Cognitive Behaviorism as a Foundation for Feedback: Promoting Teacher Growth and Development Through Reflection and Analysis

Monica Manns, Jay Samant, Anna Thomas, and Jennifer Tingley

**Evaluation is Evolving**

One of the major functions of school administrators is to evaluate teacher performance. Traditionally, principals were charged with mainly managerial tasks such as the day-to-day administration of the school building, dealing with funding and budgets, maintenance issues, etc. However, school administrators are now being asked to function as instructional leaders as compared to simply school managers. According to DiPaola and Hoy (2014), “The principal’s role as an instructional leader is to supervise, to evaluate, and to guide the professional development of their teachers – the core tasks of instructional leadership” (p. 2). The language of instructional leadership is embedded in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, which was developed by the Council of Chief School Officers. “According to Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standard 2, instructional leaders advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth” (Ylimaki, 2014, p. xiii). Although teacher evaluation is a key job duty of school principals, most of the specific evaluation elements are delegated to individual school divisions as to how to accomplish this task. In most cases, due to time constraints and the multiple competing pressures faced by school administrators, teacher evaluation tends to be a formal, summative process. In addition, the focus has typically been on evaluating teacher effectiveness rather than improving student achievement. Consequently, the traditional model of teacher evaluation has done little to actually improve teacher performance, and in turn, student achievement. Evaluation alone does not function as the change agent needed to improve teacher performance; diagnostic and prescriptive feedback delivered through the language of cognitive behaviorism provides the necessary link between supervision and improved performance. Historical hindrances associated with administrative feedback and professional development are outweighed by the gains noted in teacher performance and reflective practices.

**Early Forms of Evaluation and Cognitive Behaviorism**

Teacher evaluation and cognitive behaviorism lengthy histories only recently intertwined; in reviewing their historical developments, trends associated with their applications emerge and illustrate their compatibility. If form follows function, then the adapted role of cognitive behaviorism in the evaluation process fits the function of its psychological discipline. Teacher evaluation has evolved over time from focusing on the moral values of a teacher, to standards-based evaluation models of today that seek to include measures of student academic progress. The early days of supervision and evaluation began in the 1700s and lasted until the mid-1800s (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). They were characterized by a reliance on clergy to provide guidance to and supervision of teachers. As school systems became more complex, the need for more specialized guidance for teachers gave rise to the principal as a leader and a growing awareness of the importance of pedagogy. The era of scientific management, from the late 1800s until right before World War II, saw to the creation of school supervisory roles. This was widely expanded on in the 1970s to incorporate a more clinical
supervisory approach. By 1980, one study found that about 90 percent of school administrators used some type of clinical supervisory model (Bedward & Daniels, 2005).

Unlike the philosophy of teacher evaluation growing from moralistic and value-laden standards, cognitive behaviorism developed from the melding of two different psychological models to explain behavior. The cognitive-behavioral model grew out of some dissatisfaction with a primarily behavioral model of learning and behavior. Behaviorism was initially developed in the early 1900s. In behaviorism, the emphasis is on observable behavior and the idea that most human behavior is learned (Coleman, 1996, p. 76). In contrast, cognitive psychology is an approach to psychology "emphasizing the internal, mental processes" (Reber, 1985, p. 129).

In the 1960s, some psychologists noted that people often respond differently to the same set of circumstances and wondered if there was more to it than simply observable behavior; additionally, they began to consider individuals’ thoughts about their environments as well. Hence, the cognitive-behavioral model was developed. According to Coleman (1996), “Cognitive-behavioral proponents . . . emphasize cognitions or thinking patterns as an important link between environmental stimuli and behavior” (p. 88). Stimuli and observational feedback then, in turn, serve as the epistemological sources for behavioral changes. In more contemporary versions of teacher supervision, observational feedback functions as the foundation for change. Teachers reflect upon the feedback and its associated dialogue to make meaningful behavioral changes.

The misunderstanding of supervision

Few models in the field of educational supervision have been as widely misunderstood. Morris Cogan was a professor and supervisor of candidates in Harvard's Master of Arts in Teaching program in the 1950s. For years, Cogan and his colleagues developed a systematic approach to working with student teachers. By 1958, Cogan was lecturing on a process called the “cycle of clinical supervision” (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). By 1962, a group of educational practitioners working with Cogan in the Master of Arts in Teaching program had further refined the clinical approach. The model that emerged from these efforts was published in a book by Goldhammer, entitled Clinical Supervision: Special Methods for the Supervision of Teachers (Glanz, 2007), which explained a five-phase process of clinical supervision that was designed to involve teachers and supervisors in reflective practices. The phases were: Pre-Observation Conference, Classroom Observation, Analysis, Supervision Conference, and Analysis of the Analysis (Glanz, 2007).

Advancement introduces reflection

The next major influence on supervision was the work of Hunter during the 1980s (Glanz, 2007). The centerpiece of which was a seven-step model of a lesson design, which included the anticipatory set, objective and purpose, input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice. Although the seven-step framework for a lesson is the most well known aspect of Hunter's work, she contributed many other ideas to the process of supervision. Hunter championed the idea of using professional development to articulate a common language of instruction. She also identified a variety of purposes for supervisory conferences that included observation and script taping (Glanz, 2007). Observation and script taping were critical components of Hunter's process of supervision. During script taping, a supervisor recorded teaching behaviors and then later categorized them into those that promoted learning; those that used precious time and energy, yet contributed nothing to learning; and those that, unintentionally, actually interfered with learning. After script taping, supervisors conferred with teachers. During their post-conferences, the supervisors and teachers discussed the data from the script taping in depth (Glanz, 2007). Hunter’s method of dialogue, specific to performance evaluation, contains
elements of cognitive behaviorism in its guided reflective practice.

By the mid-1980s, researchers and theorists in supervision began to articulate alternative perspectives, primarily in reaction to the prescription applications of clinical supervision and mastery teaching. This began the era of reflective models.

**Teachers as professionals**

Charlotte Danielson (1996) was a proponent of this thought and wrote about a differentiated approach to supervision in her book *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, which was updated in 2007. According to Danielson, the intent of the framework was to accomplish three things. First, it sought to honor the complexity of teaching. Second, it constituted a language for professional conversation. Third, it provided a structure for self-assessment and reflection on professional practice. One of the most powerful aspects of the Danielson framework was that each of the 76 elements of quality teaching was broken into four levels of performance (unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished) (Clarke & Collins, 2004).

**Implementation of value-added models**

In the last decade, the effects of teachers on student performance (typically manifested as statewide standardized tests) have been re-examined using statistical models that are known as value-added models. Value-added models are widely used nowadays and they are used by some states to rank teachers. These models are used to measure teacher performance or effectiveness (via student achievement gains), with the ultimate objective of rewarding or penalizing teachers. Such practices have resulted in a large amount of controversy in the education community about the role of value-added models in the process of making important decisions about teachers such as salary increases, promotion, or termination of employment (Newton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, & Thomas, 2010). Research asserts that valued-added measures are not effective indicators of teacher's instructional effectiveness over time (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

**Teacher evaluation system reform**

Since the turn of the 21st century, emphasis has shifted from an evaluation system that measures the processes of teaching to an evaluation system that measures both the processes of teaching and student outcomes. The United States is the initiator and practitioner of this trend of reform. Including student outcomes has been the topic of intense discussion as policymakers and researchers debate the validity of the use of student test scores in terms of value-added modeling and other growth models. Researchers do not agree on the stability of such models and whether they do differentiate between effective and less effective teachers. Although the debate continues, implementation of such systems in many states within the United States has begun. Similarly, countries across the globe struggle with the basis for teacher evaluation and how teacher effectiveness research impacts such processes (Newton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, & Thomas, 2010).

**No Child Left Behind evaluation, and cognitive behaviorism**

One of the most key factors in this change is embodied by the legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act. The federal and state governments are playing an increasingly prominent role in teacher evaluation. Changes in accountability have created teacher evaluation systems that are inconsistent across states because state laws and district policies on teacher evaluations vary in their requirements for teachers and for those who conduct their performance appraisals (Newton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, & Thomas, 2010). According to DiPaola and Hoy (2014), “Proponents of value-added, outcomes-based education have redefined instructional leadership, moving from a leader of a professional community with a focus on teaching to leader of a professional community with a focus on learning” (p. 3). In describing the supervision process, Ylimaki (2014) stated, “Any process is
only as strong as the individual members engaged in supervision to link it to professional development and, eventually, student success” (p. 77). She further stated, “Student success should be the basic objective of all professional educators and of all programs and processes in the schools” (Ylimaki, 2014, p.3). In describing a new model of collegial supervision in order to improve student achievement, DiPaola and Hoy (2014) identified several key assumptions for instructional leadership. The first assumption is that “the only one who can improve instruction is the teacher him- or herself” (p. 27). Additionally, DiPaola and Hoy (2014) noted, “Improvement of instruction is likely to be accomplished in a nonthreatening situation, by working with colleagues and by fostering in teachers a sense of inquiry and experimentation” (p. 27). These two assumptions, in fact, are key elements of the cognitive behaviorism theory in the field of psychology.

**Roots and role of behaviorism**

When the field of psychology first began, the ideology tended toward positivism. However, the roots of the current field of cognitive behaviorism could best be described as post-modern. In the post-modern view of psychology, the axiological ideals include the following assumptions: a) cognition influences behavior, b) cognition is modifiable, and, c) behavior change is possible via cognitive change (Hammack, 2003, p. 211). Regarding ontology, modernists believe that the world is “knowable, identifiable, and describable” (Hammack, 2003, p. 211). From an axiological perspective, Hammack (2003) also asserts that “modern psychology views research as an intrinsically progressive endeavor.”

There are a variety of techniques associated with the cognitive-behavioral model. Most techniques emphasize strategies for specific tasks or problems. According to Coleman (1996), “...the goal of most cognitive-behavioral techniques is to train [people], through self-talk, to develop strategies or to problem-solve for themselves” (p. 91). In this way, instructional leaders can use the cognitive behavioral model to provide feedback to teachers through a collegial supervision process, which will allow teachers to create their own meaning of the feedback and to problem-solve areas for improvement. The experimental nature of behavioral cognition, in relation to the methodology of professional development, is contingent on the areas of noted need and the participants’ willingness to adapt.

**Understanding the Proposed Solution**

When investigating the link between cognitive behaviorism and teacher evaluation, the ultimate aims of the evaluative endeavor must be kept a central focus, specifically the improvement of teacher performance and its direct impact on promoting student achievement. Cognitive behaviorism (CB) is often a wolf in sheep’s clothing in educational dialogue, as the theory’s tenants are far-reaching but rarely labeled CB by practitioners. Teachers often lack the theoretical background to both identify and apply frameworks within their reflective practices, as they are more prone to build beliefs and constructs based upon personal experience (Spurgeon & Moore, 1994). Counter-intuitive to this notion of “self-reliance” in education is the expectation that teachers develop their craft and pedagogical knowledge through reflective practices when there is a noted drought of critical dialogue (Chung, 2009; Marchel, 2007). Missing from this professional development equation is the administrator’s guidance on developing the metacognitive direction of the teacher’s reflections and corrections. Feedback is a critical component in providing the information and guidance necessary for teachers to make lasting and meaningful behavioral changes, which can be accomplished through on-going communication and constructive support (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014).

**Relationships trump checklists**

Observations alone are not a powerful enough tool, as this means of data collection is limited in its scope (Kyriakides, 2005).
Administrators cannot personally and physically observe all of the duties assigned and expected of teachers, and accurate representations of teachers’ behavioral objectives cannot be confined to lists due to the contextual nature of the behaviors (Kagan, 1990). Relationships are paramount in effectively applying cognitive behaviorism in the supervision and evaluation process. If CB is to function as the operational framework, then schools need to review the interplay between both the types of data collected and the quality of the supervised-supervisor relationships (Ciuffetelli-Parker & Volante, 2009). Additionally, administrators in supervisory roles need to establish their degree of needed support and the types of roles to assume in providing the feedback and monitoring (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014). Furthermore, school climate and social conditions impact the degree to which teachers are willing to learn from their experiences (Chung, 2009), thus administrators are also charged with ensuring the promotion of collegial environments that make the adoption of feedback a normative and accepted practice amongst colleagues.

Rescuing teachers from the island

Teachers often feel deserted by their teams and supervisors; they plan and reflect in isolation (Fallon & Barnett, 2009). The notion of isolation is particularly true in school-settings where common planning and professional learning communities have not been instituted. In addition to feeling alone, teachers often make curricular and instructional decisions that are not philosophically grounded (Spurgeon & Moore, 1994). Engaging teachers through continual data-based feedback conversations will encourage them to make the pedagogical connections between their practice and actions, and cognitive behaviorism is the framework for these discussions. In asking the appropriate questions, administrators can guide teachers to make realizations about hidden biases and assumptions (Marchel, 2007). CB-framed discussions over data will serve as the starting point for teachers to become their own change agents because only they can ultimately internalize the lasting performance changes that promote student achievement (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014). The aforementioned approaches vary in the sense that supporting internal sources of motivations, per DiPaola & Hoy, are cognitively more complex than making instructional plans with colleagues. Though both practices require content-specific conversation, behaviorism is only present when the conversation is subsequently internalized and then serves as a roadmap for behavioral revisions.

Effectiveness of Cognitive Behaviorism as a Treatment Model

In the field of psychology, cognitive-behavioral therapy has been one of the most well researched forms of psychotherapy. Butler, Chapman, Forman, and Beck (2006) found more than 120 controlled clinical trials were added to the literature in the eight years between 1986 and 1993 (p. 17). A review of meta-analyses of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) completed by Butler, et. al. (2006) noted that “large effect sizes were found for CBT for unipolar depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder with or without agoraphobia, social phobia, posttraumatic stress disorder, and childhood depressive and anxiety disorders” (p. 17). Additionally, “effect sizes for CBT of marital distress, anger, childhood somatic disorders, and chronic pain were in the moderate range” (Butler et al., 2006, p. 17). Furthermore, in another review of meta-analyses, findings indicate that the strongest support exists for CBT of anxiety disorders, somatoform disorders, bulimia, anger control problems, and general stress (Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, & Fang, 2012, p. 427).

It is important to make a clear distinction between providing cognitive-behavioral therapy and using cognitive-behavioral techniques when engaging in collegial supervision; however, the research is clear on the therapeutic benefits of the cognitive-behavioral model. At the most basic level, cognitive-behavioral therapies are therapies that work on changing thoughts and behaviors (Sapp,
Whether the changes in thoughts and behaviors occur in an educational setting between a principal and a teacher or in a counseling setting between a therapist and a client, the underlying theories of cognitive-behaviorism are the same.

Factors that Hinder Implementation

Due to the changes in state and federal policies there is an overwhelming amount of support for school districts across the country to identify a different teacher evaluation format. Increasingly, they are identifying these cognitive-based evaluation practices. As much as they are increasingly being used there are numerous factors that can hinder their effective implementation but we will only focus on the following: (a) preparation and training; (b) the belief that principals are instructional leaders; and (c) time and capacity. A review of the research shows that administrators felt that these areas serve as the primary issues that hinder the use of this knowingly effective evaluation tool. As such, we must examine these potential problem areas to determine implementation viability.

Limited preparation and training

Administrators are given limited time in their graduate training to focus on preparing for one specific evaluation program. In most instances, an array of evaluation tools is provided for their review. This limited focus allows for limited opportunities for a prospective administrator to obtain mastery of one tool. During their internships, many school administrators in training are not given the opportunity to train on districts’ teacher evaluation tools (Millitello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009). Upon leaving their professional studies and entering an employment situation, too often administrators are given limited time and opportunity for training on in-house evaluation tools because of fiscal limitations. When training is provided it is often limited to the technical aspect but not on how one adequately assesses and evaluates teachers in a meaningful manner.

Administrators should be the instructional leaders, but the reality is that many school administrators were promoted for reasons beside their instructional prowess; therefore, it is difficult for them to accurately assert the necessary instructional strategies needed to support teachers. The overwhelming reason for having teacher evaluation feedback is to enhance teachers’ skills, but this is stagnated if administrators do not have the ability to provide effective feedback that actively involves the teacher in the type of productive dialogue necessary for professional growth (Danielson, 2011).

Complications of instructional leadership

Administrators are expected to have a clear understanding of their own pedagogical beliefs and have the ability to develop, support and challenge those of their teachers. The administrators should have the time to self-reflect on their own pedagogy as well as come to understand how their beliefs align with what is understood as “good instruction.” In rare instances, administrators are given sufficient time to enhance their knowledge base. This time allows them the necessary context to facilitate productive conversations. Studies show that teachers often feel that traditional feedback given by administrators was not helpful and did little to facilitate their instructional growth (Roberge, 2014); subsequently, it is important that school administrators develop their ability to give facilitative feedback to teachers following any evaluation interactions. Danielson (2011) expressed the importance of making teacher-driven cognitive-based evaluation interactions function as facilitative in nature, rather than scripted or contrived. These instances require that administrators have the ability to support teachers as they go through a self-reflective process, which should lead the teachers to explore their own pedagogical practices.

Preparing administrators to provide feedback

Administrators do not have to present themselves as “all knowing,” but they do need to make the teacher feel as if they have the knowledge
base to support them through the evaluation process. Some states have accepted school administrators’ limitations and put significant professional development dollars towards enhancing their school administrators’ ability to effectively identify a positive learning environment. Two school systems using modified versions of the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching identified this as a concern and put supports in place (University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2013; Dobeneck, 2013). A school district in Pennsylvania required all of their school administrators take an online teacher evaluation course; these administrators watched and assessed hundreds of video clips using a pre-determined rubric that allowed them to compare their scores against national experts (Dobeneck, 2013). Chicago Public Schools required all evaluators become certified by completing a modulated training series and passing an assessment exam. In addition, the school system employed specialists to work with school administrators on “calibration and assigning evidence-based ratings aligned with the rubric” (CCSR, 2013, p. 4).

Building time and capacity

As with any programmatic model being implemented there are vast differences between the expected and the reality; subsequently, the ongoing debriefing sessions, which are an intricate part of the cognitive-based teacher evaluation process, are often inconsistent due to the administrators’ (evaluators) and teachers’ limited time and capacity. A survey conducted (University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2013) on Chicago Public Schools new REACH program (a modified cognitive-based teacher evaluation system) found that 70% of school administration identified the extensive time requirements as being the “biggest challenge in implementing the new system” (p. 25). Due to the importance of rating reliability, administrators are required to conduct frequent and ongoing observations and feedback sessions; this far exceeds the requirements of more traditional teacher evaluation systems. Schools utilizing versions of cognitive-based teacher evaluation systems spend the time equivalent of one day per teacher per evaluation cycle; this process involves a pre-observation, observation, and post-conference meeting (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Based on the size of the school and district requirements for evaluation cycles, this requirement takes significant time away from school business.

Conclusion

In an era of accountability, school administrators must filter all decisions through the lens of student achievement. Performance evaluation and feedback are not excluded from this expectation. Teachers require specific input to guide their performance reflections, and administrators can provide those opportunities through targeted data collection, guided conversations, and meaningful professional development. Administrators can incorporate elements of cognitive behaviorism into this process as a means of encouraging teachers to make lasting behavioral changes for the betterment of their students. Many of the operational constraints and conflicting duties faced by modern-day school administrators make committing to the application of cognitive behaviorism challenging, as the process of meaningful behavioral change is a significant time commitment for all parties involved. However, school organizations willing to adopt tenets of cognitive behaviorism into their reflective practices, dialogue, and actions would, in turn, truly align their professional culture to a student-achievement focused model. Evaluation meets the need of state legislators and division-level policy makers; however, evaluation without conversation and reflection fails to build the capacity of educators. Through the intentional incorporation of cognitive behaviors, administrators are able to engage their faculty by providing performance data and dialogues intended to enlighten and encourage lasting behavioral changes for the betterment of the learners. Cognitive behaviorism functions as the bridge between supervision and evaluation; the
practice serves as the connection between supported insight and professional review. Future areas of research may include exploring the longitudinal impacts of cognitive behavioral approaches during the supervision and evaluation of teachers. Another aspect of study is to compare regionally aligned school programs that engage in different forms of feedback and supervision, ideally one program engaging in cognitive behavioral approaches, and then compare their associated outcomes on student learning and performance.

References


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