed are used to select peer observers, which impacts the confidence that administrators have in the process as a whole.

Another challenge to using peer observations for the evaluation process is teacher isolation. Professional isolation among teachers is a well-documented problem according to educational research (Lam, 2001; Marzely, 2001). The researcher found that isolation is most prevalent among experienced teachers. Although participants in this study indicated that beginning teachers are more receptive to feedback from their peers, the traditional perspective of top-down evaluation models and teachers performing their instructional duties in isolation can detract from the goal of professional growth in peer observation.

A final major barrier to peer observation of teaching is the perception of compliance. Several teachers carry out peer observations simply to comply with the state-mandated requirements, placing the primary goal of improving teacher performance away from the forefront. One reason that teachers conduct peer observations simply for compliance is the lack of time. Creating enough time for teacher evaluation has long been a challenge to school administrators (School Leadership Briefing Audio Journal, 2013) and is similarly passed on to teachers with the inclusion of peer observation in that process. Most principals indicated that teachers conduct the pre-observation conference, classroom observation, completion of the evaluation rubric, and post-conference as a part of the peer observation process. Both teachers and principals indicated that there is not enough time for teachers to carry out these

tasks along with their other duties. More specifically, teachers often struggle with fitting peer observations in during their planning periods. Data collected from teachers at the elementary level indicate that time is reduced even further when the responsibility of escorting and picking up students from special classes (i.e., art, music, PE) comes within that same observation period.

Additionally, teachers in North Carolina have a unique challenge that contributes to the compliance perception—the complexity of the online evaluation system. The Truenorthlogic teacher evaluation tool is a part of North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System. According to a 2013 news release from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the system is supposed to make the evaluation components more streamlined and user-friendly. However, both principals and teachers find the technological aspects of navigating this system complex. Individuals who use this system report difficulty in using the system that requires several back and forth steps to be recorded electronically to complete the process. This research found that the complexity of these steps contributes to teachers simply “checking off” boxes on the evaluation rubric and the process of peer observation in general.

The next research question asked, “*How do principals use peer observations to assess and improve teacher performance?*” Most principals who participated in this study indicated that they frequently review the data from peer observations conducted among teachers. Research supports the use of peer observation as an additional source of data on teacher performance (Morelock, 2008; Looney, 2011). However, this study found that equally as

important is the context in which principals view these observation data, especially when conducting teachers' summative evaluations. The researcher found that principals use the teacher evaluation rubric completed for peer observations as another data point when considering final evaluation ratings. Furthermore, principals and teachers tend to find more value in the narrative comments than the ratings (developing, proficient, accomplished, distinguished, or not observed) on the evaluation rubric.

The research in this study found that evaluation ratings based on peer observations tend to be higher than those conducted by administrators; similarly, the problem of inflated observation ratings has been discussed in existing research (Blackmore, 2005; Chamberlain, D'Artery, & Rowe, 2011; Cosh, 1999; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). The researcher found several possible reasons for inflated peer observation ratings including teachers' empathy toward one another, teachers' desire to maintain harmonious relationships with their colleagues, and the traditional view of the principal being primarily responsible for the teacher evaluation, held both by administrators and teachers alike.

Because principals agree that their feedback to teachers tends to be more critical, they find narrative comments on the evaluation instrument to be more objective, describing what the peer observer actually saw in the classroom. The evaluation ratings tend to include an element of judgment, and most principals rely on their own or their assistant principals' observations to determine those ratings. Because principals find more value in the narrative comments, teachers also find it more comfortable to record narrative comments, again citing

them as being more factual and providing more specific feedback to the teacher being observed. Overall, principals indicate that they find limited value in peer observation in the context of evaluating teacher performance.

In response to the question of improving teacher performance, principals and teachers agreed that professional growth is the primary purpose to practice peer observation of teaching. They cited several advantages to practicing peer observations including the reduction of teacher isolation, collaboration on school-wide goals and the ability of teachers to learn new instructional strategies. Although the qualitative data show that both administrators and career-status teachers realize the benefit of peer observation, especially for beginning teachers, the qualitative data suggest that these benefits have not been experienced at their maximum potential based on current levels of practice. This finding is reasonable based on previous research that classifies the practice of peer observation to improve classroom instruction as a new field of study (Bourne-Hayes, 2010; Bowers, 1999; Chamberlain, D'Artrey, & Rowe, 2011; Kahut, Burnap, Kilic, & Cakan, 2006; Shortland, 2004). That North Carolina has only required peer observations for probationary teachers since 2001 further explains why principals and teachers may not be seeing systemic results from a practice (NCDPI, 2001).

Under the purpose of promoting professional growth, principals who practice peer observation outside of the teacher evaluation process use them for school-wide professional development and to improve individual teacher performance. Although principals and

teachers recognize that peer observation can benefit the observer through exposure to various instructional methods, beginning teachers are reported to be more receptive to the process, according to the findings in this study.

Inasmuch as principals and teachers identified professional growth as the overarching goal for peer observation, they also described several conditions under which it is best practiced. According to the participants, training on the observation standards is at the forefront of the peer observation process. Additionally, participating teachers must establish a relationship based on trust and support as opposed to judgment and criticism. The provision of adequate time for teachers to observe each others' classrooms—an insufficient resource—is also a key component to gain the full benefits of peer observation for professional growth.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the availability of participants. This study included principals and career-status teachers. Due to the time constraints of principals, who comprised both the individual interviews and the online survey, the number of participants in the study was limited. The researcher made every effort to accommodate the participants' schedules to allow for an open and honest sharing of their experiences with peer observation of teaching. The study was designed with the intent of including ten individual interviews and a larger group of survey respondents. Again, time became a barrier and limited participation in this study.

Another limitation of the study was the small number of survey participants. The survey was developed and distributed after the individual interviews and focus group. Therefore, less time was available for the survey to be taken than for the other research methods. The small

number of respondents made it impractical to conduct significant statistical analysis of the results beyond descriptive statistics to corroborate the findings in the qualitative research.

The study examined principals and career-status teachers in various schools within an LEA in northeastern North Carolina. A limitation of this study is the lack of transferability of these cases to other environments. Because school environments and cultures vary and leadership is situational, what occurs in one context may not occur in others and what works in one situation may not work in another. As Fullan noted, “Transferability is complex [because] successful reforms in one place are partly a function of good ideas, and largely a function of the *conditions* under which the ideas flourished” (1999, p. 64).

The limitations presented did not compromise the findings of the study. The limitations were recognized by the researcher and safeguards were put in place to ensure the validity of the study.

Recommendations for Practice

For schools to successfully implement a system of peer observation that results in the greatest potential to improve teacher performance, several conditions must be established at the state, district, and school levels. The following provides a rationale and specific suggestions on how these can be implemented to improve the process for professional growth.

For peer observation of teaching to maximize teacher growth, **systemic supports** must be provided to schools from the state and district levels. A study that included North Carolina principals indicated that they need district support and resources to transform the

traditional evaluation model into one that allows teachers to take a more active role (Derrington, 2011). Supports based on the findings of this study include adequate training for teachers involved in the peer observation process, guidelines to help principals implement peer observation in their schools, adoption of a user-friendly observation tool, and reconsidering the role of peer observation in the evaluation process.

Adequate training must be provided for both the peer observers and the teacher being observed. According to research-based recommendations, both teachers in the observation process should receive training on the purposes of the observation, common performance standards, and evaluation methods (Blackmore, 2005; Kumrow & Dahlen, 2002). To produce well-prepared peer observers, teachers should be exposed to exemplars of both satisfactory and unsatisfactory classroom performance, in addition to how to provide written and verbal feedback in both instances. Teachers should be made aware of what observable classroom behaviors constitute each level of performance. Some resources already exist at the state level for training on the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, such as the model peer observation rubric and Peer Observation Notetaking Page, but these fail to address the complex nature of peer observation, which creates the tenuous situation of one teacher being asked to make judgments about a colleague's performance.

As resources are provided at the state level, districts should also consider ramping up their training efforts, especially because former intense training models such as mentor teacher training have been streamlined. Most principals consider teacher content area the

most important factor when matching peer observers. However, some schools have a disproportionate amount of career-status and probationary teachers, leaving a shallow pool of peer observers from which to select. Based on state policy, requirements for peer observers are flexible; therefore, school districts may consider creating local guidelines to determine which teachers should be used as peer observers because this varies so widely from school to school.

Another needed systemic support is to make the online process for recording observation data more user-friendly. In North Carolina, several principals and teachers find the Truenorthlogic system difficult to navigate. The difficulty of recording observation data in this database can result in teachers simply checking off boxes on the rubric for the sake of compliance due to frustration rather than for the purpose of providing growth-producing feedback. If an easier way to record observation data were used, the likelihood of teachers completing the process for the intended purpose could increase, thus making this feedback more valuable to teachers and administrators.

Existing research cautions practitioners about using peer observation as a part of the teacher evaluation process. Munson (1998) recommended a model of teachers observing other teachers without the element of judgment that is present in peer coaching or evaluative models. Data from this study indicates that both principals and teachers prefer peer observations to occur in a non-judgmental, supportive context. However, this context is not supported with the peer observation being included in probationary teachers' evaluations.

Chism (2007) acknowledges that the nature of evaluation is complex and can be further complicated by its potential to involve emotions of parties on both sides of the process. A perfect system is impractical, because overlap exists between the evaluative and collaborative models of peer observation. Both possess evaluative elements involving judgment of the quality of another colleague's teaching practice (Chamberlain, D'Artrey, & Rowe, 2011). Because principals find little agreement in their evaluation ratings versus those recorded by peer observers and find limited value in peer observation ratings to determining summative evaluation scores, perhaps it is time to reconsider how peer observations factor into the evaluation process. One recommendation consists of peer observers completing an observation tool similar to the Peer Observation Notetaking Page (Public Schools of North Carolina, n.d.-d). Peer observers could use such an instrument to record detailed narrative comments based on observable classroom behaviors while excluding the ratings of "developing," "proficient," "accomplished," and "distinguished." This model would allow all the benefits of shared strategies, collaboration, and improved practice to occur while eliminating the challenges associated with evaluation. Without the element of judgment, experienced teachers may buy into the concept of peer observation with the same willingness that beginning teachers display, according to findings within this study.

According to existing research, many teachers hold steady to the ingrained hierarchy in schools that require principals to be primarily responsible for evaluation; as such, teachers may be unwilling to assess each other's performance (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). A

scenario in which teachers are not required to rate the performance of their peers on the same evaluation rubric used by the principal may lend itself to improving the quality of peer feedback to colleagues and the challenge of confronting the traditional hierarchical views of teacher evaluation would be eliminated altogether. Whereas both principals and teachers identify professional growth as its primary purpose, the evaluation component of peer observation may be called into question.

At the **school level**, supports for peer observation of teaching should be provided mostly in terms of resources and cultural leadership. For successful implementation of peer observation of teaching at the school level, administrators must provide adequate time and personnel. Most principals in this study recognize peer observation of teaching as a valuable source of professional development when used outside of the evaluation process. Therefore, it may be recommended that school administrators allocate time and staff for peer observations to occur, just as they would for outside professional development and training opportunities. Principals may consider providing ongoing opportunities for peer observation scheduled periodically throughout the school year. Some time issues could be addressed by employing substitute teachers for peer observers. The majority of scholars who have studied peer observation of teaching agree that a three-step process including a pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference is a necessary component of the process to maximize the professional growth of teachers (Chism, 2007; Marcezely, 2001; Munson, 1996; Shortland, 2010; Wilkins & Shin, 2011). In this study,

survey respondents indicated that teachers omit some of these steps. Interviews with principals and teachers revealed that the lack of time hinders peer observation. With additional time and staff included in this process, peer observations could lend themselves to conducting the entire process of peer observation with more fidelity. Researchers identified peer observation that is focused on professional development goals as a means of active collaboration that positively influences teaching and learning (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). Establishing such supports at the school level for peer observation to be practiced completely could create a more collaborative school culture and facilitate the achievement of school improvement goals.

Perhaps the most important ingredient for peer observation to be successful is a school culture that promotes mutual trust among teachers (Atkinson & Bolt, 2010; Blackmore, 2005; Chism, 2007; Donnelly, 2007; Morelock, 2008; Shields, 2007). Several of the recommendations mentioned previously in this chapter could also potentially promote trust. Providing more in-depth training could increase the confidence of observers in their abilities to conduct peer observations and of the teachers being observed in the validity of the process overall. In addition to more training, principals could also consider scheduling time to conduct ongoing peer observations among all teachers as a means to support a trusting atmosphere. As Munson (1998) found, including all teachers may create a sense of shared ownership in the process because the focus is on professional growth rather than evaluation. Because participants in this study revealed a high degree of empathy among teachers,

building trust through a collaborative peer observation process could make teachers more comfortable with observing in each others' classrooms and providing growth-producing feedback to their colleagues—conditions that could further establish a school culture conducive to collaboration and trust.

Recommendations for Future Research

As mentioned in Chapter 2, peer observation and teacher assessment has been a topic of theoretical and practical research for just over two decades, according to Brown and Crumpler (2013). With the inclusion of peer observation in the evaluation process for North Carolina probationary teachers in 2001, directions for future research are plentiful.

Future research on peer observation of teaching and its implications for evaluation and professional growth could cover how the process is practiced at specific school levels. Although this case study included representation from all levels of practice, more specific information could be gained about the conditions that peer observations take on at the elementary, middle, and high schools. This research based on each school level could focus on the experiences of both administrator and teacher groups.

Another possible area of research could explore the practice of peer observation from the perspective of the teacher being observed. This study focused on peer observation from an implementation standpoint, but more insight could be gained from learning about how teachers on the receiving end of peer observation experience the process. Research questions could center on the extent to which peer observations help improve teacher performance.

Although research cites advantages for all teachers, this study found that beginning teachers tend to be more receptive to peer observations. Additional areas of study could center on the experiences of teachers at beginning and advanced levels of practice with peer observation.

Almost all researchers agree that effective teachers are critical to student achievement (TNTP, 2010). As peer observation of teaching becomes a more popular practice in the professional development of teachers (Munson, 1998) and as more teacher effectiveness data is collected by the state in this era of heightened accountability, a study of teacher performance and efficacy teachers who actively participate in peer observations may also contribute to the research literature.

Conclusions

Peer observation of teaching in schools is a sound instructional leadership strategy. A practice common in other professions, such as the medical field, observing one's peers promotes a collaborative culture and professional growth through mutual exposure to and conversations about observed practices (Marcezely, 2001; Weems & Rogers, 2010). As existing research states, teachers in the first few years of their profession need the most support (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006; Weems & Rogers, 2010). To provide this support, since 2001 North Carolina has required a peer observation for probationary teachers as a part of their evaluation process (NCDPI, 2001). Based on state policy, one probationary teacher could observe and assess another colleague's performance after having received electronic versions of the state evaluation policy, evaluation rubric, and district evaluation timeline.

Notwithstanding the flexibility of this policy, principals ideally prefer to select experienced, career-status teachers as peer observers based mainly on their assigned curricular areas.

Principals and teachers find several challenges to implementing peer observations, including inadequate training, a lack of time, and the traditional view of teacher evaluation. In fact, several of these challenges point to the inclusion of peer observation as a part of the evaluation process. Research cautions practitioners for using peer observation for teacher assessment (Cosh, 1999; Shields, 2007). Principals generally find and teachers confirm that feedback to a peer is less critical due to teachers' empathy toward each other and the desire to maintain positive collegial relationships. Principals use peer observation data less in summative evaluations because they rely largely on administrative observations to rate teacher performance. However, realizing the potential benefits for professional growth, several principals implement a system of peer observation of teaching outside the evaluation process, inclusive of all teachers.

Although principals recognize the potential benefits gained from peer observation, all have not experienced these benefits because most school-wide peer observation initiatives are in the beginning stages of implementation. As principals have established guidelines for teachers to follow while completing peer observations, they find that several factors that were discussed in the recommendations for practice contribute to effectively implementing peer observation of teaching.

REFERENCES

- Atkinson, D. J. & Bolt, S. (2010). Using teaching observations to reflect upon and improve teaching practice in higher education. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(3), 119.
- Benedict, A. E., Thomas, R. A., Kimerling, J., & Leko, C. (2013). Trends in Teacher Evaluation. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 45(5), 60–68.
- Blackmore, J. A. (2005). A critical evaluation of peer review via teaching observation within higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19(3), 218–232. doi: 10.1108/09513540510591002.
- Bourne-Hayes, C. (2010). *Comparing novice and experienced teachers on attitudes about peer observation as professional development*. Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI: 3422366)
- Borland, K.W. (2001). Qualitative and Quantitative Research: Complementary Balance. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 112.
- Bowers, D. L. (1999). *Teacher Use of Peer Observation And Feedback As A Means of Professional Development* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuests Dissertations and Theses.
- Breedlove, P. H., Bradshaw, L. K., & East Carolina University. Dept. of Educational Leadership. (2011). *Teacher evaluation in North Carolina*. (Doctoral dissertation).
- Brown, I. I. & Crumpler, T.(2013). Assessment of Foreign Language Teachers: A Model for Shifting Evaluation Toward Growth and Learning. *High School Journal*, 96(2), 138-151. The University of North Carolina Press. Retrieved from Project MUSE database.
- Byrne, J., Brown, H., & Challen, D. (2010). Peer development as an alternative to peer observation: A tool to enhance professional development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 15(3), 215–228. doi:[10.1080/1360144X.2010.497685](https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2010.497685)
- Calabrese, R. L., Sherwood, K., Fast, J., & Womack, C. (2004). Teachers and principals' perceptions of the summative evaluation conference: an examination of Model I theories-in-use. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 18(2), 109–117.

- Castleberry, E. (2010). *Influences of Professional Development on Teachers and Teacher Retention: Perceptions of Teachers and Professional Development Administrators* (Doctoral Dissertation). North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.
- Chamberlain, J. M., D'Artrey, M., & Rowe, D. A. (2011). Peer observation of teaching: a decoupled process. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 12(3), 189–201.
- Cheng, Kai-Wen (2008). A study on applying focus group interview on education. *Reading Improvement*. 44(4), 194–198.
- Chism, N. (2007). *Peer review of teaching: a sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.
- Cicchinelli, L. (2013). The value of teacher evaluation. *Principal*, 93(1), 52–53.
- Cosh, J. (1999). Peer observation: a reflective model. *ELT Journal*, 53(1), 22–27.
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Croasmun, J. T. & Ostrom. (2011). Using Likert-Type Scales in the Social Sciences. *Journal of Adult Education*, 40(1), 19–22.
- Danielson, C. (2001). New trends in teacher evaluation. *Educational Leadership*, 58(5), 12–15.
- Danielson, C. (2010). Evaluations that help teachers learn. *Educational Leadership*, 68(4), 35–39.
- Danielson, C. (2012 a). It's Your Evaluation—Collaborating to Improve Teacher Practice. *Education Digest*, 77(8), 22–27.
- Danielson, C. (2012 b). Observing Classroom Practice. *Educational Leadership*, 70(3), 32.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2009). Teacher learning: what matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 46–52.
- deMarrias, K. (2004). Qualitative interview studies. In K. deMarrias & S. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences* (pp. 52–68). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Derrington, M. L. (2011). Changes in teacher evaluation: Implications for the principal's work. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 77(3), 51–54. Retrieved from <http://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php?url=/docview/905838337?accountid=12725>
- Dillman, D. A. (2007). *Mail and Internet Surveys: The tailored design method* (2nd ed). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Donaldson, M. L. (2011). Principals' approaches to hiring, assigning, evaluating, and developing teachers. *Education Digest*, 76(9), 27–32.
- Donnelly, R. (2007). Peer observation of teaching in higher education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 19(2), 117–129.
- Ercikan, K. & Roth, W. (2006). What good is polarizing research into qualitative and quantitative? *Educational Researcher*, 35(5), 14–23.
- Evans, J. R., & Mathur, A. (2005). The Value of Online Surveys. *The Emerald Research Register*, 195–219.
- Fink, A. (2009). *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fullan, M. (1999). *Change Forces: The Sequel*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.
- Goldstein, J., & Noguera, P. A. (2006). A thoughtful approach to teacher evaluation. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6), 31–37.
- Goldstein, J. (2007). Easy to dance to: solving the problems of teacher evaluation with peer assistance and review. *American Journal of Education*, 113(3), 479–508.
- Goldrick, L. (2002). *Improving teacher evaluation to improve teaching quality*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association. Retrieved from <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/1202IMPROVINGTEACHEVAL.pdf>
- Goldring, R., Taie, S., and Riddles, M. (2014). Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results From the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey (NCES 2014-077). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.
- Gosling, D. (2002). *Models of peer observation of teaching*. Retrieved from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resource_database/id200_Models_of_Peer_Observation_of_Teaching

- Gravani, M. (2012). Adult learning principles in designing learning activities for teacher development. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 31(4), 419–432.
- Graves, R., Fowler, F., Couper, M., Lepkowski, J., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2009). *Survey Methodology* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.
- Hammersley-Fletcher, L., & Orsmond, P. (2004). Evaluating our peers: Is peer observation a meaningful process? *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(4), 489–503. doi:10.1080/10307507042000236380
- Hatch, J.A. (2002). *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Hazi, H. M., & Arredondo Rucinski, D. (2009). Teacher evaluation as a policy target for improved student learning: A fifty-state review of statute and regulatory action since NCLB. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 17(5).
- Heubner, T. (2009). The continuum of teacher learning. *Educational Learning*, 28(3), 431–437.
- Holdzkom, D. (1987). Appraising teacher performance in North Carolina. *Educational Leadership*, 44(7), 40–44.
- Holdzkom, D. (1991). Teacher performance appraisal in North Carolina: Preferences and practices. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72(10), 782–785.
- Johnson, R. B. & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2004). Mixed methods research: a research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14–26.
- Kane, T. J., Taylor, E., Tyler, J., & Wooten, A. (2011). Evaluating teacher effectiveness: can classroom observations identify practices that raise achievement? *Education Next*, 11(3), 55–60.
- Kelley, M. L. (2004). Why Induction Matters. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55: 438–448. doi:10.1177/002248710426953
- Kohut, G. F., Burnap, C., & Yon, M. G. (2007). Peer observation of teaching. *College Teaching*, 55(1), 19-25. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24443013&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

- Krueger, R. (1995). The future of focus groups. *Qualitative Health Research*, 5(4), 524–530. doi: 10.1177/104973239500500412
- Kumrow, D., & Dahlen, B. (2002). Is peer review an effective approach for evaluating teachers? *The Clearing House*, 75(5), 238–241. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/stable/30189751>
- Lam, S. F. (2001). Educators' opinions on classroom observation as a practice of staff development and appraisal. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(2001), 161–173.
- Learning Point Associates (2010). *Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness: Emerging Trends Reflected in the State Phase 1 of Race to the Top Applications*. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates.
- Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2006). *Methods in Educational Research: from Theory to Practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Looney, J. (2011). Developing high-quality teachers: teacher evaluation for improvement. *European Journal of Education*, 46(4), 440–455. doi:10.1111/j.14653435.2011.01492.x
- Malderez, Angi. (2003). Key Concepts in ELT: Observation. *ELT Journal*, 57(2), 179–181.
- Marczely, B. (2001). *Supervision in Education: A Differentiated Approach with Legal Perspectives*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen.
- Matula, J. J. (2011). Embedding due process measures throughout the evaluation of teachers. *NASSP Bulletin*, 95(2). doi: 10.1177/0192636511409925
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mertler, C. (2002). Demonstrating the potential for Web-based survey methodology with a case study. *American Secondary Education*, 30(2), 49–61.
- Mertler, C. (2003). *What... Another Survey??? Patterns of Response and Nonresponse from Teachers to Traditional and Web Surveys*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University.
- Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning. (2012). *North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process*. Denver, CO: McREL.

- Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning. (2012). *North Carolina School Executive: Principal and Assistant Principal Evaluation Process*. Denver, CO: McREL.
- Militello, M., Fusarelli, B., Alsbury, T., Warren, T. P. (2011). How professional standards guide practice for school principals. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(1), 74–87.
- Morgan, D. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 129–152.
- Munson, B. (1998). Peers observing peers: the better way to observe teachers. *Contemporary Education*, 69(2), 108–110.
- Nath, J. (2005). The roles of case studies in the educational field. *International Journal of Case Method Research & Application*. 17(3), 396–400.
- New Teacher Center. (2014). 2014 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Retrieved from <http://www.ncteachingconditions.org/results/report/149/62124>
- New Teacher Center. (2015). 2014 North Carolina teacher working conditions survey research brief: student achievement and teacher attrition analyses. Retrieved from http://www.ncteachingconditions.org/uploads/File/NC14_brief_ach_retent.pdf
- National Council on Teacher Quality (2010). *Teacher layoffs: Rethinking “last-hired, first-fired” policies*. Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality.
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2001). *Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument-Revised (TPAI-R) supplemental training materials* [PowerPoint slides].
- North Carolina State Board of Education. (2008). *Policy adopting the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Rubric and Process for Teacher Evaluation*. [Policy]. Retrieved from http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/sbe_meetings/0810/tcp/0810tcp03.pdf
- Olah, D. A. (2013). *A study of North Carolina technology teacher evaluation practices and job satisfaction* (Order No. 3575617). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text. (1459437122). Retrieved from <http://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php?url=/docview/1459437122?accountid=12725>
- Packer-Muti, B. (2010). Conducting a focus group. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 1023–1026. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-4/packer.pdf>

- Painter, S. R. (2000). Principals' efficacy beliefs about teacher evaluation. *Journal of Education Administration*, 38(4), 368–378.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peterson, K. (2004). Research on school teacher evaluation. *NASSP Bulletin*, 88(639), 60–75.
- Public Schools of North Carolina. (n.d.-a). *News releases 1997–1998: 1998 Supplemental Budget*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/1997-98/1998supplementalbudget#>
- Public Schools of North Carolina. (n.d.-b). *North Carolina Educator Evaluation System Wiki*. Retrieved from <http://ncees.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/NCEES+Wiki>
- Public Schools of North Carolina. (n.d.-c). *Educator Effectiveness Model*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/>
- Public Schools of North Carolina. (2006). *NC State Board of Education goals*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/stateboard/about/goals>
- Public Schools of North Carolina. (2011). *Briefing on Educator Effectiveness Policies: Prepared for the Governor's Education Transformation Commission*.
- Public Schools of North Carolina (2012). *NC teacher evaluations and teacher effectiveness: exploring the relationship between value-added data and teacher evaluations*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/intern-research/reports/teachereval.pdf>
- Public Schools of North Carolina (2014). *2013-2014 Annual report on teachers leaving the profession*. Retrieved from <http://ncpublicschools.org/docs/educatoreffectiveness/surveys/leaving/2013-2014turnoverreport.pdf>
- School Leadership Briefing Audio Journal. (2013). *Linda Darling-Hammond: Getting Teacher Evaluation Right*. Retrieved from <https://schoolbriefing.com/5013/getting-teacher-evaluation-right/>
- Shields, S. L. (2007). *A cross-case analysis of peer coaching in two elementary schools*. (Order No. DP20060, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University). *ProQuest*

- Dissertations and Theses, 106*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1033510432?accountid=12725>. (1033510432).
- Shin, E., & Wilkins, E. A. (2011). Peer feedback: Who, what, when, why, and how. *Education Digest*. <http://webportal.kdp.org/Purchase/SearchCatalog.aspx>.
- Shortland, S. (2004). Peer observation: A tool for staff development or compliance? *Journal of Further & Higher Education, 28*(2), 219–228. doi:10.1080/0309877042000206778
- Shortland, S. (2010). Feedback within peer observation: Continuing professional development and unexpected consequences. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 47*(3), 295–304. doi:10.1080/14703297.2010.498181
- Shreeve, W. (1993). Evaluating teacher evaluation: who is responsible for teacher probation? *NASSP Bulletin, 77*(551), 8–19. doi: 10.1177/019263659307755103
- Solomon, D. J. (2001). Conducting Web-based surveys. *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation, 7*(19) 146–151.
- Stacey, D. C., Holdzkom, D., & Kuliogowski, B. (1989). Effectiveness of the North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal System. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education, 3*(1), 79–106. doi: 10.1007/BF00125089
- Stillwell, C. (2008). The collaborative development of teacher training skills. *ELT Journal, 63*(4), 353–362. doi:10.1093/elt/ccno68.
- Stumbo, C., & McWalters, P. (2010). Measuring effectiveness: What will it take? *Educational Leadership, 68*(4), 10.
- Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 46*(1), 31–56.
- Taylor, E. S., & Tyler, J. (2012). "Can teacher evaluation improve teaching?" *Education Next (1539-9664), 12*(4), 78.
- Terehoff, I. (2002). Elements of adult learning in teacher professional development. *NASSP Bulletin, 86*, 65–77. doi: 10.1177/019263650208663207
- Terrell, S. (2012). Mixed-methods research methodologies. *Qualitative Report, 17*(1), 254–280.

- The New Teacher Project (2010). *Teacher Evaluation 2.0*. Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project.
- Thomas, S. (1999). *Designing Surveys that Work: A Step-by-Step Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Tuytens, M. & Devos, G. (2011). Stimulating professional learning through teacher evaluation: an impossible task for the school leader? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(2011), 891–899. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2011.02.004
- Umbach, P. (2004). Web surveys: Best practices. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, (121) 23–38.
- Vaughn, S., Schumm, J. S., & Sinagub, J. (1996). *Focus Group Interviews in Education and Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Weems, D. M., & Rogers, C. B. H. (2010). Are US teachers making the grade? A proposed framework for teacher evaluation and professional growth. *Management in Education*, 24(1), 19–24. doi: 10.1177/0892020609354959
- Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D. (2009). The widget effect. *Education Digest*, 75(2), 31–35. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=44479954&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Weller, S. (2009). What does “peer” mean in teaching observation for the professional development of higher education lecturers? *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 21(1), 25–35.
- Wilkins, E. A., & Shin, E. (2011). Peer feedback: Who, what, when, why, and how. *Education Digest*, 76(6), 49–53.
- Wood, F. & Thompson, S. (1980). Guidelines for better staff development. *Educational Leadership*, 37(5), 374–378.
- Zatynski, M. (2012). Revamping teacher evaluation. *Principal (National Association of Elementary School Principals)*, 87.(5), 22–27.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. NC Principals Peer Observation of Teaching Survey

1 Which grades are served at your school? (Please select all that apply.)

- PK (1)
- K (2)
- 1 (3)
- 2 (4)
- 3 (5)
- 4 (6)
- 5 (7)
- 6 (8)
- 7 (9)
- 8 (10)
- 9 (11)
- 10 (12)
- 11 (13)
- 12 (14)

2 Please indicate your total years of administrative (principal/assistant principal) experience:

- 0-4 (1)
- 5-10 (2)
- 11-20 (3)
- 20 or more (4)

3 Approximately what percentage of probationary (non-tenured) teachers did your school have in the 2013-2014 school year?

- Up to one-fourth (1)
- Almost half (2)
- More than half (3)

4 How were teachers assigned for peer observations in the NC Teacher Evaluation Process? (Please select all that apply.)

- Peer observers were assigned by an administrator (principal or assistant principal). (1)
- Teachers selected observation pairings among themselves (2)
- I do not know. (3)
- Peer observation was not practiced at my school. (4)

If I do not know. Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of the following groups served ...If Peer observation was not pr... Is Selected, Then Skip To Peer observations are beneficial both...

5 Which of the following groups served as peer observers in the NC Teacher Evaluation Process? (Please select all that apply.)

- Career Status (tenured) teachers (1)
- Probationary teachers (2)
- I do not know (3)

6 Please rank the following in order of importance when matching teachers with peer observers.

- _____ Content or grade level (1)
- _____ Trained as mentors (2)
- _____ Trusting relationship between teachers (3)
- _____ Professional competence of peer observer (4)

7 Which of the following groups received training beyond the NC Teacher Evaluation orientation on conducting peer observations? (Please select all that apply.)

- Peer observers (1)
- Probationary Teachers (2)
- No specific training was provided (3)
- I do not know. (4)

Answer If Which of the following groups received additional training specifically on the peer observation process? Peer observers Is Selected And Which of the following groups received additional training specifically on the peer observation process? Probationary Teachers Is Selected

8 What was the source of the specialized training for peer observations? (Please select all that apply.)

- District-sponsored training (1)
- School-level training (2)
- NCDPI training (3)
- Other Professional organization (4)
- I do not know. (5)

9 Which parts of the observation process were conducted as a part of the peer observation process? (Select all that apply.)

- Pre-observation conference (1)
- Classroom observation (2)
- Completion of NC Evaluation Process rubric (3)
- Post-observation Conference (4)
- I do not know. (5)

10 To what extent did you review peer observation data on probationary teachers in the NC Teacher Evaluation Process?

- All (1)
- Most (2)
- Some (3)
- A few (4)
- None (5)

If None Is Selected, Then Skip To In what capacity were peer observatio...

11 To what extent did peer observers record specific written feedback on the strengths or weaknesses of the teacher on the evaluation rubric?

- Far too Little (1)
- Too Little (2)
- About Right (3)
- Too Much (4)
- Far too Much (5)

12 How frequently did performance ratings from peer observers agree with the administrator's overall assessment of probationary teachers' performance?

- Never (1)
- Rarely (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Often (4)
- All of the Time (5)

13 In what capacity were peer observations conducted at your school outside of the NC Teacher Evaluation Process? (Please select all that apply.)

- Peer observations are practiced for professional development. (1)
- Peer observations are practiced as a part of the mentor/mentee program. (2)
- Peer observations were not conducted outside of the NC Teacher Evaluation Process. (4)
- I do not know. (5)

14 How frequently is peer observation practiced by teachers at your school outside of the NC Teacher Evaluation Process?

- None (1)
- Some (2)
- Regularly (3)
- Frequently (4)

If None Is Selected, Then Skip To Peer observations decreased teacher i...

15 Peer observations decreased teacher isolation at my school.

- Disagree (1)
- Somewhat Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)

16 Peer observations helped improve teacher instructional practices at my school.

- Disagree (1)
- Somewhat Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)

17 The data from peer observations were helpful in my evaluation of teacher performance.

- Disagree (1)
- Somewhat Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)

18 Peer observations were helpful to identify areas of needed professional growth for teachers.

- Disagree (1)
- Somewhat Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)

19 Peer observations are beneficial both for professional development and teacher evaluation.

- Disagree (1)
- Somewhat Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Somewhat Agree (4)
- Agree (5)

20 In your opinion, which is the most valuable purpose of peer observation of teachers?

- Peer observation is most valuable for teacher evaluation. (1)
- Peer observation is most valuable for professional growth. (2)
- Peer observation is equally valuable for evaluation and professional growth of teachers. (3)
- Neither purpose has value (4)

21 I could better use peer observations to evaluate and improve teacher performance if _____

Appendix B. IRB Letter

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina

Campus Box 7514
Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7514

Office of Research and Innovation
Division of Research Administration

919.515.8754 (phone)

919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Jennifer Ofstein,
IRB Coordinator North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: February 23, 2015

Title: A Case Study on Peer Observation of Teaching: Implications for Evaluation and Professional Growth

IRB#: 5553

Dear Brad Jones,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Ofstein". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jennifer Ofstein
NC State IRB

Appendix C. Informed Consent

North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

A Case Study on Peer Observation of Teaching: Implications for Evaluation and Professional Growth

Principal Investigator: Brad A. Jones
Brady

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kevin P.

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine how North Carolina principals use peer observation to evaluate and improve teacher performance.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately forty-five minutes. Participants will be audio recorded.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research.

Benefits

If there is no direct benefit expected to the subject, but knowledge may be gained that could help school administrators in general.

Confidentiality

In the case of interviews, confidentiality of the information in the study records cannot be guaranteed. Participants are identifiable by their responses. Data will be stored securely in a safe location supervised by the researcher. Answers participants give may be used in future endeavors by the researcher and/or his faculty sponsor for further advancement in research. **The researcher will grant access to the faculty sponsor and a third party for transcription only.** No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Brad A. Jones at bajones2@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

Appendix D. Informed Consent

North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

A Case Study on Peer Observation of Teaching: Implications for Evaluation and Professional Growth

Principal Investigator: Brad A. Jones
Brady

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kevin P.

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine how North Carolina principals use peer observation to evaluate and improve teacher performance.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take a fifteen minute online survey.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research.

Benefits

If there is no direct benefit expected to the subject, but knowledge may be gained that could help school administrators in general.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in the NCSU Qualtrics database. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Brad A. Jones at bajones2@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

Appendix E. NCDPI Peer Observation Note Taking Page

Teacher:	Peer Observer:	Date:
Grade Level/Course:	Lesson Topic:	

Peer Observation and Note Taking Page

Standard 2: Teachers establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students
Standard 3: Teachers know the content they teach
Standard 4: Teachers facilitate learning for their students

Observable Teacher Behaviors

Observable Student Behaviors

Artifacts

Questions for Reflection

Appendix F. North Carolina Peer Observation of Teaching Interview Protocol

(1) opening, (2) introductory, (3) transfer questions, (4) key questions, (5) specific questions, (6) closing questions, and (7) final questions.

Introductory:

1. Please provide the following information:

- a. How many years have you served as a school administrator?
- b. What grades are served at your school?
- c. About what percentage of your teaching staff is probationary?

2. What guidelines do you use to implement peer observations for the NC Teacher

Evaluation Process? What sources do you use to get the guidelines?

3. Describe the ways in which peer observations are used in your school.

4. What is the primary purpose of peer observation in your school?

5. What criteria do you consider to match peer observers with the teachers being observed?

6. What type of training do teachers in your school undergo before conducting a peer observation?

7. What procedures do teachers use in the peer observation process?

8. How does peer observation data usually compare with data collected from your classroom observations?

9. Tell me about any conflicts that you have had to mitigate amongst teachers as a result of ratings on a peer observation.

10. How do you use peer observation data for teachers in your school?
11. In what ways have conducting peer observations affected teacher performance in your school?
12. What could be provided to help you better use peer observation to evaluate and improve teacher performance?

Appendix G. Focus Group Interview Protocol

Experiences of Career-Status Teachers with Peer Observation Focus Group Interview Protocol

Please answer the following questions *from the perspective of a teacher who has conducted peer observations*.

Please write the following information on a numbered notecard:

- Years of teaching experience
 - Current teaching assignment
1. Why do you believe were you selected by your principal to conduct peer observations?
 2. Please describe the training that you received before conducting a peer observation.
 3. How well did the training prepare you to conduct a peer observation?
 4. What steps did you use to carry out the peer observation process?
 5. What feelings did you experience during the classroom observation?
 6. How do you believe being observed by peers different than being observed by an administrator?
 7. How do you believe you are perceived during a classroom observer versus an administrator?
 8. Describe the feelings you experienced during the post-observation conference.
 9. Describe a time when you had to give critical feedback in a peer observation.
 - a. How did you deliver this feedback?
 - b. How was this feedback received by the peer?
 10. How did going through the peer observation process affect the relationship between you and your colleague?

11. What benefits have you received from conducting peer observations?
12. What challenges did you experience with the peer observation process?
13. In your opinion, what is the main purpose of peer observations for teachers?
14. What would improve the peer observation process to make it more beneficial for both you as an observer and for the peer being observed?