A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Teachers Evaluated

Utilizing a State-Mandated Teacher Evaluation System

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Abstract

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological inquiry was to examine educators’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they were evaluated utilizing a state-mandated evaluation system. This research study was designed to reveal an in-depth view of how evaluation was experienced by eight kindergarten through sixth grade educators in Ohio. Educators participated in three in-depth interviews and anonymous interactive blogging from which data was collected and analyzed. By utilizing a phenomenological approach to this research, participant narrative profiles were created and thematic connections that were consistent across profiles were identified. This study revealed that the evaluation process failed to act as the growth model it was intended to be. Themes emerged from the data that identified specific qualities of the evaluative experience that were of concern to all participants. The implications of these findings are discussed as they relate to administrators, teachers, and educational policies.
I dedicate this dissertation to my truly amazing husband, Mike Hornberger. Mike - you have been and always will be my everything. Since the time we were kids, you have always been there to tell me I could whenever I thought I couldn’t. You have pushed me to accomplish things in my life that were not even conceivable at the outset. And, on top of all of that, you have partnered with me to create the most amazing and beautiful family – it’s all truly more than I ever could have imagined. Thank you. Thank you for being that ever constant calming and strong person who provides me with immeasurable support every single day. Thank you for teaching me that I am beautiful by seeing inside of me and loving all parts of me unconditionally. You complete me, you amaze me, and you will always and forever be my true love.
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Also to my school family; you all kept me moving forward and provided endless laughs and good times. As a result of this research, I now understand how you feel when I walk into your classroom as an evaluator – thank you for your trust and for opening yourselves up to the evaluation process. Thank you for seeing beyond the state and district mandates and putting our students’ well-being first every single day.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The question of how to evaluate effective teaching is an issue that all stakeholders (i.e. teachers, principals, parents, etc.) in education continue to examine in an effort to guarantee that students have the best possible educational experiences. According to Marshall (2009), teachers are evaluated in order to improve teaching and learning as well as to close the achievement gap. Marshall elaborated, “The principal’s most important job is getting good teaching in every classroom. The achievement gap widens every day that children are subjected to an ineffective or mediocre teacher, and good teaching has the potential to narrow it” (Marshall, 2009, p. xvi). Research suggests that teacher evaluations are most effective when educators are involved in setting guidelines for evaluation and are evaluated using strong standards that embrace professional development with multiple measures of student growth rather than the sole use of value-added data for individual teacher evaluations (Behrstock-Sherratt et. al, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Donaldson & Papay, 2012; Little, 2009; Mihaly et al., 2013; Partee, 2012 Sartain et al., 2011).

The focus of this qualitative inquiry was to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. This study examined eight teachers’ experiences at the primary (kindergarten through grade six) level in a suburban Ohio school district. This study was a heuristic phenomenological inquiry focused on uncovering the meaning within teacher’s experiences with the evaluation system (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Heurism was the ideal methodology for this study because of the depth of my own experiences with evaluation. I have experienced evaluation as an educator and have also conducted over
100 evaluations as a principal utilizing the state mandated evaluation system. Throughout the heuristic research process, the researcher was deeply and personally involved, and this involvement added an additional richness and depth to the findings of the inquiry (Moustakas, 1990).

Specifically, I used in-depth and intensive iterative interviews as well as live interactive private blogging to reveal the lived experiences of eight educators as they traversed the evaluative process (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Seidman (2013) explained that interviewing “is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues” (p. 13). My personal experiences as both an evaluated teacher and a credentialed evaluator/administrator were important aspects of this inquiry because heuristic phenomenological inquiries emphasize knowing through personal experience. According to Patton, “It exemplifies and places at the fore the way in which the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry” (2002, p. 109). Thus, my personal experiences with evaluation allowed a connection to this inquiry so that a deeper meaning could be achieved.

**Personal Context**

Hull (2013) contends that, for decades, teacher evaluation was an exercise that failed to identify true excellence and/or mediocrity in teaching. Hull stated, “Previous evaluation systems were inadequate. They identified nearly all teachers as satisfactory or not, without offering any useful feedback or direction to teachers on how they can improve” (2013, p. 2). Due to this inadequacy, reforming teacher evaluation systems has been an integral part of the wide-sweeping Race to the Top educational reforms that are
taking place throughout the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Race to the Top is a grant program that was put into place by the federal government to incentivize states to reform educational processes in such a way that student outcomes are substantially improved (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Through Race to the Top, states are called on to “design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 9). These evaluation systems are expected to measure effectiveness in multiple categories (e.g. differentiation, professionalism, lesson delivery), take into account student growth data, and be designed and developed with stakeholder involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

I have had varied experiences with teacher evaluation, both as a teacher being evaluated, and as an administrator conducting evaluations. Further, as a member of our Race to the Top district Transformation Team, I have had unique opportunities to observe and participate in the decision-making process as it relates to the district evaluation protocol. The Race to the Top Transformation Team is a district-level group of educators who are charged with writing the Race to the Top yearly scope of work and overseeing the educational reforms within the district. These experiences have shaped my beliefs about effective evaluation procedures and how to effect true change and improvement in classroom instruction.

I began my teaching career in 1997, as a fifth grade teacher in a Midwestern, middle-class suburban school district. At that time, the evaluation system in place was a basic process that began with setting two to three job targets (Appendix A) for the school year. These job targets were essentially goals to be used as a guide for instructional
improvement throughout the course of the year. They were to be revisited at the end of the school year as part of the evaluation summary (Appendix B). In addition to the job targets, one observation was conducted by the building principal during the school year (Appendix C). The teacher characteristics observed during the observations were marked as effective, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory. The characteristics being assessed during the observation included the following:

a. Knowledge and understanding of the subject matter was evident.
b. Class activities related to instructional objectives.
c. Class activities were organized and effectively paced.
d. Opening activities were well planned and smoothly conducted.
e. Closing instructions, including an assignment, were clear and understandable.
f. Teacher interaction was positive and productive.
g. There was appropriate classroom control.
h. Students were on task.
i. Classroom was neat and attractive.

When conducting an evaluation, the evaluator used a rubric/evaluation tool with the above mentioned criteria to monitor/look for evidence. The evaluation tool also included an area where the evaluator could make anecdotal comments and recommendations to the teacher (Appendix C).

The evaluation cycle ended with a summary conference between the evaluator and the teacher, during which time the evaluator completed a more in-depth checklist that again required answers of effective, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory in regards to a multitude of educator practices (Appendix B). At the end of the checklist, the evaluator
recommended to the superintendent a specific contract level (i.e. two year, one year, non-renewal) for the teacher, and then both the evaluator and the teacher signed the form. After five years of successful observations and evaluations using the above mentioned process, teachers within the district were offered a continuing contract otherwise known as tenure. Once a teacher successfully met the criteria for a continuing contract, the evaluation process was adjusted. Instead of being observed by the building principal on an annual basis, these teachers were formally observed every three years using the same process previously discussed. During a year when a teacher was not observed by the principal, they were required to choose one of four options defined by the agreement between the local education association and school board members. Teachers could choose to write a self-reflection, which required them to analyze their professional goals; submit an evaluation written by a peer or colleague; or conduct a student or parent survey (Appendices D, E, F, G for complete forms).

This traditional evaluation process did not include the key elements of comprehensive teacher evaluation systems as identified by Hull (2013): “Broad stakeholder involvement throughout the process; the use of multiple measures, including data on student achievement and classroom practices; clear policies on how the information will be used; and the necessary resources and support to help teachers achieve those outcomes” (p. 1). This traditional evaluation system remained in place until changes were made due to my district’s participation in the Race to the Top national educational reforms. Race to the Top was put into place in 2009 when president Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act [Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115, 516] (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). This act provided $4.35
billion dollars to the Race to the Top fund, which was set up as a grant program to incentivize state participation in specific core reform areas that included the following:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, pg. 2)

As part of my district’s participation in Race to the Top, staff members were approached and asked to voluntarily take part in a pilot of the new state evaluation system, known as the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) during the 2012-13 school year. Feedback from the pilot would then be used by the Race to the Top district Transformation Team to make decisions as to what the district evaluation system would look like for future school years, since the state did allow for some district-level decision-making in that regard (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). The state-created OTES rubric (see Appendix H, Tables 1-6) that was used by our district was not required by law; it could also be used as a model for districts to create their own rubrics with specific required elements included as part of the evaluation (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). Our district chose to use the rubric that was created by the state.

For the 2012-13 school year, OTES was comprised of two elements that were used in combination to arrive at an overall teacher rating for the school year (Ohio
Half of the teacher’s overall rating was based on what was identified as teacher performance (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). Teacher performance was assessed through observation by a credentialed evaluator using a rating rubric consisting of indicators based on the *Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). The evaluator gathered evidence through teachers’ professional growth or improvement plans, two formal observations, walkthroughs conducted throughout the year, and pre-conferences as well as post-conferences. After all evidence was gathered, a teacher was then assigned a performance rating of accomplished (4), skilled (3), developing (2), or ineffective (1) (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

The other half of the overall teacher rating was student growth measures, as required by the state evaluation system (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). Growth measures are data obtained from various assessments and used in conjunction with teacher performance to secure an overall rating. Growth measure data could be obtained from state assessments or locally developed assessments (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). There were three categories of student growth measures set forth by OTES (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). The first type of student growth measure that was required to be used, if it was available, was teacher value-added data derived from state assessments (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). “Value-added analysis is a statistical method that helps educators measure the impact schools and teachers have on students’ academic progress rates from year to year” (Ohio Department of Education, 2014b, para.4). If value-added data was not available from state assessments, “schools
can choose to use other assessments provided by national testing vendors and approved for use in Ohio” (Ohio Department of Education, 2015a, para.1).

Finally, if neither teacher value-added data nor vendor assessments were available, school districts determined their growth measures using student learning objectives (SLOs), with possible shared attribution if the school district determined it was appropriate. “A student learning objective is a measurable, long-term academic growth target that a teacher sets at the beginning of the year for all students or for subgroups of students. Student learning objectives demonstrate a teacher’s impact on student learning” (Ohio Department of Education, 2015c, para.3). According to the Ohio Department of Education (2015e), “Shared attribution is defined as a student growth measure that can be attributed to a group. This measure can be used to encourage collaborative goals and may be used as data in the student growth component of teacher and principal evaluation” (para.1).

During the OTES pilot, district leaders agreed to focus primarily on the teacher performance or observation portion of the evaluation system. This observation process and rubric used to evaluate teachers was much different than the previous process. As an educator who was aspiring to be an administrator during the time of the pilot, I agreed to participate in the pilot program as an evaluated teacher. I felt this experience would help me understand the new model and allow me to embrace the change forthcoming.

Participation in the pilot program created a lot of nervousness for me. After examining the OTES teacher evaluation rubric (see Appendix H, Tables 1-6), I was still unsure about how data/evidence would be collected to document my level of success. The OTES observation rubric focused on specific areas during the pre-conference and
post-conference, as well as the observation (Ohio Department of Education, 2012; see Appendix H, Tables 1-6).

During the pilot program, I had the opportunity to participate in a pre-conference with my evaluator. During the pre-conference, I was required to show evidence on certain domains within the OTES rubric (see Appendix H, Tables 1-6). Such domains included: focus for learning, assessment data, and connections to students’ prior knowledge as well as future learning opportunities (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). To help with the pre-conference process, I chose to prepare a document to show evidence of meeting certain standards. As an initial pilot participant, I felt very unsure of the requirements and fearful that I would omit some crucial detail.

After much reflection and discussion with my evaluator, I realized that some of my current teaching practices needed to be strengthened in order to maximize student success and to meet the OTES rubric level of satisfaction. I came to realize that, while I did consistently connect my learning outcomes to state standards, I was not truly using formative assessments to guide my instruction. Formative assessments are used “to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to improve their teaching and by students to improve their learning” (Carnegie Mellon University, 2015). I realized that I did not assess each student and then plan differentiated curricula to ensure that I was challenging each and every one of them. Instead, I tended to deliver each unit of instruction to the whole group without really accounting for individualized student needs. By using the OTES rubric to help plan my pre-conference, I was able to understand and legitimize the value of this process. The
process forced me, as an educator, to re-evaluate my practice and to focus attention on the areas needed for improvement to maximize student learning.

Under the evaluation system utilized prior to OTES, as explained above, there was no opportunity for reflection and refinement, since it was simply used as a summative check-off of basic expectations. In addition, this was the first time in my teaching career where I sat down with an administrator and took an in-depth look at my practice. I came to recognize ways that I could refine my skills by examining the evaluation rubric and comparing it to my current practice. I also realized areas of professional strength and areas for growth as a result of the conversations and feedback from my administrator.

Stronge and Tucker (2003) stated, “The fundamental purpose of the evaluation process is to improve both the individual’s and the organization’s performance and to advance the mission and the goals of the school system” (p. 74). As I reflect on this process of being the first to be formally evaluated using the new criteria, I can see that the OTES observation process forced me to identify and address areas within my teaching pedagogy that needed refinement. Prior to this experience, I was never forced to be as reflective with the observation process as I was during the pilot program for OTES. My days were always so busy with planning, teaching, and assessment that time for reflection was simply not a priority. The OTES rubric and the conversations with my administrator made reflection a top priority.

As the pilot year for OTES ended, I recall being anxious about my student growth measure (value-added) that would have been the other half of my formal evaluation. During previous evaluation cycles, I was not required to use a student growth measure,
and I did not fully understand the metrics behind value-added, but I hoped my results would mirror my efforts as a classroom teacher. Having never had measures for student growth in the past, this new value-added measure was not something that I thoroughly understood, but I hoped it would be reflective of the efforts that I continually put forth in improving my teaching practice. Coincidentally, I made the transition from a middle school teacher (fifth grade) to an elementary school (pre-school through grade four) principal for the 2013-14 school year. As a principal, my student growth measure would include the level of student growth obtained from all teachers under my supervision. As a principal, I was evaluated under a similar process but using a different rubric called Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES). The nervousness and anxiety that I experienced during the pilot year of OTES increased exponentially. As a school administrator, my efforts on a yearly basis must be aimed at positively impacting student growth and achievement on a much larger scale.

Within OPES, student growth and achievement are measured by the same types of growth measures as are utilized for OTES. According to the Ohio Department of Education (2015b):

The Ohio Principal Evaluation System is a standards-based integrated model that is designed to foster the professional growth of principals in knowledge, skills, and practice. In OPES, student growth measures (50%) combined with evaluation of principals’ proficiency on standards (50%) determine the level of principal effectiveness. (para. 4)

OPES was adopted in 2008 by the Ohio State Board of Education as a resource model to improve principal performance, and it is the model that has been adopted for use by my
school district (Ohio Department of Education, 2015b). Within my OPES evaluation, the growth measures of my entire staff are combined to account for half of my overall evaluation.

Furthermore, as the only administrator and credentialed OTES evaluator in my building, I am responsible for the evaluation of more than 20 staff members each year. This process is time consuming and labor-intensive, and requires approximately six hours total per staff member. The complete cycle includes two pre-conferences, two observations (minimum 30 minutes), two post-conferences, a minimum of two walk-throughs, and a summative conference. Although I see the value in the process, the time it takes to successfully evaluate all staff members has divided my efforts as instructional leader, school manager, and building principal. The process takes at least 10% of the school year, and the pace that it requires for me to complete these evaluations while remaining an effective instructional and building leader does not feel as if it is sustainable over time.

I find that the observation process associated with OTES does lead to a deeper understanding of the educators in my building. As an evaluator, I am able to directly observe specific areas of strength and to reinforce those practices with teachers. In addition, I am able to make suggestions for areas of refinement, as well as guide teachers to resources and colleagues who might be of assistance to them. In my opinion, this observation format is a vast improvement over the format used in prior years in this school district, giving educators an opportunity to work collaboratively with their evaluators to reflect on their current practice and plan for future professional improvement.
However, my experience with student growth measures (data from assessments) has been much different. I have found that the outcomes obtained from certain metrics (Univariate Model and Multivariate Model) are not aligned with observed teaching practices. These two metrics, used for value-added data in the state of Ohio, are defined as follows:

- Multivariate Response Model (MRM) is used for tests given in consecutive grades, like the OAA math and reading assessments in grades three through eight.
- Univariate Response Model (URM) is used when a test is given in non-consecutive grades, such as OAA science assessments in grades five and eight or any End-of-Course tests that may exist in the future. (Ohio Department of Education, 2015f, p. 6)

In my district, there have been many instances where the student growth measures do not align with the observation protocol rubric of the evaluation (e.g. teacher with least effective value-added metrics but skilled observations and vice-versa). This has contributed to skepticism among staff about OTES as a whole and has negatively impacted stakeholder buy-in to the evaluation process.

**Problem Statement**

The question of how to evaluate effective teaching is an issue that all stakeholders in education continue to examine in an effort to assure that students have the best possible educational experiences. The state of Ohio has attempted to answer the question of how to go about evaluating educators with the development of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) framework. According to Stan Heffner, former Superintendent of Public Instruction in Ohio,
The system is research-based, transparent, fair, and adaptable to the specific contexts of Ohio’s districts (rural, urban, suburban, large, and small). It builds on what we know about the importance of ongoing assessment and feedback as a powerful vehicle to support improved practice. (as cited in Ohio Department of Education, 2012)

OTES is comprised of two to three elements that are used in combination to arrive at an overall teacher rating for the school year, depending on whether or not the alternative framework is utilized (Ohio Department of Education, 2012, 2015c, 2015g; Appendix I for alternative framework). Fifty percent of the teacher’s overall rating is based on what is termed teacher performance (Ohio Department of Education, 2012, 2015c, 2015g).

According to the Ohio Department of Education (2012):

Teacher performance is determined by using a rating rubric consisting of indicators based on the *Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession*. The evaluation process requires the evaluator to use evidence gathered through a variety of avenues (professional growth or improvement plan, observations, walkthroughs, and conferences) to determine a teacher performance rating. (p. 5)

After a credentialed evaluator gathers this evidence over the course of a school year, a teacher performance rating of either accomplished (4), skilled (3), developing (2), or ineffective (1) is assigned (Ohio Department of Education, 2012, 2015g; Appendix H, Tables 1-6).

The other 35-50% of the overall teacher rating is referred to as student growth measures, as defined above (Appendix I). There are three categories of student growth measures (Ohio Department of Education, 2012, 2015a, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e, 2015g).
The first type of student growth measure that must be used, if it is available, is teacher value-added data generated from students’ state assessments (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). If value-added from state assessments is not available, vendor assessments (i.e. STAR, MAP, etc.) must be used if they are able to measure growth (Ohio Department of Education, 2015c). Finally, if neither state assessment data nor vendor assessment data are available, school districts must determine a growth measure using student learning objectives (SLOs), with possible shared attribution if the school district determines it is appropriate (Ohio Department of Education, 2015c, 2015e). Shared attribution occurs when a teacher receives a student growth measure that results from the combination of the building or districts’ efforts.

The final component of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System was approved for use during the 2014-15 school year. It is known as the Alternative Framework (Ohio Department of Education, 2015g; Appendix I), and it allows the use of one of the following components to account for as much as 15% of the overall evaluation: student surveys (which must be submitted for approval by the Ohio Department of Education), teacher self-evaluations, peer review evaluations, or student portfolios (Ohio Department of Education, 2015d, 2015g). According to the Ohio Department of Education (2015d), teacher self-evaluations, peer review evaluations, and student portfolios are defined as the following:

- Teacher Self-Evaluation promotes an objective self-reflection of strengths and areas for growth. The reflection should be based on analysis of evidence about effective instructional practices and the impact of those practices on student learning. (para. 3)
• Peer review evaluation is an ongoing process in which the teacher and peer reviewer examine data, performance and student learning. The Peer Review Evaluation tool can be used to promote a collaborative relationship between a teacher and his/her peer reviewer. (para. 4)

• Student portfolios provide documentation of a teacher’s practice in relation to the Standards for the Teaching Profession. As an evaluation tool, student portfolios provide teachers the opportunity to demonstrate how their knowledge and skills result in improved teaching practices and student learning. (para. 5)

A district must choose only one of these alternative components for use throughout the entire district (Ohio Department of Education, 2015d).

Some aspects of OTES, as outlined above, certainly appear to be an improvement over traditional methods of evaluation such as the one I experienced in my early years of teaching. The new process encourages teachers and administrators to engage deeply in reflecting on teaching practice. However, it is unclear as to whether or not this evaluation system will result in improved teacher practice. More importantly, several questions remain unanswered. Does the new evaluation system (OTES) provide a richer experience for teachers, ample opportunities for reflection on current practices, and inspire pedagogical growth? Behrstock-Sherratt, Rizzolo, Laine, and Friedman (2013) pointed out that “even the most well-intentioned education leaders often fail to consider the input of those most deeply affected by teacher evaluation: teachers themselves” (p. x).

In Ohio, the experiences and voices of teachers who are evaluated using the OTES framework system are still, for the most part, unknown.
Purpose of this Inquiry

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to capture the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of teachers as they were evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. As I look back on my past experiences with evaluation as an educator, and as I reflect on my current experiences as an evaluator, I know that there is room for improvement in the process. Educator evaluation has the potential to truly be a growth model (Goe et al., 2011; Goldstein, 2007; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marshall, 2009; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Towe, 2012; Tucker et al., 2003), but only if we acknowledge the fear and anxiety that the current high stakes nature of the process instills in our educators (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Danielson & McGreal, 2000). In order to make improvements to the evaluation system, educator voices and experiences must be honored so that a higher level of understanding can be attained (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Danielson & McGreal, 2000). This study allowed me to become aware of teacher perception regarding the evaluation system and to connect teacher experiences to my own. Furthermore, by employing a heuristic approach to this topic, I was able to achieve a new depth of awareness with regards to the essence of the evaluative experience for individual educators, giving a voice to those who are impacted so profoundly by evaluation.

Research Question

While this study inevitably necessitated an examination of many aspects of the evaluation system, the following question was used to guide this inquiry:

What are teachers’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they are being evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)?
I attempted to reach a deep understanding of this topic through an intensive examination of the context, details, and meaning of teachers’ experiences as they traversed the evaluative process. This was accomplished using an informal three-interview structure.

Furthermore, through my work as both an educator being evaluated through OTES and as an administrator evaluating my teaching staff using OTES, I have had many first-hand experiences that added richness to my findings throughout this inquiry. Thus, this inquiry was phenomenological in nature. Patton (2002) explained, “The only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves” (p. 106). My experiences were documented through reflective journaling, and I utilized the heuristic process to produce a creative synthesis of the research findings.

**Theoretical Framework**

This inquiry was analyzed within the framework of evaluation theory. Evaluation theory is rooted in social accountability, systematic social inquiry, and epistemology (Alkin, 2013). More specifically, this study encompassed aspects of House’s (2005) theories of democratic evaluation. House (2005) defined democratic evaluation as an evaluative process that is representative of a large array of viewpoints and interests. Democratic evaluation works toward including underrepresented and powerless groups as key stakeholders. It encourages these underrepresented and powerless groups to become an integral part of the evaluation process by giving voice to their experiences (House, 2005).
**Introduction to the Literature**

The focus of this research study was evaluation, and teachers’ experiences as they were evaluated, using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. In order to study evaluation systems, researchers must first work from a common definition of evaluation. Chemlinsky (1997), Everitt and Hardiker (1996), and Smith (2001, 2006) have each provided insight into the definition of evaluation as it relates to service organizations. Evaluation is recognized as an essential part of the educational process that is utilized to identify areas of concern and gather information to clarify whether or not current processes, procedures, and methods are effective or in need of improvement (Alkin, 1969; Smith, 2001, 2006). Once this definition of evaluation was further clarified, evaluation theory must then be understood. Alkin (1969) discussed evaluation theory at length in his published article entitled *Evaluation Theory Development*. House (2003), Mark (2005), and Shadish, Cook, and Leviton (1991) expanded upon evaluation theory in their published works.

Once definitions of evaluation and evaluation theory were thoroughly examined, the literature review then focused on teacher evaluation in general. This included a discussion of the history of evaluation and how teacher evaluations are used. Next, teacher effectiveness as it relates to evaluation systems was reviewed. In addition, the research related to using student growth measures as predictors of teacher effectiveness was included in the literature review. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of evaluation reform was reviewed. Finally, the critical components of evaluation for professional growth and teachers’ perspectives on evaluation were examined.
Methodology

This study was a qualitative examination of how educators experienced OTES in an Ohio School District. This study embraced the heuristic phenomenological response to inquiry. This type of inquiry focuses on intense human experiences from the point of view of both the investigator and others who are involved in the study (Patton, 2002). A phenomenological study “focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 107). Further, heuristic inquiries are filled with reflections, discoveries, and personal insights from the researcher; so much so that these types of studies result in depictions of essential meanings that encompass the essence of the person in the experience (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) stated, “Heuristic research epitomizes the phenomenological emphasis on meanings and knowing through personal experience; it exemplifies and places at the fore the way in which the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry” (p. 109).

Summary

This research study examined teacher evaluation through multiple lenses. At the heart of evaluation lie the goals of both student and educator growth. Many aspects of evaluation can contribute to the effectiveness of the process. However, are there opinions and experiences with regards to the evaluation process that have been overlooked? Could these viewpoints and insights lend themselves to a more complete and comprehensive process if they are given appropriate consideration? This study utilized a heuristic phenomenological framework to shed light on these unheard educator voices – the voices at the heart of the evaluation process.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Evaluation, evaluation theory, teacher effectiveness and educator evaluation reform measures are frequently discussed and explored in the literature. Therefore, it is important to conduct a review of the available literature in order to develop a firm basis upon which to build this particular research study. This chapter begins with an examination of the theoretical foundation of this research study as it relates to evaluation and evaluation theories. Next, an examination of the history of teacher evaluation is juxtaposed with an examination of how teacher evaluations are currently being utilized. Teacher effectiveness is another major theme that will be explored in this review of the literature. In addition, research focused on using student growth measures as predictors of teacher effectiveness is reviewed. Moreover, to help contextualize this study, the related literature is reviewed and current evaluation reform measures are outlined. Furthermore, specific components of effective evaluation for professional growth are set forth. This extensive review of the literature will clarify current knowledge and understanding related to teacher evaluation. Finally, teacher perspectives on evaluation will be presented as a key consideration when studying evaluation reform.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

The focus of this qualitative inquiry is to describe the experiences and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. In order to examine evaluation systems and their impact on educators, researchers must first work from a common definition of evaluation as it relates to service organizations. In addition, evaluation theory must be examined in order to build an understanding of how current evaluation practices have come to fruition in the field of education. The
following sections will provide an operationalized definition of evaluation and discuss
the theory and evolution of teacher evaluations.

**Definition of evaluation.** A working definition of evaluation can help researchers
determine the goals of evaluation systems and articulate evaluation theory. Alkin (1969)
explained, “To start with, in the development of a theory, it is necessary to reach
agreement on a definition of evaluation. Most would agree that a major failing of
evaluation today stems from the lack of an adequate definition” (p. 2). Thus, Alkin
(1969) specified the following definition of evaluation: “Evaluation is the process of
ascertaining the areas of concern, selecting appropriate information, and collecting and
analyzing information in order to report summary data useful to decision-makers in
selecting among alternatives” (p. 2). It is from this definition of evaluation that Alkin
worked to develop models of evaluation theory for educational programs (1969, 2013).

Smith (2001, 2006) explained that evaluation is an integral part of the educational
process. Smith traced the history of evaluation in the United States back to the expansion
of many federal programs in the 1930’s, and supplied the definition of evaluation as “the
systematic exploration and judgement of working processes, experiences, and outcomes.
It pays special attention to aims, values, perceptions, needs, and resources” (Smith, 2001,
2006, p. 2). Specifically, Smith (2001, 2006) specified that evaluation can be utilized to
prove something is working or needed, or it can be used to improve current practices and
projects.

Everitt and Hardiker (1996) also established that evaluation should be used to
ensure good practice within organizations. They set forth seven principles that should be
present in any evaluation system. Within these principles, they emphasized the
importance of ensuring that all stakeholders, regardless of position or status within the educational organization, have an opportunity to present their opinions. In addition, Everitt and Hardiker (1996) advocate for evaluation systems to acknowledge the interplay between power, powerlessness and empowerment, as well as the development of an authentic dialogue between evaluators and those being evaluated. Furthermore, they explained that the goals and purpose of the organization should remain at the forefront of the evaluation process, and the organization should encourage an environment of openness with regards to questioning and criticism both within and outside the organization. Finally, Everitt and Hardiker (1996) advocated for, “the removal of ‘otherness’ that may be attributed to those lower in the hierarchy, to users and to those relatively powerless in the community” (p. 35). Whether or not these principles are present in the statewide evaluation system that is examined in this research study will become evident through the intimate examination of participant experiences within the system.

Furthermore, Everitt and Hardiker (1996) cautioned against approaches to evaluation that were primarily quantitative in nature. Their concern was that evaluation was becoming “the repertoire of those controlling policy and resource allocation mechanisms” (p. 83). Instead, they advocated for the idea of quantitative measures being used as openers to discussions and questions that might allow for a more in-depth examination of current practices. This recommended use of quantitative measures is in contrast to the use of student growth measures in the current state-mandated evaluation system that is the topic of this research study. Student growth measures will be further discussed in this literature review. Rather than acting as a conversation-starter, these
growth measures are isolated and comprise as much as 50% of the teacher’s evaluation for each school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2014a).

Chelimsky (2012) also expressed concern about the dichotomy between what evaluations are intended to measure and how the methodology can skew results. Specifically, Chelimsky (2012) identified the advent of the single narrative as an increasingly popular method of evaluation that is less sophisticated and more political than earlier evaluation methods. Chelimsky (2012) stated, “We see the narrative again in education (with respect to both unfounded assumptions about charter schools, and the notion that bad teachers are the single cause of poor student outcomes)” (p. 81). To avoid the distortion of the evaluation process and provide for government accountability, Chelimsky (2012) made several suggestions for future evaluation methodology, including providing measures to deal with politically skewed evaluations, using the final evaluation report as a vehicle to shine light on shadowy areas of program and/or policy, assembling review panels in neutral environments, and encouraging the American Evaluation Association to initiate an inquiry into the distortion of evaluation through its Ethics Committee. Finally, Chelimsky warned against the consequences of evaluation as a single narrative, stating,

We do not get all the facts, and the facts we are given may not be facts at all. This affects us in at least three ways: in our ability to think clearly about public problems, in our ability to perform meaningful evaluations, and in our ability to use those evaluations to improve accountability and transparency in government. (2012, p. 82)
Thus, it is important to keep at the forefront the definition and purpose of evaluation as decisions are made and as goals for the evaluative process are set forth.

**The development of evaluation theory.** As a result of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [Public Law 89-10], the Center for the Study of Evaluation was established and sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education (Alkin, 1969). With M.C. Alkin serving as director, this organization was devoted to examining educational evaluation, specifically with three objectives: “to develop a theory for the study of evaluation; to develop methods and instruments for measuring program effectiveness; and to provide a scientific basis for program and policy decisions in education” (Alkin, 1969, p. 2).

Alkin (2013) explained that “evaluation theory is rooted in social accountability, systematic social inquiry, and epistemology” (p. 11). Social accountability refers to the importance of evaluation in investigating whether or not programs funded by the government are effective, while systematic social inquiry “emanates from a concern for employing a methodical and justifiable set of procedures for determining accountability” (Alkin, 2013, p. 11). Finally, epistemology is the root of evaluation theory that addresses the nature of knowledge. Alkin (2013) elaborated, “Those in evaluation who have historically and are currently engaged in epistemological discussions typically draw on one of three broad areas of thinking: (1) postpositivism, (2) constructivism (and related thinking), or (3) pragmatism” (p. 16).

Shadish (1998) advocated for a deeper knowledge of evaluation theory, especially among evaluators because it is central to the evaluation profession. He also conceded the following in regards to evaluation theory:
Parts of evaluation theory are empirically based, but especially given the youth of our field, much more of it is hypothetical, conjectural, and unproven, still waiting to be tested…it is not a single theory but rather a set of diverse theoretical writings held together by the common glue of having evaluation practice as their target. (Shadish, 1998, p. 2)

Alkin (2013) identified more than 26 evaluation theorists (i.e. Campbell, Cronbach, Scriven, Stufflebeam, Wholey, Chelimsky) who have contributed to these theoretical writings about evaluation in the areas of methods, valuing, and use; all of which form the basis for current evaluation theory and practice.

Mark (2005) also concurred that evaluation theory exists so that it can be used as a guide to practice. He explained that evaluation theories are essential in synthesizing prior experiences so that theorists and researchers learn from the past mistakes, successes, and/or experiences of others. Further, Mark (2005) pointed out that “comparing evaluation theories is a useful way of identifying and better understanding the key areas of debate within the field. Comparative study of evaluation theory likewise helps to crystallize what the unsettled issues are for practice” (p. 1). Finally, Mark (2005) presented the rationale that the study of evaluation theory helps to solidify evaluators’ identities, both collectively and individually.

Chelimsky (1998) also touched on the idea that evaluation theories help to ferret out ideals for the practice of evaluation. In particular, Chelimsky (1998) identified five implications for theory that are based on experiences in the practice of evaluation:

1. The need to change the way we view stakeholders;
2. The need to rethink how we use goals and objectives;
3. The need for inclusiveness;

4. The need to re-think criteria for deciding when to do an evaluation; and

5. The need to re-think our views on the use of evaluation. (1998, pp. 44-50)

Chelimsky (1998) explained that there are advances being made to the body of knowledge of evaluation, but called on evaluators to continue to consider the above areas as evaluation theory and practice continue to evolve.

Likewise, House (2005) advocated for evaluation to evolve into a more democratic process by becoming more representative of a larger array of viewpoints and interests, by promoting additional stakeholder involvement in the process, and by providing opportunities for open discussion and deliberation. House (2005) stated the following regarding to democratic evaluation:

Its three key components are inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation. Inclusion means working with underrepresented and powerless groups as key stakeholders in the evaluation, not just the sponsors and powerful stakeholders; extensive dialogue increases the chances of evaluators understanding stakeholders and stakeholders understanding each other; and extended deliberation is careful reasoned discussion of issues, values, and findings by all concerned. (House, 2005, p. 7)

**Application of Theoretical Foundation**

In order to develop a deeper understanding of educators’ experiences and perceptions while being evaluated using a state-mandated teacher evaluation system, a working definition of evaluation must first be established. Evaluation is recognized as an integral part of the educational process through which areas of concern are identified and
information is gathered to ascertain whether or not current processes, procedures, and methods are effective or in need of improvement (Alkin, 1969; Smith, 2001, 2006). A number of evaluation theorists have opined that evaluation methods should include all stakeholders, especially those who are viewed as powerless within the process and that the evaluation process should include multiple voices to avoid a politically-controlled single narrative as the final product (Chelimsky, 2012; Everitt & Hardiker, 1996; House, 2005).

In addition, evaluation theorists have repeatedly posited that evaluation theory is shaped by evaluation practice. Therefore, it is advisable that evaluators have a depth of knowledge about evaluation theory so that it can be utilized as a guide to practice (Mark, 2005; Shadish, 1998). Furthermore, this understanding of evaluation theory can help to ensure that evaluators learn from both past mistakes and successes in the field, while also allowing the field of evaluation to continue to evolve (Chelimsky, 1998; Mark, 2005). Therefore, in order to successfully research the topic of educator evaluation, developing both an understanding of evaluation theory, as well as establishing a working definition of evaluation, are essential aspects of this inquiry.

The theoretical lens of evaluation theory will be used in the context of this inquiry to illuminate both strengths and weaknesses in the state-mandated evaluation system that is the topic of this study. This lens is most appropriate because evaluation theorists have stated that evaluation methods should be created with ample input from all stakeholders (Chelimsky, 2012; Everitt & Hardiker, 1996; House, 2005). While the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) is used to evaluate Ohio educators throughout the state, it is unclear as to whether or not these educators feel that their opinions and input have been
included in the creation and use of the evaluation system. Thus, the aim of this research study is to illuminate educators’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of the OTES evaluation system, thereby also illuminating the extent to which these stakeholders feel involved in evaluative decision-making, as is the ideal according to many evaluation theorists.

**Teacher Evaluation**

In order to build a deeper understanding of teachers’ experiences while being evaluated using a state-mandated teacher evaluation system, an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of teacher evaluation must first be realized. Marshall (2009) explained that, under ideal conditions, there should be a mutual understanding between principals and teachers as to what good teaching looks like. In addition, Marshall (2009) elaborated that principals must regularly visit classrooms to see typical teaching in action, while also identifying and remembering key points from the classroom visit. Next, principals should give feedback on effective practices, as well as areas for improvement (Marshall, 2009). Teachers must then be able to understand the feedback and use it to improve classroom procedures and practices in order for student achievement to be positively impacted by the evaluative process (Marshall, 2009). The struggle, however, is that it is quite difficult to ensure all of these aspects of evaluation are in place, yet the results of teacher evaluations have become very high stakes for teachers, evaluators, and schools in recent years (Marshall, 2009).

Even more importantly, Stronge and Tucker (2003) explained, “Without capable, high quality teachers in America’s classrooms, no educational reform effort can possibly succeed. Without high quality evaluation systems, we cannot know if we have high
quality teachers” (p. 3). Stronge and Tucker (2003) further identified two purposes of the evaluation process: improving performance and documenting accountability. They argued that improved teaching leads to school improvement (Stronge & Tucker, 2003). Thus, by examining both the history of teacher evaluation, as well as how teacher evaluations are currently being used, a deeper understanding of this research study can be achieved.

**History of teacher evaluation.** Teacher evaluation has changed in the United States based largely upon societal views about the goals of the educational process. According to Goldstein (2014), we can develop an understanding of American views on the teaching profession by examining the history of teaching in the United States. She posited that American teachers are so often both resented and idealized due to “the tension between our sky-high hopes for public education and the vehicle of meritocracy and our perennial unwillingness to fully invest in our public sector, teachers and schools included” (Introduction, para.7).

Goldstein (2014) traced the feminization of American teaching to the 1800’s and the common schools movement. At that time, women were assumed to lack intellectual capacity when compared to their male counterparts; however, the focus was on developing children’s character (Goldstein, 2014; Kober, 2007). Basic literacy and numeracy were the extent of the academic focus in many schools, and women were seen as having a natural ability to deal with young children and could also be employed for far less money than a man (Goldstein, 2014; Kober, 2007).

According to Goldstein (2014), the value system for education in the United States in the 1800’s, in which morality was more heavily weighted than intellect, began
to set American schools apart from their European counterparts. In addition, in the 1800’s, the emergence of the common school politicized education (Viteritti, 2008). Viteritti (2008) explained, “Because it was always assumed that the common curriculum would go beyond the basics to incorporate certain fundamental values to which we should all subscribe, the common school created a crucible for fierce disagreement” (p. 67). In addition, extremely low pay and poor working conditions at the time led to the creation of teachers’ unions at the turn of the century (Goldstein, 2014). Around the early 1900s, education reformers also began to advocate for tying teachers’ raises and promotions to their evaluations conducted by school principals, as well as to teachers’ performance on written exams (Goldstein, 2014). Furthermore, “between 1910 and 1945, secondary schools expanded rapidly, the graduation rate rising from 10 percent to 45 percent” (Bracey, 1997, para. 12). However, while there were abundant complaints about academic results at this time, schools were not typically blamed for these deficiencies (Bracey, 1997).

Goldstein (2014) also noted a change in the demographics of teachers in public education in the 1930’s through the 1950’s. Initially due to the high unemployment rates brought on by the Depression, educators became increasingly male, more diverse, and more educated, sometimes to the point of being overqualified (Goldstein, 2014). As a result, boards of education were able to put into place very stringent intellectual requirements for aspiring educators. However, standards for teachers remained subjective and were typically created by administrators and educational institutions (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). According to Cruickshank and Haefele (2001), “Schools, school districts, and colleges cranked out checklists and rating scales that
scored such traits as professional attitude, understanding of students, creativity, control of class, planning, individualization, and pupil participation” (p. 26). By the 1970’s, nearly all public school systems had specific written evaluation procedures for educators (Stronge & Tucker, 2003).

In 1966, the Coleman Report was published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and this report asserted that students’ socioeconomic background influenced student achievement more than teachers did (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). Educational researchers pushed back against these findings by attempting to research and identify specific qualities of effective teachers (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). Cruickshank and Haefele (2001) also explained that paralleling this movement to specify what constitutes effective teaching, the amount of student achievement testing was increasing. They stated, “As a result, we have become more focused on the product - better student scores on standardized tests - and on rewarding teachers who succeed in teaching to the test (p. 27).

Stronge and Tucker (2003) explained, “Prior to the 1970’s, the focus of teacher evaluation was primarily summative. Principals made their judgements about the teachers’ performance and recommended retention or dismissal with little or no feedback to teachers for improving their practice” (Stronge & Tucker, 2003, p. 13). Advocates began to suggest a formative approach to evaluation that was more focused on teacher participation in the process and provided guidance as to how to improve instruction (Stronge & Tucker, 2003).

In the 1980’s, the teacher testing movement was born, in which “teachers or teachers-to-be had to pass tests developed by state education departments or by such
national organizations as the Educational Testing Service and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards” (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). In addition, in the 1990’s, the focus shifted to new research being done around value-added measures. Goldstein (2014) explained that the student achievement testing that had been conducted since the 1970’s provided researchers with an unprecedented amount of student data. Goldstein (2014) explained “Statisticians and economists have used this achievement data to ask a much narrower question: Which teachers raise or lower a child’s test scores? Value-added measurement is the method researchers developed to find an answer” (pp. 202-203). In recent years, education reformers have attempted to partner these value-added measures with an observational framework to create state-mandated evaluation systems such as OTES.

With regards to the recent use of value-added measures as part of a teacher’s evaluation, the American Statistical Association released a statement in 2014 addressing the use of these models for educational assessment. Specifically, they presented key questions that states and districts should consider when using value-added models (American Statistical Association, 2014). First, they caution that value-added models (VAMs) are only as reliable as the information that comprises a particular assessment. They stated, “Ideally, tests should fully measure student achievement with respect to the curriculum objectives and content standards adopted by the state, in both breadth and depth. In practice no test meets this stringent standard…” (American Statistical Association, 2014, p. 4).

In addition, the American Statistical Association (2014) expressed concern that classroom-level differences, such as class size and teaching high-needs or gifted students,
are not accounted for in particular VAM regression models. Further, they call for all value-added scores to always include an explanation of their measures of their precision and a discussion of possible biases (2014). Finally, they caution that “overreliance on VAM scores may foster a competitive environment, discourage collaboration and efforts to improve the educational system as a whole” (American Statistical Association, 2014, p. 6).

In addition to these concerns about value-added models, Hoover (2014) stated the following:

Having studied and researched VAM for a number of years, I will say without hesitation that value added as it is used in high-stakes education accountability systems represents a truly remarkable example of politicians and policy makers ignoring a vast amount of good research in favor of ideological and special-interest group motivations. (p. 1)

Specifically, Hoover (2014) cited similar concerns about test validity as those brought to light by the American Statistical Association (2014). Further, he pointed out concerns related to asymmetry. “For example, if teachers and administrators are held accountable for student achievement, but students are not, then there are likely to be concerns about the degree to which students put forth their best effort in taking the tests” (Hoover, 2014, p. 2). Finally, Hoover voiced his concern that there is an inappropriate assumption being made that there is a one-to-one correspondence between teacher and student achievement. He stated, “Value-added metrics assume that teachers are the direct cause of student scores—that a specific teacher’s effects are revealed directly and fully by standardized
test scores. Value added *assumes* that teacher effects are significant, specific, and precisely quantifiable when they are not” (Hoover, 2014, p. 4).

To address the observational piece of educator evaluation, Beerens (2000) defined three main reasons for conducting teacher evaluation:

- To improve teacher effectiveness
- To encourage professional growth
- To remediate or eliminate weak teachers. (p. 9)

To meet these needs, Beerens developed a Growth-Focused Evaluation process that addresses the need for both formative and summative feedback, that promotes relationships between administrators and teachers in order to foster educator growth, that focuses on what quality curriculum and instruction look like, and that uses multiple sources of data chosen with teacher input (Beerens, 2000).

Likewise, in 1996, Danielson set forth a framework for teaching to be applied to teacher evaluation. Danielson described her framework as comprehensive because she believes it is broad enough to encompass all of the complexities of teaching, including the following four domains: (1) Planning and Preparation, (2) The Classroom Environment, (3) Instruction, and (4) Professional Responsibilities” (2007, pp. 22-23). The basics of this framework have continued to be updated, most recently with the 2013 edition, in which Danielson incorporated the implications of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) into the existing framework evaluation instrument (Danielson, 2013).

Danielson’s framework was used by the Ohio Department of Education as a model for the creation of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). Goldstein (2014) pointed out that one possible downside to
Danielson’s framework is that, historically, frameworks with so many competencies included within them (Danielson’s has 22) have not been viable over the long-term due to large amounts of time and paperwork. Further, Goldstein (2014) stated the following in regards to the Danielson framework:

> Principals either go through the motions without making meaningful distinctions among teachers, or they find ways to use the great number of subjective variables in these rubrics – for example, “compliance with standards of conduct,” – in Danielson’s framework – as a way to target disfavored teachers for dismissal, regardless of more objective measures of performance. (p. 235)

**How teacher evaluations are used.** Stronge (2006) explained that a synergistic balance is necessary when performing teacher evaluation and when examining and utilizing the results of evaluation so that the goals of both the teacher and the school as a whole can be met. When there is a lack of balance between these two entities, there can be a lack of progress within the school environment or stakeholders can be deprived of opportunities for improvement (Stronge, 2006). Stronge elaborated by declaring, “A teacher assessment and evaluation system that is built squarely upon individual and institutional improvement holds the promise of filling this need and better serving our students and our communities” (p. 21).

There is little doubt that teacher evaluation results are being used to shape policy and practice decisions in school districts throughout the United States. For example, Ramirez, Lamphere, Smith, Brown, and Pierceall-Herman (2011) examined teacher evaluation practice and policy among school districts throughout Colorado. The research team reached consensus that “teacher evaluations overwhelmingly tend to be events
devoid of context” (Ramirez et al., 2011, p. 98). Furthermore, they found that the evaluation process tends to overwhelm administrators because the focus is on compliance and meeting demands to evaluate a certain number of teachers by an imposed deadline. In addition, Ramirez and colleagues (2011) explained, “Our observations led us to the conclusion that school district policy interprets instruction in narrowly defined terms and teachers’ evaluations are circumscribed by a set of forms and checklists” (p. 98).

Researchers also found that, despite the fact that state expectations were for districts to implement evaluation policies and procedures based on ample stakeholder input, most districts had adopted very similar policies, procedures, and forms (Ramirez et al., 2011). They concluded that practices throughout school districts in Colorado fall short of the state’s policy goals. However, they stated, “The flaws in the teacher evaluation and development policies are in the system itself and not the people who are subjected to the policies” (Ramirez et al., 2011, p. 98). This study points to the possibility that teacher evaluation policies and expectations may fall short when they are put into practice.

Though limited in scope, Master’s (2013) research findings from an independently managed charter school district appear to support Ramirez et al.’s findings with regards to the narrow scope of teacher evaluation systems. Master (2013) utilized an exploratory factor analysis to determine “the extent to which autonomous school administrators’ formative evaluations of teachers predict a variety of future personnel decisions” (p. 1). Master found that administrators’ ratings impacted future personnel decisions, and that there was a high level of complexity in assessing teacher contributions within a school (Master, 2013). Master concluded, “Evaluation systems that account for
the potential complexity and diversity of teachers’ contributions by including more holistic and flexible measures of their performance may be more responsive and ultimately more effective at improving student outcomes” (Master, 2013, p. 18).

Kimball and Milanowski (2009) utilized a mixed-methods approach to identify schools with more and less valid results when using value-added student achievement data in conjunction with teacher evaluation ratings to form the basis of a standards-based evaluation system. They explained that standards-based evaluation systems consist of the following:

These systems contain public standards and detailed rating scales, which provide guidance to evaluators in making judgments, potentially lowering subjectivity by establishing a common criterion reference for evaluating teacher performance. Standards-based evaluation systems also typically call for more varied sources of evidence about teachers’ practice than traditional evaluation approaches and for more extensive training of evaluators, who are typically school principals.

(Kimball & Milanowski, 2009, p. 36)

They pointed out that there has been criticism about using standards-based evaluation systems because they are seen as attempting to simplify the complex act of teaching. In addition, Kimball and Milanowski (2009) explained that because these types of evaluation systems are being used to encourage specific teacher practices and are tied into compensation systems, careful examination of standards-based evaluations is warranted.

Their findings also indicated that there was a high level of complexity in attempting to identify and assure the use of good evaluation practice. They reached this
conclusion because they were unable to accurately identify specific evaluator practices that were associated with higher validity. They were, however, able to determine the following:

Providing evaluators with relatively detailed rubrics or rating scales describing generic teaching behaviors thought to promote student learning, coupled with initial training in applying them, is not enough to ensure that all evaluators’ ratings will be positively related to student achievement. If policy makers and program designers want evaluation scores to be more highly related to some criterion such as student achievement, it will take more than specific rubrics and basic training of evaluators in the process to achieve a strong relationship.

(Kimball and Milanowski, 2009, p. 65)

These findings do have strong implications for carefully analyzing and scrutinizing current evaluation systems. Kimball and Milanowski (2009) advocated for the addition of incentives to evaluators for accurate evaluations, oversight that is focused on encouraging evaluators to differentiate individual evaluations, and continual practice accompanied by feedback from trained evaluators.

Likewise, Valli, Croninger, and Walters (2007) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the relationship between teacher practices and student learning. They indicated that their “findings on multiple teacher influences on student learning raise questions about both the feasibility and desirability of teacher accountability systems” (2007, p. 653). This is due, at least in part, to students having multiple teachers involved in their instruction over the course of a day, particularly if the student is part of an at-risk population (Valli et al., 2007). Valli and colleagues (2007) explained:
If the patterns of multiple influence we saw are typical of schools with relatively high degrees of poverty, special needs students, and diverse linguistic populations, it is more sensible to hold entire schools accountable for student achievement than to seek to parcel the individual effects of teachers. (p. 654) Overall, these researchers identified a conflict between the push for increased teacher collaboration and the push for higher levels of individual teacher accountability (Valli et al., 2007). If teachers are expected to work as teams to positively impact student achievement, it would stand to reason that teacher evaluation systems should take into account this expectation.

On the other hand, standards-based teacher evaluation scores may prove instrumental in identifying inequalities in our educational system. For example, Borman and Kimball (2005) utilized the standards-based teacher evaluation score coupled with student achievement results to determine that high-quality teachers are not evenly distributed among all student populations:

Students from poor, minority, and low-achieving backgrounds have access to teachers of lower quality, as reflected in teachers’ evaluation scores. Better teachers may be assigned, and seek out assignments, to classrooms with more advantaged, nonminority, and higher-achieving students. This inequality could represent an important mechanism that systematically constricts the educational opportunities offered to students from less advantaged backgrounds. (p. 17) Researchers also pointed out, however, that it is also possible that teachers in these particular classrooms may be perceived to be of lower quality due to an overall school culture and climate that is lacking (Borman and Kimball, 2005). Interestingly, Borman
and Kimball (2005) found that even high-quality teachers were unable to close the gap between high and low achievers within their classrooms.

Further, Conley and Glasman (2008) examined how fear plays a part in the possible uses of teacher evaluation results. They explained that, particularly in the last decade, teacher evaluation results may be used as grounds for possible dismissal from the job; the fear of these high-stakes types of evaluations can then lead to a less than desirable evaluative environment (Conley & Glasman, 2008). They stated the following:

Individual teachers fearing a summative evaluation may be less than forthcoming about their performance shortcomings and/or goals, and supervisors may hesitate to give teachers detailed feedback. The result is that teachers may fear that evaluation is less about personal improvement involving professional growth and more of a political hurdle. (Conley & Glasman, 2008, p. 68).

Therefore, the entire evaluation process may be compromised when educators fear how the evaluation outcomes will be used.

Conley and Glasman (2008) advocated for identifying the sources of fear and then working toward controlling the sources of fear utilizing various strategies. They identified the following sources of fear within the evaluation process for educators:

a) The prospect of losing control and autonomy in one’s work,

b) Working in an atmosphere of organizational rigidity and inflexibility, and

c) Failing to be continued in one’s profession and/or lacking a sense of continuous skill development or career progress. (Conley & Glasman, 2008, pp. 75-76).
Some of the varied methods used to address these sources of fear might include changing the adversarial tone of evaluation, encouraging collaboration and teamwork among educators, facilitating administrator and teacher partnerships in the analysis of student learning, and increasing union participation (Conley & Glasman, 2008).

According to Marzano, Toth, and Schooling (2012), the ultimate use of teacher evaluation should be to positively impact student learning. They explained, “As teachers’ classroom instructional practice improves, districts should see a corresponding improvement, measurable and consistent, in student achievement” (Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012, p. 1). In order to accomplish this goal, they posit that the ideal evaluation model is one that is used to plan and provide individualized professional development tailored to teachers’ specific strengths and weaknesses (Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012). “It will rely on frequent observations across different lessons and sections of students; it will provide ample opportunities for focused feedback; and it will build teacher expertise over time” (Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012, p. 6).

Summary of Teacher Evaluation

Goldstein (2014) explained that an understanding of American views on the teaching profession in general, and teacher evaluation in particular, can be developed by examining the history of teaching in the United States. In addition, the roots of the evaluative process in schools can be traced back to the colonial period, with the primary focus being a summative evaluation that either recommended retention or dismissal (Stronge & Tucker, 2003). It wasn’t until the 1970’s that the focus of teacher evaluation began to change into a formative process that focused on how teacher professional growth might have a positive impact on student achievement (Stronge & Tucker, 2003).
However, even as the process became more formative in nature, standards for teachers remained subjective and were typically created by administrators and educational institutions (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001).

In the 1980’s, the teacher testing movement was born (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001), and in the 1990’s, the focus shifted to new research being done around value-added measures (Goldstein, 2014). In regards to the recent use of value-added measures as part of a teacher’s evaluation, the American Statistical Association released a statement in 2014 addressing their concerns over the use of these models for educational assessment. Specifically, they presented key questions that states and districts should consider when using value-added models (American Statistical Association, 2014). Hoover (2014) echoed these same concerns with regards to the use of value-added models for evaluator assessment.

In recent years, education reformers have attempted to partner value-added measures with an observational framework to create state-mandated evaluation systems such as OTES. Beerens (2000) created a growth-focused evaluation process that addressed both the need for formative and summative feedback, as well as promoted positive relationships between educators and administrators so that professional growth might be more readily achieved. Furthermore, Danielson (2007) created a comprehensive research-based framework that could be used in many different educational environments. Danielson’s (2007) framework was described as comprehensive because it was broad enough to be used to assess educator performance both within and outside of the classroom. However, Goldstein (2014) cautioned that, historically, frameworks with a large number of competencies such as Danielson’s may
not be viable over the long-term. In addition, she explained that sometimes subjective variables on these types of rubrics can be used subjectively to target disfavored teachers for dismissal (Goldstein, 2014).

In addition, teacher evaluation has been used to accomplish varied goals and meet varied needs within the educational system. In some studies, teacher evaluation has been found to interpret instruction in narrowly defined terms, while shaping policy and practice decisions (Ramirez et al., 2011). Researchers have suggested that current teacher evaluation systems could be improved with increased complexity and diversity within the systems, as well as with increased oversight, incentives, and training for evaluators (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009; Master, 2013). There is also conflict within the system in that administrators have encouraged increased collaboration within their teaching staffs, while being pressured and/or required to utilize individualized teacher accountability measures (Valli et al., 2007).

On the other hand, Borman and Kimball (2005) were able to uncover inequalities in the distribution of high-quality teachers that could have a significant impact on student achievement. This information might be used to identify and possibly remedy these inequities in the educational system. However, even teachers who were identified as high quality were unable to close the gap between high-achieving and low-achieving students (Borman & Kimball, 2005).

Conley and Glasman (2008) explained that how teacher evaluation results are used, including to possibly justify dismissal from employment, instills fear in educators. They posited that this fear contributes to a less than desirable evaluation environment in which professional growth is not as likely (Conley & Glasman, 2008). When the
evaluation process is impeded, the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement is less likely to be accomplished (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012). Additional research in the area of teacher evaluation is needed both to assure that optimal conditions for student achievement are understood, and so that teacher evaluation can be utilized as a tool to assure best practices in every classroom.

**Teacher Effectiveness**

Gordon, Kane, and Staiger (2006) cited that it is widely accepted among education researchers that there is “wide variation in the effectiveness of teachers, even after adjusting for student characteristics such as baseline test performance, race/ethnicity, family income, gender, and so on” (p. 8). In response to this evidence, they made five recommendations in order to improve teacher effectiveness by increasing the numbers of new teachers, setting forth minimum competencies that must be demonstrated on the job, and encouraging the most effective teachers to work in the most needy schools.

Thus, in order to positively impact overall teacher effectiveness, Gordon, Kane and Staiger (2006) recommended the following:

1. Reduce the barriers to entry into teaching for those without traditional teacher certification.
2. Make it harder to promote the least effective teachers to tenured positions.
3. Provide bonuses to highly effective teachers willing to teach in schools with a high proportion of low-income students.
4. Evaluate individual teachers using various measures of teacher performance on the job.
5. Provide federal grants to help states that link student performance with the effectiveness of individual teachers over time.

Many of these recommendations have since been implemented in the state-mandated teacher evaluation system that is the focus of this study (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

Partee (2012) examined state strategies that were being used to determine teacher effectiveness as part of the educational reforms sparked by the No Child Left Behind Act as well as Race to the Top educational initiatives. Partee (2012) explained that, as part of these reform measures, meaningful evaluation systems were being developed throughout the United States. Partee’s report focused on this “very large set of transformations: the multiple measures and multiple methods used in new teacher evaluation systems, including the weighting of these measures to determine a composite score of teacher effectiveness” (Partee, 2012, p. 2).

According to Partee (2012), effective teaching practices are measured by clear standards that are set forth at the state level. Some states have adopted the Model Core Teaching Standards, some have used the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, while others have created research-based standards of their own (as cited in Partee, 2012). Once the standards have been determined, a combination of the following items may be used to determine teacher effectiveness:

- Observations, including feedback from peers, based on rubrics aligned with standards of professional practice.
- Self-assessments and reflection.
- Artifacts – or documents that reflect some aspect of classroom teaching that is not directly reflected in classroom practice.

- Student-learning measures such as samples of student work, including portfolios and research papers.

- Student and parent surveys. (Partee, 2012, p. 12)

The methodologies used to combine these items and determine teacher effectiveness vary by state throughout the United States.

In addition Darling-Hammond (2013), draws a distinction between teacher quality and teaching quality. Darling-Hammond explained that teacher quality is the personal characteristics that an educator brings to the teaching profession. Research has shown that the following teacher qualities have a positive impact on teacher effectiveness: a strong content knowledge of the subject area to be taught, as well as a knowledge of how to teach the content to others; an understanding of how to support diverse learners in their academic growth; the ability to make observations and both organize and explain ideas; and expertise in adapting and modifying curriculum and instruction based on student needs (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Darling-Hammond (2013) expanded on this idea by explaining that many parents, policy-makers, and educators would add the following characteristics to these essential teacher qualities:

- support learning for all students,

- teach in a fair, unbiased manner,

- adapt instruction to help students succeed,

- strive to continue to learn and improve, and
collaborate with other professionals and parents in the service of individual students and the school as a whole. (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 11)

Darling-Hammond further explained that teaching quality is distinct from the above teacher qualities because teaching quality is “strongly impacted by the context of instruction, including factors aside from what the teacher knows and can do” (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 12). Therefore, if an educator with strong teacher qualities does not have all of the supports needed (environment, curriculum, teaching conditions) to provide high-quality instruction, teaching quality and teacher effectiveness is negatively impacted (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Strong, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman (2008) conducted a research study to “examine what constitutes effective teaching as defined by measured increases in student learning with a focus on the instructional behaviors and practices” (p. 165). They selected a sample of third grade regular education teachers throughout a moderately-sized urban school district located in Virginia. A total of 1,936 students and 85 classrooms were included in the study. The researchers made the assumption that effective teachers were those that achieved above expected growth in student achievement gains on Virginia’s state assessments, as well as Standards of Learning Assessments (Strong, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman, 2008). Researchers then examined the instructional practices of the identified effective teachers. While they found no statistically significant difference in student-teacher interactions when comparing more effective teachers to less effective teachers, they noted that more effective teachers performed better in several areas (Strong, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman, 2008). First, effective teachers provided more complex instruction utilizing a wider range of instructional strategies with a focus
on meaning rather than memorization (Strong, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman, 2008). In addition, effective teachers differentiated assignments more frequently, were more organized and efficient, asked higher-level questions of students, and had higher behavioral expectations for students (Strong, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman, 2008). More effective teachers also demonstrated more respect and fairness toward students, and students were more often found to be on-task in effective teachers’ classrooms (Strong, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman, 2008).

Kane, Taylor, Tyler, and Wooten (2010) also examined teacher effectiveness as it relates to student achievement data. They compared results from Cincinnati’s Teacher Evaluation System (TES), which is based on Danielson’s (2007) Framework, with student achievement gains contained in evaluation data from 2,071 teachers from 2000 to 2007. Their findings indicated the following:

Our results provide some of the strongest evidence to date that classroom observations can capture elements of teaching that are related to student achievement. Our estimates show a positive and non-trivial relationship between TES scores and student achievement growth. (Kane et al., 2010, p. 27)

In particular, teacher improvement in teaching practices and classroom environment skills as measured by the TES framework appeared to have a positive impact on student achievement gains (Kane et al., 2010). However, Kane and colleagues (2010) cautioned that they could not exclude relationships between students’ achievement gains and other practices not measured by TES.

Also, Stronge, Ward, and Grant (2011) conducted a cross-case analysis that examined the connection between teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Their
study consisted of two phases. They explained, “By comparing the findings from the observational phase of the study (Phase II) with the findings derived from the value-added assessment of teacher effectiveness (Phase I), our intent was to shed light on the elusive connection between teacher effects and teacher practices” (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 342).

Stronge, Ward, and Grant (2011) examined the practices of the selected top- and bottom-quartile teachers as identified in Phase I to determine how their teaching practices differed. Thirty-two of these teachers were observed by trained graduate students and retired educators. The researchers noted that they did have small sample sizes that weakened the statistical power of the comparisons and, since teachers had to agree to participate in Phase II, this may have skewed results as well (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).

With regards to how classroom practices differed in these two groups of teachers, researchers found that “bottom quartile teachers had disruptions in their classrooms every 20 minutes, whereas top-quartile teachers had disruptions once an hour” (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 348). In addition, teacher effectiveness was rated in 4 domains by the observers; top-quartile teachers scored significantly higher in two of the four areas (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). First, top-quartile teachers scored significantly higher in classroom management by establishing routines, monitoring student behavior, and using time efficiently and effectively, and in classroom organization by securing necessary classroom materials, creating the physical layout of the classroom, and using space effectively (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).
Second, top quartile teachers scored significantly higher in personal qualities including exhibiting fairness, respect, and having positive relationships with students (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). As a result of these findings, Stronge, Ward, and Grant (2011) concluded, “Although various educational policy initiatives may offer the promise of improving education, nothing is more fundamentally important to improving our schools than improving the teaching that occurs every day in every classroom” (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 351).

In another study focused on teacher effectiveness, Stronge, Ward, Tucker, Hindman, McColsky, and Howard (2007) examined if there was a difference in teacher effectiveness between National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and Non-National Board Certified Teachers. Researchers conducted this study using four North Carolina school districts which were selected due to the demographics of the districts and the availability of NBCTs in the districts (Stronge et al., 2007). Phase I of the study examined the relationship between National Board Certification and student achievement results. Phase II of the study then examined how NBCTs compare to both high-performing and low-performing non board-certified teachers as measured by student achievement results.

Stronge and colleagues (2007) explained, “Current policies in many states are based on an underlying assumption that the National Board certification process identifies highly qualified teachers who effect better than average student achievement gains” (p. 204). The findings of this research study did not support this assumption. The researchers explained that other studies regarding National Board certification and the relationship to student achievement results have used different methodologies, different
student populations, and different teacher populations, thereby contributing to a lack of a clear pattern of results. Stronge et al. (2007) noted, however, “Student achievement is just one educational outcome measure. It does not address the extent to which NBCTs might promote more learner engagement, motivation for lifelong learning, or students who enjoy their educational experience to a greater extent” (p. 204).

Furthermore, Grant, Stronge, and Popp (2008) partnered with the National Center for Homeless Education and The College of William and Mary to explore effective teaching as it relates to at-risk and highly mobile students. They identified teachers to participate in the study based on having won a state or national award for teaching excellence and teaching in schools whose student population consisted of a high amount of mobility, poverty, and/or homelessness (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008). The researchers then utilized effective teaching frameworks to focus their work in gathering observational data while conducting six case studies of effective teachers who work with at-risk students. These case studies revealed that effective teachers focused on two main areas in their classrooms: delivery of instruction and the importance of student/teacher relationships (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008). In particular, Grant, Stronge, and Popp (2008) explained, “the teachers maintained high student engagement, used a variety of instructional activities, and focused on a wide range of cognitive levels in the questions asked as well as the instructional activities” (pp. vii-viii).

**Summary of Teacher Effectiveness**

In conclusion, identifying measures of teacher effectiveness is an integral part of teacher evaluation. Gordon, Kane, and Staiger (2006) advocated for minimizing barriers for entry into the teaching profession, making tenure more difficult to achieve, providing
bonuses to effective teachers who commit to working in high-need schools, using various on-the-job measures to evaluate teachers, and providing additional funding to states who tie student performance measures to evaluations of teacher effectiveness. The majority of these recommendations have since been implemented in the state-mandated evaluation system that is the topic of this study.

Furthermore, Partee (2012) identified the specific components that were being used throughout the United States to determine teacher effectiveness. These components included observations, self-assessments, various classroom artifacts, student learning measures, and student and parent surveys (Partee, 2012). In addition, Darling-Hammond (2013) drew a distinction between teacher quality and teaching quality. Darling-Hammond defined teacher quality as the personal characteristics that an educator brings to the profession, while specifying that teaching quality is dependent upon the supports that are imperative for an effective learning environment and for high levels of teacher effectiveness.

In addition, researchers have identified multiple qualities of effective teaching that appear to have a positive impact on student achievement (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Kane et. al., 2010; Stronge, Ward, & Grant 2011; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2008). These qualities included implementing specific instructional strategies, utilizing various classroom management techniques, and fostering specific types of relationships with students (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Kane et. al., 2010; Stronge, Ward, & Grant 2011; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2008). On the other hand, Stronge et al. (2007) were unable to find a correlation between National Board Certification as a measure of teacher effectiveness and student achievement gains. These
researchers explained that this may be due to the fact that student achievement is just one possible indicator of higher levels of teacher effectiveness; others might include the amount of learner engagement, prolonged student motivation, and enjoyment of educational experiences (Stronge et al., 2007).

Tucker and Stronge (2005) explained the following regarding teacher effectiveness:

We know intuitively that these highly effective teachers can have an enriching effect on the daily lives of children and their lifelong educational and career aspirations. We now know empirically that these effective teachers also have a direct influence in enhancing student learning. (p. 2)

Thus, teacher effectiveness lies at the heart of a positive educational experience for students. Therefore, it also lies at the heart of teacher evaluation.

**Student Growth Measures as Predictors of Teacher Effectiveness**

For many years, school accountability has been measured by examining the number of students who have reached a minimum level of proficiency (Battelle for Kids, 2011). However, these measures were found to be limiting because they gave no indication of student growth over the course of the school year. Student growth has been defined as “a comparison of the test results of a student or group of students between two points in time where a positive difference would imply growth” (Battelle for Kids, 2011). According to Battelle for Kids (2011), the leading organization in Ohio offering school improvement services, student growth measures are being used for a variety of purposes throughout the United States. They caution that, while growth measures can be used as one possible indicator of teacher effectiveness, it is “a disservice to the profession to
distill the complexities of teaching and learning to a single measure” (Batelle for Kids, 2011, p. 8).

Papay (2011) conducted a research study examining the correlation between the value-added estimates of three different reading achievement tests and teacher performance. Papay (2011) explained that some researchers do acknowledge that value-added methods represent a substantial improvement over traditional analysis based on test score levels. However, he also cautioned that the research community has not reached a consensus about the usefulness of value-added data when considering compensation and accountability policies (Papay, 2011).

Utilizing three different reading achievement tests to explore their estimates of teacher effectiveness, Papay’s findings indicate that “using different achievement tests produces substantially different estimates of individual teacher effectiveness” (2011, p. 166). Further, Papay’s research found that the varying test formats (content, item format, scaling, sample) did not explain the differences; rather, “test timing and inconsistency, such as measurement error, play a much greater role” (Papay, 2011, p. 166). These findings legitimize concerns about using the results of these tests to make determinations regarding teacher accountability policies.

In addition, Hill, Kapitula, and Umland (2010) recognized that value-added models are increasingly being used in research, evaluation, and compensation plans for educators. They explained, “Most research on value-added scores has, to date, been purely quantitative. Missing are studies that examine the relationship between value-added scores and the characteristics they are assumed to represent: good teaching and, by extension, good teachers” (Hill et al., 2010, p. 795). Therefore, they conducted a mixed
methods study in which they linked teacher value-added scores to quality of instruction and knowledge for teaching (Hill et al., 2010). Further, they also examined teacher value-added and student characteristics, such as student background, special education status, and other attributes (Hill et al., 2010). The results of their research were as follows:

We did find evidence that teachers’ value-added scores from some models converged with expert ratings of their instruction, but we also uncovered evidence that these same scores correlated somewhat with aspects of the composition of students in a teacher’s classroom. We also found that while a substantial number of teachers were classified similarly by their value-added and observational scores, a large minority were not. (Hill et al., 2010, p. 825).

These findings substantiate Papay’s (2011) findings and again raise concerns about the use of value-added scores in making decisions about teacher promotion, retention, and compensation policies.

Harris, Ingle, and Rutledge’s (2014) study of the correlation between teacher effectiveness ratings and teacher value-added ratings also uncovered inconsistencies in this method of evaluating teachers for the purpose of determining overall effectiveness. They brought to light an additional concern that “teacher evaluation based on value-added is also likely to reduce emphasis on teachers’ personal traits like sociability and ability to work well with multiple school actors – traits that school principals currently value highly, but that are more weakly related to value-added” (Harris et al., 2014, p. 2). If these characteristics are important in the school environment, yet are not effectively
measured with teacher value-added structures, how will teachers receive feedback and encouragement to work toward developing these important classroom habits?

Further, in their mixed methods analysis, Harris and colleagues (2014) found that principals tend to give higher evaluations to teachers based on their efforts and that there is a possibility that there is some internal conflict between principals’ organizational goals and their instructional expectations. They explained:

Ironically, as more demands are placed on principals to evaluate teachers, principals may be forced to lean on their teachers to perform other important duties – the same outside-the-classroom activities that policymakers are, intentionally or not, pressuring principals to downplay. More aggressive accountability may also change the nature of teacher-principal relationships.

(Harris et al., 2014, p. 33)

This focus on teacher value-added scores and specific identified instructional strategies to the exclusion of other teacher personal traits may have a detrimental impact on the effective functioning of the building as a whole.

Likewise, Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, and Wyckoff (2013) found that “effective teachers have better command over certain skills than less effective teachers” (p. 465). However, they also found that “other instructional elements are not associated with gains in student learning as measured by value-added” (Grossman, et al., 2013, p. 465). This appears to be a common thread throughout the current value-added literature; teacher value-added data may be indicative of some aspects of high-quality instruction, but it may not offer a full picture of overall educator quality.
However, while it is imperative to identify the many concerns about the use of value-added data, it is also important to understand that some researchers have identified what they believe are benefits of examining teacher value-added data. For example, Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) researched whether or not teachers assigned to students from kindergarten through fifth grade have an impact on sixth grade achievement. Their findings indicated the following:

The present study demonstrated that teachers affect student achievement positively and that teacher effects persist through the sixth grade for mathematics, reading, and science achievement. This finding highlights the importance of identifying effective teachers in elementary grades and studying the characteristics that describe effective teachers. (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011, p. 383)

Furthermore, they found that, while extended exposure to highly effective teachers (as measured by teacher value-added data) in elementary grades resulted in a substantially positive effect, extended exposure to less effective teachers resulted in a significantly negative effect on student achievement (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011, p. 383). Konstantopoulos and Chung summarized that the teacher effects in their study correlated to nearly a year’s growth for students (2011). This led them to the conclusion that teachers matter, particularly in the early grades (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011). “In addition, the cumulative teacher effects were substantial and highlighted the importance of having effective teachers for multiple years in elementary grades” (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011, p. 384).
The use of value-added data in this study allowed Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) to have a more in-depth perspective on the impact that teacher quality has on student achievement. Moreover, using this data to help deepen the understanding of the impact that high-quality teachers can have on students over time is quite different from using teacher value-added data on a yearly basis to make high-stakes decisions. Research is still unclear as to whether or not it is appropriate to use teacher value-added data as part of that decision-making process.

Betebenner and Linn (2009) explained, “There is a tremendous interest in measuring growth and in using growth as part of accountability systems for both teachers and schools” (p. 19). There are many approaches, however, to measuring student growth, and each approach attempts to answer different questions. Therefore, the selection of a growth model should be made based upon the questions that are most important to school stakeholders (Betebenner & Linn, 2009).

Betebenner and Linn (2009) cautioned against assuming that one particular growth model can answer the multitude of questions associated with student progress. Rather, they advocate for the use of growth data as just one piece of information within a larger ecosystem that can help to improve the educational process. Further, the wide-scale availability and use of quantitative growth data to measure quality can lead to “narrowed curriculum, gaming the system (e.g., focus on bubble students), overemphasis on test preparation, as well as the frustration and demoralization of those most involved with school improvement efforts” (Betebenner & Linn, 2009, p. 19).

In contrast, Chetty, Friedman and Rockoff (2011) utilized a quasi-experimental research design to examine whether teachers with high levels of value-added improved
students’ long-term outcomes and whether or not value-added data provided an unbiased estimate of the impact on student achievement. Using this particular research design analyzing data from 2.5 million children in grades 3-8, they found that existing teacher value-added measures were informative on the long-term impact on students. Specifically, they stated the following:

Students assigned to high-VA teachers are more likely to attend college, attend higher-ranked colleges, earn higher salaries, live in higher [socioeconomic status] SES neighborhoods, and save more for retirement. They are also less likely to have children as teenagers. Teachers have large impacts in all grades from 4 to 8. On average, a one standard deviation improvement in teacher VA in a single grade raises earnings by about 1% at age 28. (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011, p. 2).

However, even in light of such positive findings, Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff (2011) explained that their study did not parse out issues surrounding teacher merit pay and salaries or other methods of raising the level of teacher effectiveness.

Koedel and Betts (2009) utilized Stanford mathematics test data from fourth grade students in the San Diego school district to examine value-added gains for teachers’ classes over multiple years. They found that sorting bias can be an issue when considering the validity of value-added teacher estimates particularly when only one year of data is considered (Koedel & Betts, 2009). Sorting bias is essentially the practice of students not being randomly assigned to teachers. However, “sorting bias can be almost completely mitigated using the value-added approach and looking across multiple years of classrooms for teachers” (Koedel & Betts, 2009, p. 4).
Although Koedel and Betts (2009) found that multiple years of data increased the accuracy of value-added measures, there were still limitations in their study findings. They explained that “less detailed value-added models that include teacher-effect estimates based on single classroom observations fare poorly in our analysis. That some value-added models will be reliable but not others, and that value-added modeling may only be reliable in some settings are important limitations” (Koedel & Betts, 2009, p. 4).

On the other hand, Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, and Rothstein (2011), summarized research acknowledging the accuracy of value-added models. Their summary identified three significant problems with value-added measures:

1. Value-added models of teacher effectiveness are highly unstable.
2. Teachers’ value-added ratings are significantly affected by differences in the students who are assigned to them.
3. Value-added ratings cannot disentangle the many influences on student progress.

(Darling-Hammond et. al., 2011, p. ii)

Thus, they concluded that value-added measures are a viable option when examining large-scale studies of overall curricula or teaching practices, but that it is not appropriate to use value-added measures as a primary method for evaluating individual teachers (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2011).

**Summary of Student Growth Measures as Predictors of Teacher Effectiveness**

The issue of how to evaluate effective teaching is complex, with no easy one-size-fits-all answers. Research has shown that analyzing teacher value-added data is an improved method for determining teacher effectiveness when compared to prior methods (Grossman et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2010; Papay, 2011). In addition,
teacher effect, as measured by value-added data, has been shown to have a significant and lasting positive impact on student achievement (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011).

Using value-added data to make employment, policy, and compensation decisions remains controversial. This is due in part to conflicting findings about the relationship between teacher performance/observational data and teacher value-added data (Grossman et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2010; Papay, 2011). Further, as pointed out by Betebenner and Linn (2009), utilizing value-added data as the primary method of determining educator and school effectiveness can lead to unintended negative consequences including the demoralization of school employees.

Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff (2011), on the other hand, found that teachers with high levels of value-added had a significantly positive impact on students over the long-term, but still cautioned that their study did not address implications about the types of policies that ensure high levels of teacher effectiveness. Likewise, Koedel and Betts (2009) found that using multiple years of value-added data to determine teacher effectiveness increased the reliability of the measure; however, they viewed the variability in value-added results as a limitation of the usage of such data. Darling-Hammond et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis finding value-added measures to be highly unstable and variable from year-to-year depending upon the particular student population.
Evaluation Reform

Marshall (2009) specified a logic model of evaluation that identified specific factors that should be present in order for effective evaluation to take place. These factors include the following:

- Principals and teachers have a shared understanding of what good teaching looks like.
- Principals get into classrooms and see typical teaching in action.
- Principals capture and remember key points from their classroom visits.
- Principals give teachers feedback on what’s effective and what needs to be improved.
- Teachers understand and accept the feedback.
- Teachers use the feedback to improve their classroom practice.
- As a result, student achievement improves. (p. 21)

However, Marshall (2009) explained that evaluation often breaks down in many schools. This is due to a myriad of reasons such as a lack of observed teaching time by administrators or the presence of the administrator during the observation changing the classroom dynamics. Further, teachers tend to showcase a well-planned lesson, rather than exhibiting typical methods of daily instruction. In addition, administrator write-ups may be of poor quality, may miss the bigger picture, might fail to confront mediocre teaching, and may lack suggestions for improvement (Marshall, 2009). Thus, in order for evaluation practices to have a positive impact on teacher effectiveness, these factors must be addressed through evaluation reform.
Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2011) explained, as described above, that it is problematic to use value-added models (VAMs) for making evaluation decisions about regards to individual teachers. They take the position that VAMs are helpful only in large-scale studies in which the influence of specific teaching practices are examined to ascertain the impact on larger numbers of students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011).

However, Darling-Hammond et al. further clarified, “There is a large body of evidence over many decades concerning how specific teaching practices influence student learning gains” (p. 7). They advocate for the inclusion of specific effective teaching practices that years of research have shown positively impact student learning. These effective teaching practices can be measured through the use of standards-based evaluation processes such as National Board Certification, performance assessments for beginning teachers, and instruments used at the school- and district-level that are based on professional teaching standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011). In addition, “These measures may include evidence of student work and learning, as well as evidence of teacher practices derived from observations, videotapes, artifacts, and even student surveys” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011, p. 7). Furthermore, these measures are most effective when they are embedded within a system that ensures evaluators are properly trained, feedback is frequent, and professional development and mentoring are made available to educators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011).

Mihaly, McCaffrey, Staiger, and Lockwood (2013) utilized a statistical model to determine whether or not examining multiple measures of teacher effectiveness improves the accuracy of inferences made by evaluators. They explained the following:
Our goal is to understand how indicators like those that are being considered by states might be combined to improve inferences about a teacher’s impact on student achievement (as measured by state achievement tests or by other tests) and about teaching (as measured by observations and surveys). (Mihaly et al., 2013, p. 7)

Data used for the development of this statistical model were derived from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, which was a multi-year study of teaching performance measures funded by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Mihaly et al., 2013)

Specifically, Mihaly and colleagues (2013) examined data that were representative of the multiple measures being used throughout many districts: student achievement growth, student survey responses, and classroom observations. They found that each of these measures is highly correlated with the component that it is intended to predict. They explained, “Indicators of state value added are the best predictors of a teacher’s impact on state test scores, classroom observation scores are the best predictors of a teacher’s classroom practice, and student surveys are the best predictors of student perceptions of the teacher” (Mihaly et al., 2013, p. 39).

In addition, Mihaly et al. (2013) posited that states and districts must determine priorities when setting weights for multiple measures used in evaluation. More weight placed on any particular dimension will necessarily identify teachers whose strengths are captured within that particular indicator. Furthermore they specified that “more equally weighted composite scores, that average teacher performance across student achievement growth, classroom observations, and student survey responses, will not be optimal for
targeting any particular dimension of effective teaching, but will be close to optimal across many dimensions and more stable across years” (Mihaly et al., 2013, p. 41).

Partee (2012) identified two types of measures of teaching effectiveness: measures of professional practice and measures of student achievement. With regards to professional practice, Partee stated, “Experts stress the qualitative measures used to determine instructional quality or professional practice must be founded on high-quality standards of what is known about effective teaching practices. These standards must be clear and transparent about what effective teaching practice looks like” (2012, p. 11).

Specifically, Partee (2012) noted that the following items may be used to assess professional practice: professional self-assessment as part of a professional growth plan, performance review by a principal, reflections, long-term plans and unit work samples, various artifacts, samples of student work including portfolios and research papers, frequent classroom observations and unannounced visits, and student and parent surveys.

With regards to measures of student achievement and growth, Partee (2012) asserted that “growth models are important because, conceptually they align well with student learning, provide richer information on student learning than any single test score, and focus on the development of individual students” (p. 17). Partee further identified VAMs as the most sophisticated of growth models, but conceded that the use of the VAM is new and controversial. Partee stated the following:

Researchers have found that value-added models of teacher effectiveness do not produce stable rating of teachers, and that evaluation scores can fluctuate from class to class and year to year. Moreover, even under the best circumstances, a
teacher’s efforts represent just one element of many conditions impacting student success. (Partee, 2012, p. 18)

When VAMs are unavailable, states use a range of other student achievement measures, such as district-adopted standardized assessment results or student learning objectives that are determined and agreed upon by teachers and administrators (Partee, 2012).

Little (2009) reviewed the research on five current teacher evaluation systems that have been identified as comprehensive and innovative approaches to evaluation reform. First, Little (2009) found that successful evaluation reform is focused on the development of a credible and meaningful evaluation system. All stakeholders should be involved in the development, revision, and refinement of the system. In addition, valid and credible evaluation measures should be implemented with fidelity. Furthermore, multiple measures of teacher effectiveness should be used to evaluate the many facets of good teaching (Little, 2009).

Second, Little (2009) found that linked and integrated systems are essential aspects of successful evaluation reform. These types of systems include opportunities for career advancement as well as job-embedded, ongoing professional development. Little (2009) explained that evaluation reform must “tie evaluation procedures to curricular standards, professional development activities, targeted support, and human capital decisions” (p. viii).

Considering the use of student achievement data, Little (2009) stated the following:

Research on the use of value-added measures in instructional accountability systems concludes that value-added should be utilized with several caveats and
that much more research is needed to improve our understanding of what these measures are capturing. Value-added may be most appropriate for identifying those teachers at either extreme of the performance distribution, but it is less reliable at ranking teachers in the middle of the distribution and can provide only a limited amount of performance information. (p. 15)

Thus, utilizing multiple measures of performance is a key factor to be considered in evaluation reform. Little (2009) advocated for involving teachers in the discussion about the various types of measures that can be used to successfully measure student growth and achievement.

Behrstock-Sherratt, Rizzolo, Laine, and Friedman (2013) also encouraged teacher involvement in the reform process because they are the stakeholder group most profoundly impacted by evaluation reform. Behrstock-Sherratt and colleagues (2013) set forth the following guidelines for engaging teachers in the reform process:

- Understand the difference between dialogue and debate or negotiation, and know how to encourage the former over the latter
- Be familiar with the principles of authentic engagement, return continuously to evaluate how the effort is aligning with those principles during each step of the process, and be prepared to share and explain these principles with and to others
- Know how the engagement process will unfold: either as a small-scale, informal, teacher-led effort or as a formal feedback channel for a school-or district-level task force
- Have a timeline in mind for the process
- Have established teacher engagement teams. (p. 131)
Once these guidelines are in place, effective and productive conversations about evaluation reform can take place (Behrstock-Sherratt et al., 2013).

Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown (2011) summarized findings from a two-year study conducted in Chicago Public Schools. The study examined Chicago’s Excellence in Teaching Pilot, which provided training and support for teachers and principals by utilizing the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching which required twice-a-year educator observations (Sartain et al., 2011). Sartain et al. (2011) found that the Danielson observation tool was valid and reliable, and that it helped to facilitate productive and meaningful conversations between administrators and staff members. Furthermore, they found that, whatever observation tool is used, evaluator training and support is essential to assure high-quality implementation (Sartain et al., 2011).

On the other hand, the study also revealed several areas of concern. Sartain and colleagues (2011) found that principals were more likely to rate teachers as distinguished in order to preserve relationships with staff members. In addition, both principals and teachers appeared to need intensive professional development in order to hold deep conversations about how to translate the rubric findings into instructional improvement in the classroom (Sartain et al., 2011). Sartain et al. (2011) summarized their findings in the following way:

A successful evidence-based teacher evaluation system must ensure that these tools, ratings, and systems are supported by professional development that help teachers and principals to re-conceptualize teacher evaluation as a process intended to promote and support teacher development and as a vehicle to improve instructional practice. (p. 42)
These findings reiterate the importance of professional development as an integral part of the evaluation process.

Donaldson and Papay (2012) examined the cooperative development and implementation of a new teacher evaluation system in a mid-sized northeastern urban school district. Key stakeholders including school and district leaders, the school board, and the teacher’s union, supported and facilitated the implementation of the evaluation program. Donaldson and Papay (2012) explained that “a key element of the reform is that it has real consequences: some teachers have been recognized as exemplary while others have left the district because of poor performance” (p. 2).

The findings from this study of one school district’s experience with evaluation reform indicated the following:

- Economic, political, and policy factors facilitated the development and success of the teacher evaluation program.
- Collaboration was at the heart of the teacher evaluation program’s creation and development.
- The teacher evaluation program represents both a process and a product.
- The teacher evaluation program’s progress reflects strong leadership coupled with broad input. (Donaldson & Papay, 2012, p. 37-38)

Overall, this study again supports the idea that teacher evaluation should, ideally, be a growth process in which collaboration and broad stakeholder input are highly valued.

Darling-Hammond (2013) also advocates for a systemic approach to evaluating and supporting teaching. This systemic approach should have ample support structures in place to assure evaluators are properly trained, provide professional learning
opportunities for both evaluators and teachers, and be developed based on common statewide standards, with performance-based educator assessments utilized to assess these standards. Darling-Hammond explained, “Initiatives will have the greatest payoff if they stimulate practices known to support student learning and are embedded in systems that also develop greater teaching competence” (2013, p. 141).

Firestone (2014) asserted that current evaluation reform has lost sight of overarching theories of how evaluation works and has instead focused too much on measurement issues and performance-based pay incentives. Firestone (2014) stated, available evidence is discouraging about the efficacy of incentive programs using performance-based pay such as bonuses or salary increases for meeting measured targets. At best constant tinkering is required to make these programs work with complex, public sector jobs. (p. 6)

Furthermore, Firestone conceded that, while effective measurement of data should be part of evaluation reform, there must be a clear understanding of how measurement data either motivates, or fails to motivate, teachers (Firestone, 2014).

Research also suggests that reforming the evaluation process should begin during teacher preparation programs. For example, Hill, Umland, Litke, and Kapitula (2012) compared the congruence between teacher performance on a mathematics assessment, performance in specific domains of instructional practice, and student mathematics outcomes. Hill and colleagues (2012) suggested that this assessment, which is similar to mathematics certification assessments currently being used in the United States, could be used as a first indicator of educator suitability for the job. They elaborated, “This instrument does well in predicting teacher performance, especially around proposed cut-
points…[but]…does not discriminate well for those with test scores in the middle of the distribution” (Hill et al., 2012, p. 491). They concluded that multiple-choice exams such as this can be predictive of future classroom practice and student performance (Hill et al., 2012).

**Summary of Evaluation Reform**

In conclusion, Marshall (2009) identified specific factors that must be addressed for effective evaluation reform. These factors included the possibility that classroom dynamics may change when administrators are present, observations may be infrequent, teachers may showcase atypical teaching strategies, and/or evaluation feedback may be of poor quality, failing to address mediocre teaching and lacking suggestions for improvement (Marshall, 2009).

Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2009) called for reforms that included using value added models only for the evaluation of large-scale teaching strategies and not for the evaluation of individual teachers. Rather, they advocated for the use of evaluation instruments that have been developed based on professional teaching standards and include measures that exhibit student learning through observations and various classroom artifacts used as evidence of effective teaching practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

On the other hand, Mihaly and colleagues (2013) advocated an approach that uses a composite score across three dimensions: student achievement growth, classroom observations, and student survey responses. Partee (2012) identified value-added models as the most sophisticated method to measure student growth, but conceded that these models can still be unreliable and only measure one aspect of student success.
(2009) encouraged diverse and widespread stakeholder involvement in evaluation reform in order to address the narrow focus of value-added models. Specifically, Little (2009) advocated for teachers to be involved in decision-making regarding the types of student measures that will give a meaningful picture of overall student growth and achievement. Behrstock-Sherratt et al. (2013) also encouraged teacher involvement in the reform process because they are the stakeholder group most profoundly impacted by evaluation reform. They set forth specific guidelines that can be followed to assure successful teacher engagement in evaluation reform.

In addition, Donaldson and Papay (2012) and Sartain and colleagues (2011) found that the key to the successful use of a comprehensive teacher observation rubric is ongoing professional development in which both teachers and evaluators are trained to utilize the rubric in a manner that promotes professional growth and improved classroom practices. Darling-Hammond (2013) also advocated for a systemic approach in which ample support structures are in place to assure evaluators are properly trained and professional learning opportunities for both evaluators and teachers are embedded within the system. Furthermore, Firestone (2014) cautioned stakeholders to consider prevailing evaluation theory when initiating evaluation reform. Firestone (2014) further explained that some evaluation incentives, such as performance-based pay, might impact teacher motivation in unintended ways. Finally, Hill and colleagues (2012) found congruence between teacher scores on a mathematics assessment and future teaching practices as well as student performance. Their findings indicated that evaluation reform might start as early as during the teacher preparation process.
Evaluation for Professional Growth

The goal of evaluation reform is an established system that encourages and stimulates educator professional growth. Marzano and Toth (2013) stated, “For well over a decade, the research has consistently demonstrated that an individual classroom teacher can have a powerful, positive effect on the learning of his or her students” (p. 9). What are the key components of an evaluation system that assures that this positive impact on student learning is taking place in all classrooms?

Marzano and Toth (2013) set forth six recommendations to significantly improve current systems of evaluation. First, “Student growth should be measured in multiple ways and aggregated across multiple measures” (Marzano & Toth, 2013, p. 13). Because VAMs have severe limitations, additional measures of student growth, such as assessments across smaller units of instruction, must be collected and aggregated with VAMs to more accurately reflect student learning (Marzano & Toth, 2013).

In addition, assessment of teachers’ pedagogical skills should come from multiple sources over multiple points in time (Marzano & Toth, 2013). Marzano and Toth (2013) explained, “The concepts of teacher observation and the measurement of pedagogical skills must be expanded to provide information from a variety of perspectives. Furthermore, “Teacher behaviors outside the classroom should be considered in teacher evaluation” (Marzano & Toth, 2013, p. 13). Teacher performance in the classroom is preceded by much forethought and planning, and these preparations for instruction should be considered within the evaluative process (Marzano & Toth, 2013).

Marzano and Toth (2013) also stated that evaluation should represent the distribution of skill levels among teachers. They explained, “A system that rates every
teacher highly makes little sense and does little if anything to help struggling teachers get better” (Marzano & Toth, 2013, p. 14). In addition, Marzano and Toth (2013) recommended that the evaluation system be structured in such a way that it enhances teachers’ skills and improves their practice by providing support that assures pedagogical improvement. Finally, Marzano and Toth (2013) advocated for what they termed hierarchal evaluation. They elaborated that teachers do not work in isolation; therefore, “School leaders should be evaluated on the extent to which their actions support teacher development, and district leaders should be evaluated on the extent to which their actions help schools improve” (Marzano & Toth, 2013, p. 14).

Towe (2012) used a mixed methods research design to determine the extent to which a standards-based teacher evaluation system that was implemented by building administrators influenced improved teacher practice and professional growth. Towe (2012) used a teacher questionnaire, teacher and administrator interviews, and a review of state, district, and school documents as data collection sources. Towe’s findings revealed that “teachers and administrators hold similar perceptions about the teacher evaluation process; they view the formative process as having limited impact on improved teacher practice, with the summative evaluation having a greater degree of impact on professional development” (Towe, 2012, p. ii).

Towe (2012) indicated that her study uncovered the following policy implications:

- Implement an ongoing teacher evaluation training program for teachers and administrators.
- Implement a fully-funded professional development program that focuses on differentiated needs of teachers via a wide range of topics.
- Develop a multi-tiered evaluation program that considers years of experience and teacher status.

In addition, Towe (2012) advocated for oversight to assure that all aspects of the teacher evaluation process are implemented with fidelity.

Recommendations set forth by Goe, Holdheide, and Miller (2011) encompassed many of these same essential components to assure that evaluation spurs educator professional growth. To begin with, they specified that well-defined goals should be put into place with the input of all stakeholders. Further, “The methods and weighting used for various components of the resulting system and any actions informed by evaluation results (e.g., professional development targeted to a challenge area) should reflect the evaluation system goals” (Goe, Holdheide, & Miller, 2011, p. 9).

Goe and colleagues (2011) also advocated for securing and sustaining involvement with all stakeholders while also maintaining open lines of communications. In addition, they recommended selecting multiple measures that strengthen teacher evaluation, contribute to educators’ professional growth, and set the stage for improved teaching and learning (Goe, Holdheide, & Miller, 2011). Furthermore, a reliable and appropriate structure must be assigned to the system, evaluators must be thoroughly trained in the use of the system, and data integrity and transparency must be ensured (Goe, Holdheide, & Miller, 2011).

Evaluation results must also be used in a way that aligns with the goals of the evaluation process. Goe et al. (2011) stated the following:
Ensuring that teacher ratings can reliably detect teacher strengths and weaknesses is essential for accurately targeting professional development. Evaluation results can then be used to identify individual, school, and district-wide needs; target professional learning; gauge teacher growth; and identify potential mentors. Providing job-embedded, ongoing, individualized professional learning and support is necessary for teacher evaluation to have positive impacts on teacher practice. (p. 43)

The evaluation system itself must also be evaluated to determine whether or not the system is effective. Specifically, Goe and colleagues (2011) explained that stakeholders must assure that the system is valued and understood, that teacher practice and student performance is improved, and that the system has been implemented with fidelity.

Tucker, Stronge, Gareis, and Beers (2003) conducted a multiyear study to determine the efficacy of portfolios in teacher evaluation, both for accountability and professional development purposes. The researchers utilized a mixed methods approach and enhanced the viability of their findings by triangulation of the following data collection strategies: portfolio review and analysis, surveys, focus groups, and archival record analysis (Tucker et al., 2003).

Their findings indicated that the use of student portfolios enhances the accountability of teacher evaluation and they also contribute to educator professional growth (Tucker et al., 2003). They explained, “Through portfolios, teachers are able to document and highlight not only those areas of teaching that are cornerstones of quality instruction but also their assessment practices and their activities in the areas of professional growth and development” (Tucker et al., 2003, p. 592). Furthermore,
teachers were able to have significant control over the artifacts included in their portfolios, and the artifacts proved useful to evaluators in assuring that educator professional responsibilities were being met (Tucker et al., 2003).

Portfolios were found to be best used in conjunction with other evaluation measures, such as observations, conferences, and surveys. Portfolios were also found to improve educators’ abilities to self-evaluate (Tucker et al., 2003). Tucker and colleagues (2003) summarized their findings in the following way:

Teachers in our study felt empowered by the greater role they played in their own evaluation, and principals felt that they were better informed and better able to distinguish capable teachers from outstanding ones who extended themselves in terms of the quality and consistency of their professional efforts. (p. 593)

Thus, portfolios can be used as an important component of a comprehensive evaluation system that targets educator professional growth.

Goldstein (2007) conducted a longitudinal case study to determine the ways in which peer assistance and review (PAR) can be used to improve the teacher evaluation process. PAR involves having consulting teachers (CTs) who are identified for their excellence in the classroom being released from the classroom for 2-3 years. During this time, CTs provide mentoring to new teachers as well as intervention to struggling veteran teachers (Goldstein, 2007). CTs then report educator progress to a district-wide board comprised of both teachers and administrators. During this time, teachers who are involved in the program must meet specific quality standards or face removal from the classroom (Goldstein, 2007).
Goldstein (2007) found that “the PAR program presented here addressed structural barriers in the system of teacher evaluation that allowed the CTs to achieve results that principals are typically unable to achieve” (p. 497). Goldstein cautioned that these findings are not meant to imply that CTs are more adept at conducting teacher evaluations than principals; rather, the PAR program that was utilized in the study was better able to address common barriers that are present in a more traditional evaluation process (Goldstein, 2007). This study found that a PAR program can prove beneficial in creating a more collaborative distributed leadership model in schools as well as increased professionalization of educators (Goldstein, 2007).

Kane and Staiger (2012) summarized findings in which they investigated the use of various confidential student surveys that were proven to have both high validity and reliability to ascertain whether they could provide valuable feedback about teaching practice. Several key findings were outlined in their study. First, the student surveys were positively associated with gains in student achievement. Kane and Staiger (2012) elaborated by stating “The teachers who more effectively demonstrated the types of practices emphasized in the instruments had greater student achievement gains than other teachers” (p. 5).

Furthermore, combining student achievement growth as measured by state assessments along with student feedback and observation scores improved predictive power and reliability of teacher evaluations (Kane & Staiger, 2012). In fact, “combining observation scores, student feedback, and student achievement gains was better than graduate degrees or years of teaching experience at predicting a teacher’s student achievement gains with another group of students on the state tests” (Kane & Staiger,
Therefore, when considering how to structure evaluations so that they ensure professional growth, student surveys can be used as a powerful piece in the evaluation process.

**Summary of Evaluation for Professional Growth**

In conclusion, there are several key components of an evaluation system that guarantees that professional growth remains the focus for educators. To begin, researchers advocate for the use of multiple measures of student growth and achievement to ensure increased accuracy and reliability (Goe Holdheide, & Miller, 2011; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Tucker, Stronge, Gareis, & Beers, 2003). In addition, the assessment of teacher pedagogical skills should be derived from multiple resources and from multiple points in time (Goe et al., 2011; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013). This broad-based assessment of pedagogical skills should include teacher practices that also occur outside the classroom, such as planning and reflection (Marzano & Toth, 2013).

Furthermore, all aspects of the evaluation process should be aimed at professional growth and improvement (Goe et al., 2011; Goldstein, 2007; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Tucker et al., 2003; Towe, 2012). Marzano and Toth (2013) advocated for school and district leaders to be evaluated on how well they support educator professional growth and development. Evaluators also need consistent and ongoing training to ensure that they are effective in their evaluative roles (Goe et al., 2011; Towe, 2012).

In addition, evaluation systems should have well-defined goals that are agreed upon and set forth by all stakeholders (Goe et al., 2011; Tucker et al., 2003). All
stakeholders should also maintain open lines of communication throughout the evaluative process, and teachers should feel as if they have a voice in decisions about evaluation (Goe et al., 2011; Tucker et al., 2003). Finally, teacher portfolios, peer assistance and review programs, and student surveys are all components of evaluation that can be used to enhance the validity and reliability of evaluation results while also fostering professional growth (Goldstein, 2007; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Tucker et al., 2003).

**Teacher Perspectives on Evaluation**

Behrstock-Sherratt, Rizzolo, Lane, and Friedman (2013) explained the importance of considering teachers’ perspectives when considering methods of evaluation. They stated, “It is only through the inclusion of many voices that the complexities inherent in teacher evaluation can be unearthed and addressed” (p. 5). Unfortunately, many evaluation reform policies have been put into place so quickly that engaging teachers in the process of policy creation has happened as an afterthought, if at all (Behrstock-Sherratt et al., 2013).

VanVeen and Sleegers (2006) utilized a cognitive social-psychological approach to examine how teachers perceived their work within the context of educational reform. Specifically, the researchers focused on how teachers emotionally experience educational reforms and how these emotions relate to the situational demands they are confronted with in their professional lives (VanVeen & Sleegers, 2006). The researchers found that teachers’ reactions to reform depended upon their professional orientations. Teachers with a learning or student-centered orientation toward teaching experienced positive emotions toward education reforms, while teachers with a content- or teacher-centered orientation toward teaching experienced negative emotions toward reforms (VanVeen &
Sleegers, 2006). Overall, the researchers’ findings reinforced the idea that “the manner in which teachers react to educational reforms is largely determined by whether the teachers perceive their professional identities as being reinforced or threatened by reforms” (p. 106).

Craig (2010) utilized a narrative inquiry to examine teacher perspectives of a school reform program within the United States. The researcher identified several notable themes as a result of this study. First, Craig (2010) found that teachers were brought into evaluation reform toward the end of the reform process, thereby causing them to be removed from many of the important aspects of the process. In addition, Craig (2010) found that “our identities as educators directly impacted how we approached our individual practices and how we interpreted what being ethical and professional meant to us in the perplexing situations we encountered.” (Section 7, para. 3). This idea is similar to the findings of VanVeen and Sleeger (2006) noted above. Who educators are as people shapes the way they perceive their teaching role and how they make sense of education reform (Craig, 2010).

Furthermore, another theme that Craig (2010) identified was the inequality of expectations for evaluators as compared to educators. While educators were expected to be transparent in their thinking throughout the evaluation process and were expected to supply copious amounts of evidence, evaluators were not held to the same standard (Craig, 2010). Craig (2010) stated, “Such behavior suggests that evaluation, in this particular case, was as an activity in which the evaluation team engaged in—not one fundamentally grounded in human relationships, interactions, and experiences and respect for the dignity of human beings” (Section 7, para. 4).
McMillan (2015) examined National Board Certified Teachers’ (NBCT) perspectives on using student test scores for teacher evaluation. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather data and coded the collected data to identify major themes and general recommendations for conducting effective teacher evaluations (McMillan, 2015). McMillan explained the following regarding the research findings:

The overall attitude of the teachers toward the use of these measures for teacher evaluation was mixed, though more negative than positive. While a majority indicated that they thought the current approaches (e.g., using pretest-posttests and student goal-setting) were ineffective and bothersome, some thought that there were important potential benefits. (2015, p. 5)

Some of the potential benefits identified by the NBCTs were that the test data might offset potentially unreliable administrator observations and ratings. In addition, several NBCTs felt that using testing data for teacher evaluation might help to emphasize the overall importance of data-driven decision-making and using assessment data to drive classroom instruction (McMillan, 2015).

However, NBCTs felt that, overall, the negatives of using test scores to evaluate teachers outweighed any possible positives derived from this type of evaluation. The NBCTs opined that using assessment data to evaluate educators “could be ‘gamed,’ did not include all relevant contextual and student characteristic influences on learning, did not reflect important learning gains, and demanded even more ‘administrative’ duties and record-keeping that took time away from preparation and actual instruction” (McMillan, 2015, p. 5). McMillan (2015) concluded that the results of this study aligned with other
research findings, advancing the body of evidence that the use of large-scale assessments for teacher evaluation is not effective and may even be harmful.

Summary

In conclusion, educational evaluation is an essential process through which areas of concern are identified and information is gathered to determine the processes, procedures, and methods that are effective and/or are in need of improvement (Alkin, 1969; Smith, 2006). A number of evaluation theorists advocate for evaluation methods that are inclusive of all stakeholders, especially those who are viewed as powerless within the process to avoid a politically-controlled single narrative as the final product (Chelimsky, 2012; Everitt & Hardiker, 1996; House, 2005). Also, because evaluation theory is shaped by evaluation practice, evaluators should have a depth of knowledge about evaluation theory so that it can be utilized as a guide to practice (Mark, 2005; Shadish, 1998). Furthermore, this knowledge can help to ensure that evaluators learn from past mistakes and successes in the field, while also allowing the field of evaluation to continue to evolve (Chelimsky, 1998; Mark, 2005).

In addition, evaluation has traditionally been a summative process until the 1970’s when evaluation started to be viewed as a formative process that had the potential to positively impact student achievement (Stronge & Tucker, 2003). More recently, evaluation has been treated as a growth-focused process in current comprehensive evaluation models, eventually also encompassing educator practices that take place outside of the classroom (Beerens, 2000; Danielson, 2007; Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Furthermore, research has shown that current teacher evaluation systems can be improved by: allowing for increased complexity and diversity within the systems, encouraging
increased collaboration between evaluators and educators, and providing for increased oversight, incentives, and training for evaluators (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009; Master, 2013; Valli et al., 2007).

Areas identified as weaknesses in educator evaluation included inequalities in the distribution of high-quality teachers and the high-stakes nature of evaluation systems that instills fear in educators (Borman & Kimball, 2005; Conley & Glasman, 2008). When areas of weakness within an evaluation system are not addressed, the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement is less likely to be accomplished (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012).

In addition, research has shown that identifying measures of teacher effectiveness is an integral part of teacher evaluation. Specifically, researchers have identified multiple qualities of effective teaching that appeared to have a positive impact on student achievement (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Kane et. al., 2010; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2008). These qualities include implementing specific types of instructional strategies, utilizing effective classroom management techniques, and fostering specific types of relationships with students (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Kane et. al., 2010; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2008).

Furthermore, research has shown that using student growth measures as predictors of teacher effectiveness is an improved method when compared to prior measures (Grossman et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2010; Papay, 2011). In addition, teacher effect, as measured by value-added data, has been shown to have a significant and lasting positive impact on student achievement (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011;
Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011;). On the other hand, caution should be used when contemplating the use of value-added data to make employment, policy, and compensation decisions due to conflicting findings about the relationship between teacher performance/observational data and teacher value-added data (Darling-Hammond et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2010; Papay, 2011).

Researchers such as Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), Mihaly et al. (2013), and Partee (2012) also have specific recommendations when it comes to evaluation reform. They advocated for the use of evaluations based on teaching standards and multiple measures rather than the sole use of value-added data for individual teacher evaluations. Furthermore, increased teacher involvement in evaluation reform was also identified as beneficial to the reform process (Behrstock-Sherratt et al., 2013; Little, 2009). Finally, increased professional development was identified as another key aspect of evaluation reform (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Donaldson & Papay, 2012; Sartain et al., 2011).

Finally, in order to ensure that evaluations have a positive impact on professional growth, the use of multiple measures of student growth is key to ensure increased accuracy and reliability (Goe, Holdheide, & Miller, 2011; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Stronge, Gareis, & Beers, 2003; Tucker et al., 2003). In addition, teacher observation and evaluation should take place consistently and repeatedly over an extended period of time (Goe et al., 2011; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013). Furthermore, professional growth and improvement should remain at the heart of the evaluation process (Goe et al., 2011; Goldstein, 2007; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Towe, 2012; Tucker et al., 2003).
Evaluators also need consistent and ongoing training to ensure that their evaluations are effective, and goals for evaluation should be well defined and developed in collaboration with all key stakeholders (Goe et al., 2011; Towe, 2012; Tucker et al., 2003). Finally, teacher portfolios, peer assistance and review programs, and student surveys can be used to enhance the validity and reliability of evaluation results, while also encouraging professional growth (Goldstein, 2007; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Tucker et al., 2003).

In researching teacher perspectives on evaluation, VanVeen and Sleegers (2006) utilized a cognitive social-psychological approach to examine how teachers perceived their work within the context of educational reform. The researchers found that teachers’ reactions to reform depended upon their overall professional orientations. In addition, Craig (2010) utilized a narrative inquiry to examine teacher perspectives of a school reform program within the United States. Craig (2010) found that teachers were not included during much of the planning that was part of the reform process. In addition, the findings indicated that who educators are as people shapes the way they perceive their teaching role and how they make sense of education reform. Furthermore, Craig (2010) identified an inequality of expectations for evaluators and educators. McMillan (2015) examined National Board Certified Teachers’ (NBCT) perspectives on using student test scores for teacher evaluation. Overall, McMillan’s (2015) study revealed that NBCTs viewed the negative impacts of the use of assessment data for educator evaluation to be more profound than any possible positive benefits gleaned from the use of such data.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of eight teachers who were evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. The school district involved in the study is located in Ohio and utilizes the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) as its method of evaluation, as required by state law. OTES was formulated in response to the Race to the Top educational reforms that have taken place throughout the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The federal government initiated Race to the Top to encourage state participation in educational reforms that are targeted to improve student growth and achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Evaluations utilizing the OTES framework began in the district during the 2013-14 school year. This comprehensive evaluation system is a significant change when compared to the evaluation system that the district had in place in years past. As was the case in many districts throughout the country, the prior evaluation system simply identified teachers as satisfactory or not, without feedback about specific teaching practices or suggestions for improvement (Hull, 2013). The OTES framework is more comprehensive than the prior evaluation system because it incorporates the following areas: developing a focus for learning; planning for and using assessment data; incorporating prior content knowledge, sequencing, and connections; exhibiting knowledge of students; lesson delivery; level of differentiation; use of resources; classroom environment; and professional responsibilities (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).
The educators involved in this study are employed at the primary level (kindergarten through grade six) within the school district. This grade band was chosen because this is where I have acquired all of my teaching and administrative experience, and the heuristic nature of this inquiry allowed me to more easily relate my own experiences to teachers in the same grade band. Using a heuristic phenomenological approach, this study focused on uncovering the meaning within teacher’s experiences with the evaluation system (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). According to Moustakas (1990), “The focus in a heuristic quest is on recreation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person” (pg. 39). Specifically, I used a live private interactive blog that allowed participants to communicate their experiences with the evaluation process as it took place. In addition, I used in-depth and intensive iterative interviews that attempted to draw on the following four themes that characterize a phenomenological approach to interviewing:

- The ephemeral essence of the human experience
- An understanding of the experience from the research participants’ point of view
- Reflection on lived experiences as the foundation for the phenomena
- An emphasis on meaning and meaning in context of the participants’ lives.

(Seidman, 2013).

My personal experiences as both an evaluated teacher and a credentialed evaluator/administrator were also important components of this research study. In regards to heuristic inquiry, Moustakas (1990) stated, “The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the process with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge” (p.
9). Thus, as I embarked on the careful examination of the research participants’ experiences with teacher evaluation, I worked to deepen my understanding of my own experiences as well. This was done by utilizing Moustakas’ (1990) six phases of heuristic research: “initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (p. 27).

**Statement of the Problem**

With the development of increasingly comprehensive evaluation systems such as OTES, stakeholders have sought to more effectively measure multiple aspects of quality teaching while also encouraging improved teacher practices (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). OTES has been structured in such a way that 50% of the teacher’s overall rating is based on what is termed teacher performance (Ohio Department of Education, 2012, 2015c, 2015g). After a credentialed evaluator gathers evidence of teacher performance over the course of a school year through multiple conferences, observations, and walkthroughs, a rating of either accomplished (4), skilled (3), developing (2), or ineffective (1) is assigned (Ohio Department of Education, 2012, 2015g; see Appendix H, Tables 1-6).

The other 35-50% of the overall teacher rating is termed as student growth measures. Growth measures are data obtained from various assessments, and they are used in conjunction with teacher performance to secure an overall rating. Growth measure data could be obtained from state assessments or locally developed assessments (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). OTES sets forth three types of student growth measures that may be used within the framework. The first type of student growth
measure that is required to be used if it is available is teacher value-added data derived from state assessments (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). If value-added data are not available from state assessments, schools may use certain national vendor assessments that have been approved for use in Ohio (Ohio Department of Education, 2015a). Finally, if neither teacher value-added data nor vendor assessments are available, school districts must determine their growth measures using student learning objectives, as defined above, with possible shared attribution if the school district determines it is appropriate.

The final optional component of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System was approved for use during the 2014-15 school year. It is known as the Alternative Framework (Ohio Department of Education, 2015g; see Appendix I), and it allows for the use of one of the following components to account for as much as 15% of the overall evaluation: student surveys (which must be submitted for approval to the Ohio Department of Education), teacher self-evaluations, peer review evaluations, or student portfolios (Ohio Department of Education, 2015d, 2015g). A district must choose only one of these alternative components for use throughout the entire district (Ohio Department of Education, 2015d).

The OTES framework has allowed for a more comprehensive examination of a broad range of teacher practices, as described above. However, the extent to which this evaluation system results in improved teacher practice is unclear. In addition, to what extent does OTES provide a richer experience for teachers, ample opportunities for reflection on current practices, and inspire pedagogical growth? To what degree do teachers feel empowered through the process and as if their voices are being heard as the
evaluation is being conducted? In Ohio, the experiences and voices of teachers who are evaluated using the OTES framework system are still, for the most part, unknown.

**Research Question**

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to provide teachers with a voice by conducting an in-depth examination of the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of teachers as they were evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. As I worked with the participants involved in this study, I also gained a deeper awareness of teachers’ perceptions of the evaluation process and connected teacher experiences to my own. The question that guided this heuristic phenomenological research study was the following:

What are teachers’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they are being evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)?

Additional insights into the experiences of evaluated teachers were also revealed as this question was carefully examined.

The process chosen to examine this question was an intensive series of three interviews, as well as an interactive blog utilized during each step of the evaluative process. According to Seidman (2013), each of the three interviews serves a purpose in providing foundational details and illuminating future understanding. She explained the following with regards to each interview:

The first interview establishes the context of the participants’ experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. (Seidman, 2013, p. 21)
Thus, a full and rich picture of each teacher’s experiences was established through this three-interview structure since it allowed for an in-depth analysis of the context, meaning, and details of the evaluation process.

In addition, I was able to deepen my own understanding of evaluation experiences (both my own and the research participants’) by working through Moustakas’ six steps of heuristic research (1990). Working through these six steps was appropriate for this study because I have experienced evaluation both as a teacher and as an evaluator. Moustakas (1990) explained the following:

In the process of a heuristic search, I may challenge, confront, or even doubt my understanding of a human concern or issue; but when I persist in a disciplined and devoted way I ultimately deepen my knowledge of the phenomenon. In the heuristic process, I am personally involved. I am searching for qualities, conditions, and relationships that underlie a fundamental question, issue, or concern. (p. 11)

Therefore, linking my experiences with that of my research participants added an additional richness and depth to the findings of this inquiry.

Research Methodology

This study was a heuristic phenomenological inquiry in which intensive iterative interviews were conducted and live blogs were utilized with eight teachers from grades K-6 in an Ohio school district that utilizes the OTES framework for teacher evaluation. The qualitative approach was utilized for this research study because both the researcher and the study participants were integral to the construction of the knowledge gained and the topic was connected to a real-world condition. According to Rossman and Rallis
(2012), “Qualitative research has two unique features: (1) the research is the means through which the study is conducted and (2) the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world” (p. 5). Thus, qualitative research was the preferred method for this investigation.

This research study required an epistemological stance that was subjectivist in nature. Levers (2013) explained, “While not a denial that an external reality exists, a subjective epistemology recognizes knowledge as value laden. Unaffected and universal knowledge of an external reality is not possible beyond individual reflections and interpretations” (p. 3). The focus of this inquiry was the deeply personal perceptions of teachers throughout the evaluation process; these perceptions were necessarily shaped within each educator. Gray (2004) noted, “For subjectivism, meaning does not emerge from the interplay between subject and the outside world, but is imposed on the object by the subject. Subjects do construct meaning, but do so from within collective unconsciousness, from dreams, from religious beliefs, etc.” (p. 20)

**Research Design**

In-depth phenomenological interviewing and live private interactive blogging was employed to gain an intimate understanding of educator experiences, both as they traversed the evaluative process and as they reflected upon the evaluative process. Live private interactive blogging provided a unique opportunity to capture teachers’ experiences in real-time, as the evaluation was actually taking place. Hookway (2008) explained, “Blogs offer substantial benefits for social scientific research providing similar, but far more extensive, opportunities than their ‘offline’ parallel of qualitative diary research” (p. 92). Some of the benefits of blogging include providing real-time data
that is collected in a low-cost and instantaneous manner (Chenail, 2011; Hookway, 2008). Thus, for the purposes of this research study, the live interactive blog provided immediate access to participants’ thoughts, reactions, and feedback as they experienced each step of the OTES evaluation process.

Harrichan and Bhopal (2014) noted that some of the advantages of a blog are that they are continuous in nature, allowing research participants’ voices to be heard throughout the duration of the research study. Further, “the interactive nature of the blog would help to hold participant interest and to keep data collection progressing where traditional diaries had shown to become monotonous” (Harrichan and Bhopal, 2014, p. 329). The interactive blog used for this research study was available to study participants, and I interacted with the participants as well, with the goal of inspiring and deepening a continual conversation among the educators.

With regards to the phenomenological approach to interviewing, Seidman (2013) explained, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). Thus, using a phenomenological interviewing process was ideal for this inquiry because the goal of the study was to develop an enhanced understanding of the lived experiences of educators as they were evaluated using a state-mandated evaluation system. Glesne (2011) elaborated, “The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry” (p. 104). Through the interviewing process, I gained a new perspective of evaluation from alternate perspectives and this knowledge enhanced and enriched my understanding of educator evaluation.
The first series of interviews puts the educators’ experiences in context by exploring their life histories up to the present (Seidman, 2013). Participants were asked to recount their early family and school experiences with the use of open-ended questions that focused on exploring how these events were experienced by participants. Seidman (2013) explained, “By asking “how?” we hope to have them reconstruct and narrate a range of constitutive events in their past family, school, and work experience” (p. 21). Furthermore, the interview was informal and conversational in structure to allow for each interview to be personalized to the individual’s experience (Patton, 2002). In informal conversational interviews, Patton (2002) explained, “Questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of things; there is no predetermination of question topics or wording” (p. 349). Each first interview was allotted approximately 45-60 minutes in duration to allow for ample exploration of each educator’s applicable life experiences.

The second series of interviews focused on the details of the participant’s experiences with teacher evaluation. In particular, I was looking for details upon which the educator’s opinions were built (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (2013) elaborated, “Our task is to strive, however incompletely, to reconstruct the myriad details of the participants’ experiences in the area we are studying” (p. 22). Gleaning as much information as possible about the school environment and the details of the evaluation process was the focus of this second interview, which was also informal, conversational, and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.
The third interview reflected on the meaning of the evaluation experience as experienced by the research participants. Seidman (2013) explained the following in regards to the third interview:

Making sense or making meaning requires the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in details and within the context in which it occurs. The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives. The third interview can be productive only if the foundation for it has been established in the first two. (p. 22)

The third interview was also informal and conversational in structure, and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes in length. The three interviews worked together to create an ideal phenomenological structure, which examined the essence of each educator’s lived experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

After collecting data through interviewing, I utilized Moustakas’ (1990, 1994) heuristically-based process to analyze the data, which culminated in a creative synthesis. Heurism was an appropriate methodology for this inquiry because heuristic inquiries are filled with reflections, discoveries, and personal insights from the researcher to such a great degree that these types of studies result in depictions of essential meanings that encompass the essence of the person in the experience (Patton, 2002). Moustakas (1990) explained, “In heuristic research, the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been actual
autobiographical connections” (p. 14). In regards to this research topic, I have had an intimate view of the state-mandated evaluation system since its inception. I participated in the pilot program for the evaluation system, I have served on the Race to the Top Transformation team that oversees the implementation of the system (as described above), and I have conducted nearly 100 evaluations of my teaching staff in my role as a principal at an elementary building. As a result of these experiences, heuristic inquiry was the best fit for this research study, since the essential findings of the study were derived from both my personal experiences and the personal experiences of the research participants.

Moustakas (1990, 1994) identified six phases in heuristic research, and each of these phases has been practiced throughout this inquiry. In the first phase of initial engagement, the task was “to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). As a result of my initial engagement with the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, I defined the topic for this research inquiry: educator evaluation. The second phase of the process was immersion, through which the researcher becomes intimately engaged with the question and practices a sustained focus on the topic (Moustakas, 1990). After I identified my topic, immersion took place for me during my first year serving as a principal at an elementary school. I had already been trained as an OTES evaluator and had experienced OTES through the pilot program during the 2012-13 school year. Subsequently, during the 2013-14 school year, I used the OTES process nearly 50 times as I conducted evaluations on over 20 staff members. The switch to this evaluation system dominated our professional development
opportunities, and it also dominated my work, as each evaluation took a minimum of four hours. This first year of conducting evaluations using the OTES framework was very beneficial as I was able to become fully immersed in the topic of educator evaluation.

The third phase of heuristic inquiry was incubation, in which “the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). This period of time took place for me after I identified my topic of interest. I wrestled with how to study educator evaluation and whether the study should be qualitative or quantitative in nature. I knew I was passionate about giving voice to educator experiences, but was unsure how to do so. This lack of clarity was frustrating and precipitated a period of distance from this inquiry that lasted nearly one school year from 2014 to 2015. At the time, I did not realize that this period of incubation was an essential step in heuristic inquiry. Moustakas (1990) explained, “Nevertheless, growth is taking place. The period of incubation enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities” (p. 28). A second period of incubation also occurred following the interviewing process with my research participants. This allowed “the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29).

When I determined that it was time to re-engage with this research project, I experienced the fourth phase of heuristic inquiry, which was illumination. According to Moustakas (1990), “Illumination opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time yet beyond immediate awareness” (p. 30). My illumination regarding educator evaluation came only after my second year of
conducting OTES evaluations, as this research topic was incubating in my consciousness. During the second year of evaluation, I became more intimately aware of how individual each of my teachers’ experiences were at my school alone. Some teachers continued to struggle with the performance rubric or the growth measures requirements during this second year of OTES implementation. Other teachers were able to “shine” during the evaluative process, demonstrating their expertise in various areas of the performance rubric or attaining the highest levels of effectiveness as measured by student growth measures. As my support of teachers in each of these unique situations became differentiated to their individualized needs, I came to realize just how individual and intensely personal the evaluation journey had been for each of them. I also realized that as both a novice researcher and a principal, I wanted to deeply engage with each of these experiences to allow for the teacher voice to be heard as part of the evaluation conversation.

The fifth phase of heuristic inquiry was explication. Moustakas (1990) explained, “The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning” (p. 31). In addition, the explication process requires the researcher to be completely in tune with his/her own feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in order to be able to develop an understanding of the participants’ feelings, thoughts, and beliefs (Moustakas, 1990). For me, explication has taken place as I have prepared my dissertation proposal after nearly two years of working with the topic of evaluation through the initial engagement, immersion, incubation, and illumination. The review of the literature was a particularly valuable process, as I worked to fully examine all of the layers of the evaluative process. As I examined current
research and emerging themes, I was able to come to a more in-depth understanding of my own feelings, thoughts, and beliefs related to evaluation.

The final phase of the heuristic process was the creative synthesis. Moustakas (1990) elaborated, “Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis” (pp. 31-32). This synthesis is typically in the form of a narrative description with examples directly from the participants who have been involved in the research (Moustakas, 1990). For this inquiry, I produced the creative synthesis following the intensive interviewing process and interactive blogging that took place with the research participants. I took time in solitude to meditate with the data that was collected as I worked to synthesize the data (Moustakas, 1990). I reduced the text of the transcribed interviews and the content of the interactive blogs and utilized Moustakas’ (1990) guide for the heuristic analysis of the collected data as described below.

Setting

Richardson Local School District is a Midwestern suburban school district close to a large city in Ohio. Richardson Local educates over 10,000 students. The district encompasses 14 buildings overall, including two high schools (grades 9-12), two junior high schools (grades 7-8), three middle schools (grades 5-6), seven elementary buildings (grades K-4 or PreK-4), and one community school. Richardson Local is a diverse school district, with 64% white students, 21% African American, 7% Biracial, 4% Hispanic/Latino, and 3% Asian. The four-year graduation rate is 95% and 23.6% of
students are economically disadvantaged, 14.5% are students with disabilities, and 3.9% have limited English proficiency.

**Total population.** The Richardson Local School District has more than 700 employees. These employees work in varied roles throughout the district, including administrative staff (principals, coordinators of various programs, and district office administrators), certified staff (educators), and classified staff (custodial, secretarial, and paraprofessional). The certified and classified staff are unionized, while the administrative staff is not. Negotiations for both the certified and classified staff include working out the specifics of evaluation within the boundaries of Ohio law. During the last two contract negotiations for certified staff, OTES was a major topic of concern, dominating the majority of the negotiations timeline.

**Study population.** Of the 700 employees in the Richardson Local School District, 578 are evaluated utilizing the OTES framework. During the 2013-14 school year, 301 teachers received an overall rating of accomplished, 249 received an overall rating of skilled, 27 received an overall rating of developing, and 1 received an overall rating of ineffective. There are 56 employees in the district who are credentialed evaluators, and 43 of these credentialed evaluators actually conducted the above evaluations.

**Study sample.** When selecting research participants, Moustakas (1994) explained that there are no advance criteria that must be followed when conducting human science research, other than ensuring that each participant has both experienced the phenomenon being studied and is strongly interested in examining the phenomenon in great detail. For this qualitative phenomenological study, the study sample was relatively small. I
interviewed eight teachers from the K-6 primary grade band who have been evaluated utilizing the OTES framework during the past two school years.

I located participants through purposeful sampling, which allowed me to identify information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), “Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230). The first strategy I used in identifying potential research participants was to gain permission from the district office to conduct this research within Richardson Local School District (Appendix J). I then solicited educator participation via e-mail (Appendix K). The e-mail explained the background and the focus of the study. It also explained that all participants will remain anonymous and what the basic timeline would look like if they should choose to participate. Potential participants were asked to respond to the e-mail indicating their interest.

I sent additional information through a personalized letter to those who indicated their interest (Appendix L). This letter gave a more in-depth explanation of the study. I then followed up with potential participants with an in-person meeting where I clarified the role that participants would take through the duration of the study (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) stated the following:

Essential criteria include: the research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview and (perhaps a follow-up interview), grants the investigator the right to tape-record, possibly videotape the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation and other publications.
In addition, I let potential research participants know that I would share with them specific data that I was planning to use, that they would remain anonymous throughout the study, that the names of schools and locations would be changed to protect confidentiality, and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time (Moustakas, 1994). During this meeting, I also answered any questions and addressed any potential concerns that participants had. Educators were also asked to sign a participant release agreement (Appendix M) to finalize participation in the study. In addition, due to the heuristic nature of this inquiry, participants were asked to immerse themselves in thoughts about their experiences related to the topic (Moustakas, 1994).

**Open-Ended Interviews**

For this heuristic inquiry, three informal conversational interviews were conducted as described above. The first interview was used to establish the context of the participant’s experience, the second interview focused on the details of the evaluative experience, and the third interview allowed the participants the space to reflect on the meaning the evaluative experience held for them (Seidman, 2013). Due to the heuristic nature of this study, dialogue was used to encourage disclosure of the details of the experience (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas (1990) stated the following about this open-ended structure:

Dialogue involves cooperative sharing in which co-researchers and primary researchers open pathways to each other for explicating the phenomenon being investigated. This means receiving the other as a partner, accepting and affirming the other person. The persons in the heuristic interview must be willing to say freely what they think and feel relevant to the research question, and what
emerges in their awareness when the phenomenon becomes the focus of their attention and concentration. Although general questions may be formulated in advance, genuine dialogue cannot be planned. (p. 47)

Thus, I had very general ideas for topics of exploration for each interview, but I allowed plenty of time and space for dialogue to take place. I then reduced the text of each transcribed interview so that I had written documentation of each interview dialogue and so that I was able to begin transitioning from data collection to immersion and analysis (Patton, 2002).

**Document Examination**

I asked participants to submit documents from each evaluation process if they had them available and felt comfortable submitting them. These documents included items such as lesson plans, data notebooks, assessment data, pre-conference notes, observation notes, post-conference notes, walkthrough evidence, lesson samples, and rating documentation. I then immersed myself in the interview transcripts, the interactive blog communications, and the documents provided from each participant to reach a deeper understanding of each participant’s experience with teacher evaluation (Moustakas, 1990).

**Reflective Journaling**

Reflective journaling was the final data source for this research study. Patton (2002) identified the foundational question for heuristic inquiry as the following: “What is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely” (p. 107). An essential part of this inquiry was deepening my own understanding of evaluation by following the six-step heuristic
process. As I interacted with the research participants and also embarked on another school year of evaluation utilizing the OTES framework, I recorded my moments of illumination in a journal format. Writing has been my preferred method of expression throughout my life, and I was able to work through much of my personal journey through the written word.

**Validity**

Moustakas (1990) explained the following about the validation of heuristic research:

The question of validity is one of meaning: Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? This judgment is made by the primary researcher, who is the only person in the investigation who has undergone the heuristic inquiry from the beginning formulation of the questions through the phases of incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis not only with himself or herself, but with each and every co-researcher.” (p. 32)

Therefore, the determination of validity was my responsibility as the primary researcher in this heuristic inquiry.

I assured the validity of this inquiry by returning over and over again to the data provided by the various methods explained above to assure that the meaning that I have explicated from the data was indeed the meaning that was present (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). In addition, as I synthesized the data provided by the research participants, I checked with them to verify that the synthesis of the data validates their experiences.
(Moustakas, 1990, 1994). Changes (including additions or deletions if necessary) were repeatedly made to the creative synthesis as needed to assure validity (Moustakas, 1990, 1994).

**Reliability**

Reliability in this study was achieved by being as open and transparent as possible with the data I collected as I moved through the heuristic process. Patton (2002) explained, “Analysts have an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible” (p. 434). Therefore, the reliability of the data in this study depended upon the careful explanation of, and adherence to, the steps of data analysis.

**Sample Recruitment and Selection**

The study sample in this qualitative phenomenological study was relatively small. Creswell (2012) explained, “In qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (p. 206). I utilized purposeful sampling to locate eight research participants from the K-6 grade band. The focus of the study was to reveal teachers’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they were evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES).

I began recruiting the study sample by obtaining permission from the district office to solicit teacher participation via e-mail (Appendix J). This e-mail detailed the focus of the study, as well as the methods used to maintain confidentiality and the basic timeline for the study (Appendix K). Educators were asked to respond to the e-mail if they were interested in participating.
I then sent a personalized letter to those who indicated they were interested in participating in the study (Appendix L). The letter gave a more in-depth explanation of the study, and I followed up with an in-person meeting where I clarified the role and depth of participation needed from each educator (Moustakas, 1994). At this meeting, I let potential research participants know that there would be three interviews that would last approximately 45-60 minutes each. Also, participants had to be willing to have their sessions recorded and have the data published in a dissertation and possibly other publications; however, names and specific places would be deleted from the publication so that they may remain anonymous.

I informed potential participants that data collected would be shared with them to check for accuracy in my portrayal of the phenomena. In addition, I made them aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also answered any questions and addressed any concerns that potential participants had at the meeting. Educators were asked to sign a participant release agreement (Appendix M) to finalize participation in the study (Moustakas, 1990). Finally, due to the heuristic nature of this study, research participants were asked to immerse themselves in thoughts related to their experiences with educator evaluation (Moustakas, 1994).

**Data Security**

The data gathered in this study were stored for a period of three years following the completion of the research. It was stored on a password-protected computer and names were not included with the data so that it remained confidential. The data collected were only viewed and stored by me, and this ensured that the identities of the participants remained protected. In addition, signed consent forms were stored separately
in a locked filing cabinet. At the conclusion of the three years, the data was destroyed in a manner approved by the Institutional Review Board.

**Open-Ended Interviews**

Three informal conversational interviews were used to collect data from research participants. Patton (2002) explained, “Being unstructured doesn’t mean that conversational interviews are unfocused. Sensitizing concepts and the overall purpose of the inquiry inform the interviewing” (p. 343). Overarching concepts and themes that guided the first, second, and third interviews were as follows (Seidman, 2013):

1. **First Interview**: Used to establish the context of the participant’s experience
   - Early experiences with family
   - Early experiences with friends and in the neighborhood
   - Experiences in school
   - Path to becoming an educator
   - Early experiences in education
   - Early ideas about educator assessment
   - First experiences with educator assessment
   - Philosophy of teaching and learning
   - Role of educators in society

2. **Second Interview**: Focused on the details of the participant’s experience
   - Experiences with teacher evaluation prior to OTES
   - How OTES was introduced to the co-researcher
   - Level of understanding of OTES
   - Professional growth and improvement plans
• The first evaluation cycle (first year) – pre-conference
• The first evaluation cycle (first year) – observation
• The first evaluation cycle (first year) – post-conference
• The first evaluation cycle (first year) – walkthroughs
• The second evaluation cycle (first year) – same as above
• Experiences with growth measures (first year)
• Experiences with the final summative rating
• How the second year was experienced (if applicable)

3. Third Interview: Reflecting on the meaning of the evaluative experience

• Qualities or dimensions of the experience that stand out
• Examples that are vivid and alive for the interviewee
• Events, situations, and people connected with the experience
• Feelings and thoughts generated by the experience
• Bodily states or shifts in bodily presence that occur in the experience
• Time and space factors that affect the person’s awareness and meaning of the experience
• Any other significant ingredients or constituents of the experience

(Moustakas, 1990, p. 48)

During this three-interview process, I attempted to create a relaxed, open, and calming environment for the duration of the interviews, as this encouraged candidness and self-disclosure (Moustakas, 1990). I inquired as to where the research participant would be most comfortable conducting the interviews, whether that was in his/her classroom, in a public setting, or in a private environment. To maintain the relaxed and
conversational atmosphere of the interview, I recorded the interviews and transcribed the conversation after the interview was completed.

**Document Examination**

Research participants were asked to submit documents from each evaluation process if they had them available and felt comfortable submitting them. These documents included the following items: lesson plans, data notebooks, assessment data, pre-conference notes, observation notes, post-conference notes, walkthrough evidence, lesson samples, and rating documentation. After these documents were collected from each educator, I immersed myself in both the interview transcripts and the documents provided from each participant to reach a deeper understanding of each educator’s experience with teacher evaluation (Moustakas, 1990).

**Reflective Journaling**

Reflective journaling was the final data source for this research study. Moustakas (1990) stated, “In the process of a heuristic search, I may challenge, confront, or even doubt my understanding of a human concern or issue; but when I persist in a disciplined and devoted way I ultimately deepen my knowledge of the phenomenon” (p. 11). An essential part of this inquiry was deepening my own understanding of evaluation through the six-step heuristic process. As I interacted with my research participants and also embarked on another school year of evaluation utilizing the OTES framework, I recorded my moments of illumination through reflective journaling. Ortlipp (2008) explained, “Keeping and using reflective journals enabled me to make my experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation process” (p. 704).
Data Analysis Procedures

This heuristic phenomenological inquiry attempted to discern teachers’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they were being evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES). I used in-depth iterative interviews with an informal conversational approach to build trust and rapport with the research participants involved in the study, as well as a live private interactive blog to further explore participants’ thoughts and feelings as evaluations took place. In addition, I examined OTES documentation supplied by participants to deepen my understanding of their experiences. Furthermore, I practiced reflective journaling throughout the inquiry process to deepen my personal understanding of the phenomena.

I utilized Moustakas’ (1990,1994) guide for the heuristic analysis of the collected data. I also incorporated Seidman’s (2013) guide for analyzing, interpreting, and sharing interview material. Using these methods, I presented an in-depth and complete understanding of the participants’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they are evaluated by the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. The steps involved for this analysis are explained and summarized below:

1. All data (transcripts, notes, documents, etc.) from each research participant were gathered together.

2. I entered into a period of immersion with each participant’s data that was not time-bound. Moustakas (1990) explained, “Knowledge of the individual participant’s experience as a whole and in its detail is comprehensively apprehended by the researcher” (p. 51). During this period, I reduced the text from the transcribed material, marking passages that were of interest and
beginning to analyze, interpret, and making meaning of these collected data (Seidman, 2013).

3. Following the period of immersion with the individual participant’s data, they were set aside for a period of time, which is thought to awaken a fresh energy and perspective within the primary researcher. Following the rest period, I reviewed again all of the individual participant’s data and took notes on specific qualities and themes that began to manifest themselves. I then studied and reviewed these notes and the data carefully to construct an individualized depiction, or narrative profile, of the experience for each of the eight research participants. Moustakas (1990) stated, “The individual depiction retains the language and includes examples drawn from the individual co-researcher’s experience of the phenomenon. It includes qualities and themes that encompass the research participant’s experience” (p. 51). The purpose of each narrative profile is to share the interview data and open up the material to analysis and interpretation. Seidman (2013) noted that the narrative profile should “present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time.”

4. Next, I checked this individual depiction, or narrative profile, against the original data, examining it to assure that the depiction fit with the data, and that the qualities and themes that were essential to the experience were present in the depiction. Once the depiction fit with the original data, I moved on to the next set of participant data. If the data did not fit with the original data, the narrative
profile was re-worked until it reflected the essential dimension of the collected data.

5. I completed the above steps with each participant’s individualized data. This step was completed once I had constructed an accurate individualized narrative profile of each participant’s experience. According to Seidman (2013), “By crafting a profile in the participant’s own words, the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person’s consciousness” (p. 122).

6. Next, I entered into another phase of immersion until the universal themes and qualities were revealed and recognized. I made and analyzed thematic connections that were consistent across the narrative profiles (Sediman, 2013). By doing so, I attempted to capture the universal themes and qualities of all of the data taken as a whole. Moustakas (1990) explained that this composite depiction of thematic connections should be “vivid, accurate, alive, and clear, and encompass the themes inherent in the experience. The composite depiction includes all of the core meanings of the phenomenon as experienced by the individual participants and by the group as a whole” (p. 52).

7. The final step in this heuristic process involved a creative synthesis of the experience. I used my intuitive awareness of the phenomenon and my knowledge gained through immersion, illumination, and explication to develop a “rendition of the themes and essential meanings of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52). Moustakas (1990) further explained, “There is a free reign of thought and feeling that supports the researcher’s knowledge, passion, and presence; this infuses the work with a personal, professional, and literary value” (p. 52). This
creative synthesis allowed me to explain the meaning that I have made as I have completed my work. Seidman (2013) explained, “In the course of interviewing, researchers asked the participants what the experience meant to them. Now they have the opportunity to respond to the same question” (p. 131).

**Ethical Considerations**

Patton (2002) explained, “Interviews are interventions. They affect people. A good interview lays open thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and experience, not only to the interviewer but also to the interviewee” (p. 405). Because interviews can be so powerful, it is important to note ethical considerations before embarking on this or any inquiry involving human subjects. Due to the structure of this study, there were few, if any, risks to the participants in this study.

I began recruiting the study sample by obtaining permission from the district office to solicit teacher participation via e-mail (Appendix J). This e-mail detailed the focus of the study, as well as the methods used to maintain confidentiality and the basic timeline for the study. Participants were asked to respond to the e-mail if they were interested in participating.

I then sent a personalized letter to those who indicated they were interested in participating in the study (Appendix L). The letter gave a more in-depth explanation of the study, and I followed up with an in-person meeting where I clarified the role and depth of participation needed from each potential participant (Moustakas, 1994). At this meeting, I let potential participants know that there would be three interviews that would last approximately 60 minutes each. Also, participants had to be willing to have their sessions recorded and have the data published in a dissertation and possibly other
publications; however, names and specific places were deleted from the publication so that they may remain anonymous.

I informed potential participants that data collected would be shared with them to check for accuracy in my portrayal of the phenomenon. In addition, I made them aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time. I also answered any questions and addressed any concerns that potential participants had at the meeting. Educators were then asked to sign a participant release agreement (Appendix M) to finalize participation in the study (Moustakas, 1990). Finally, due to the heuristic nature of this study, participants were asked to immerse themselves in thoughts related to their experiences with educator evaluation (Moustakas, 1994).

The data gathered in this study were stored for a period of three years following the completion of the research. It was stored on a password-protected computer and names were not included with the data so that it could remain confidential. The data collected were only viewed and stored by me, and this ensured that the identities of the participants remained protected. In addition, signed consent forms were stored separately in a locked filing cabinet. At the conclusion of the three years, the data were destroyed in a manner approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Limitations

Moustakas (1990) noted, “The focus in a heuristic quest is on recreation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person” (p. 39). Therefore, knowledge gained through a heuristic inquiry is not generalizable to an overall population; rather, it highlights the deep individual experiences of the phenomenon. Essentially, the focus is on depth rather
than breadth. Thus, the unique qualities of the location where this inquiry took place, as well as the unique qualities of the individuals who acted as research participants, gave a picture of the deep perceptions and experiences of educator evaluation in this particular location with these particular participants. It should not be assumed that other participants in other locations would experience evaluation in the same way.

**Summary**

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological inquiry was to describe the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of eight teachers who were evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. The participants involved in this study were employed at the primary level (kindergarten through grade six) within an Ohio school district. Patton explained, “Heuristic inquiry focuses on intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator and co-researchers. It is the combination of personal experience and intensity that yields an understanding of the phenomenon” (p. 107). To obtain this deep level of understanding, I used intensive iterative interviews that attempted to draw on the characteristics of a phenomenological approach to interviewing, as well as private live interactive blogs that illuminated participants’ perceptions as evaluations were taking place.

My personal experience as both an evaluated teacher and a credentialed evaluator/administrator were also important aspects of this inquiry. Moustakas (1990) stated, “From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner-awareness, meaning, and inspiration” (p. 11). Throughout this research study, I worked toward a state of self-discovery through reflective journaling. In addition,
I utilized Moustakas’ (1990) six phases of heuristic research, which included “initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (p. 27). This heuristic approach to the topic facilitated a new depth of awareness about the essence of the evaluative experience for individual educators.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), “Those engaged in phenomenological research focus in depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection, the quintessential meaning of the experience will be revealed” (pp. 96-97). This phenomenological study was focused on giving a voice to educators’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they were evaluated utilizing a state-mandated evaluation system. Seidman’s (2013) in-depth interview structure was utilized to accomplish this goal. Three intensive 45-60 minute interviews were conducted with the eight participants in this study. Over 700 pages of transcribed material resulted from this in-depth interviewing process. I reduced the transcribed material utilizing Moustakas’ (1990, 1994) guide for the heuristic analysis of collected data. I also incorporated Seidman’s (2013) methodology for analyzing, interpreting, and sharing interview material. From this reduced material, I crafted eight narrative profiles (Appendix Q) through which I attempted capture the essence of the shared experience of evaluation. According to Patton (2002), “A phenomenological study…is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 107).

The resulting narrative profiles were written in first person. Seidman (2013) explained, “One key to the power of the profile is that it is presented in the words of the participant. I cannot stress too much how important it is to use the first person, the voice of the participant, rather than the third person transformation of that voice” (p. 123). Thus, in an effort to assure that the narrative profiles were a vivid and in-depth reflection of each individual educator’s experiences, profiles were crafted by reducing the data
while still retaining the participants’ own words within each depiction. Seidman (2013) further elaborated, “Using the third-person voice distances the reader from the participant and allows the researcher to intrude more easily than when he or she is limited to selecting compelling material and weaving it together into a first person narrative” (p. 124). The remainder of this chapter will provide an overview of the research study participants and will culminate with an identification and analysis of the emergent themes from the participant interviews.

**Participant Overviews**

I located participants for this research study through purposeful sampling, which allowed me to locate information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). The eight participants represented all levels of teaching experience, including two educators who were new to the profession, four educators who had seven to eighteen years of experience, and two educators who were nearing retirement. In addition, participants represented varied areas of specialization, including educators from second grade through sixth grade, and those who provided general instruction to those who taught gifted and special education populations. The varied levels and areas of expertise, as well as years of experience, assured that educators from many different environments were included in this study.

The first research participant was Anastasia, who was a special education teacher with two years of experience. As a new teacher in Richardson Local School District, she received very little professional development in regards to OTES and expressed much confusion about both the OTES rubric and the student growth measures portion of the evaluation. In addition, her evaluator seemed to focus much more on the aesthetics of her
classroom instead of her instructional strategies. For example, her evaluator told her
during her OTES post-conference that she needed colorful posters and décor in her
classroom. This feedback was not valuable to her because many of her students were
highly distractible and learned better in a visually calm and non-cluttered environment.
Anastasia also shared that, as part of the resident educator process (Ohio’s required
educator induction program), she was able to do observations of other educators. She
explained that these observations were highly beneficial in improving her practice as an
educator.

The second research participant was Candace, who had been an educator for 32
years. Candace had most of her teaching experience in Richardson Local School District,
and she was the optimist of the group. She was a very well-respected elementary teacher,
yet she found herself on an improvement plan due to the growth measures portion of
OTES. This was despite the fact that she was rated accomplished on the observation
portion of the rubric. In fact, all of her third grade colleagues at her school were on
improvement plans due to growth measures that were deemed to be least effective by the
state. Candace expressed concern for her younger colleagues because of the stress and
negativity that was generated from the OTES process. It was so disheartening to see that
an expert teacher such as Candace was spending her last years of teaching working on an
improvement plan, rather than mentoring young teachers and passing on the immense
amount of knowledge she possessed about how to effectively educate her young students.

The third research participant was Carter, who had been teaching for seventeen
years and was employed as a gifted teacher. Carter was an educator who was highly
confident in her teaching abilities and who continuously received a most effective rating
on her value-added data and her OTES evaluation. Despite her continual success with OTES, she felt as if the process did not inspire growth and was just another hoop to jump through that took time away from more important and valuable teacher practices. She also noted that, prior to the inception of OTES, her principal was able to spend much more time in her classroom. However, because of the increased workload due to OTES, her principal is now only able to come to her classroom when conducting the formal OTES observation.

The fourth research participant was Christian, who had taught for seven years at the elementary level. Christian taught at the third grade level for several years, but transferred to second grade to avoid the value-added data that was used at the third grade level. He expressed concern that the district was losing many great third grade teachers due to the value-added data that was being used for the grade level. Christian also expressed a lot of confidence in his ability to generate most effective test score data from his students. However, he also shared that “there’s always something, I don’t what it is. I guess I’m waiting for the ball to drop for one class, and not have good scores, and then in my opinion all hell would break loose.” Christian also shared that he had positive experiences with evaluation prior to OTES because he and his principal had a very open and trusting relationship. Since the inception of OTES, his experiences with evaluation have not been beneficial to his growth as an educator.

The fifth research participant was Fiona, who was an elementary teacher with 15 years of experience. Fiona also had positive evaluation experiences prior to OTES. Her evaluator at that time was open and supportive, and this made Fiona more receptive to the constructive criticism that the evaluator provided. Fiona’s evaluator for OTES, however,
has not built this same type of relationship with her. This evaluator even told her that all of her other colleagues received a higher rating than she did. This devalued the process for Fiona, and she currently views OTES as just another hoop she must jump through as an educator. Even though she has always felt that she was destined to be an educator, she has started to consider other career options because she feels worn down by the OTES process and frustrated by the many new mandates that she has been forced to comply with.

The sixth research participant was Jill, who was a middle school teacher with 28 years of experience. Jill was another well-respected veteran teacher in Richardson Local School District. Jill shared that she was in mourning for her profession. She explained that the OTES evaluation system might support new and struggling teachers, but it has constricted excellent teachers. She felt strongly that seasoned educators should be used to support these new and struggling educators, rather than continuously having to divert their energies to prove themselves in the evaluation process. Jill noted that she spent 36 hours on average preparing for each OTES evaluation, and she expressed anger and frustration that her time was being used for this purpose at this point in her career.

The seventh research participant was Lorelei, who was a middle school teacher with eight years of experience. Lorelei spent her first several years teaching in another state. During her first year of teaching in Ohio, she received very little professional development to prepare for OTES. She also received a least effective rating on her vendor assessment for her growth measure that first year. Therefore, despite the fact that she was skilled on the observation portion of OTES, this assessment data pulled her overall rating down to least effective. In addition, state law required her to use the same
student group for her assessment data for the following year, so her rating was again automatically least effective.

Lorelei cried during her interview because she was so defeated. She explained the following:

The last three years have been very tumultuous for me. And every year I’ve said I think this might be my last year teaching. This OTES is killing me. It’s taking all the joy out of teaching. Because of the situation I’m in with those test scores, I feel like a complete and total loser most of the time and it’s like I’m fighting this battle that is impossible to win. Emotionally, I’m an absolute wreck and I’ve actually considered leaving the teaching profession every year [since] I’ve been back here in Ohio.

Lorelei’s test scores have rebounded for this school year; however, she has confirmed that this will be her last year in education. In addition to her feelings of failure due to OTES, she has been moved each year due to her lack of seniority and has not had the opportunity to build strong and supportive collegial relationships.

The final research participant was Marie, who was a middle school teacher with three years of experience. Similar to Anastasia, Marie expressed frustration and confusion about the OTES process. The resident educator program in Ohio coupled with OTES made her feel as if she was doing double the work, and this was overwhelming as a new teacher. OTES was the source of much anxiety and stress for Marie, even though she had received strong ratings during each evaluation cycle. She expressed much fear about the process as well because she was concerned that it may determine whether or
not she would get to keep her job from year to year. Also similar to Anastasia, Marie identified observation of other educators as key to her professional growth.

**Introduction to Emerging Themes**

Following the creation of the narrative profiles (Appendix Q) for each of the eight participants in this research study, I entered into another phase of immersion until the universal themes and qualities of each of the profiles were revealed and recognized. At this point, I explicaited and analyzed these thematic connections that were consistent across the narrative profiles (Seidman, 2013). By doing so, I attempted to capture the universal themes and qualities of all of the data taken as a whole. A total of seven themes were derived from the above data analysis methods. This section will present the thematic analyses and connections made from the individual depictions. Creswell (2012) noted, “Describing and developing themes from the data consists of answering the major research questions and forming an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon through description and thematic development” (p. 247). Through a thorough description and examination of each of the seven themes described below, essential meanings in regards to the research question were revealed.

At the outset of this research study, I suspected that OTES was not a true growth model for educators. I suspected this was the case as a result of my experiences as both an educator evaluated by OTES and as a credentialed OTES evaluator. As an educator, I recalled the immense amount of time and preparation that were required in order to successfully complete the OTES observation cycle. I also recalled the feelings of fear in regards to how the results of my evaluation might be used. I knew, even at that time, that it was possible that my employment, pay, and reputation could be impacted by the results
of the evaluation. Therefore, similar to many of the research participants, I showcased a lesson for my evaluator that was quite different from the ways that I instructed on a day-to-day basis. I also spent an inordinate amount of time prepping my students for state-mandated assessments that would attempt to measure their academic growth and that would account for as much as fifty percent of my evaluation.

In addition, as an OTES evaluator, I personally conducted more than 100 OTES observations. Despite the fact that I have developed open, positive, and highly supportive relationships with my staff members, I know that they put on the dog and pony show for me as well when I arrive in their classrooms to conduct their observations. Teachers have also shared with me how afraid they were during their observations. Because of this fear, there is limited opportunity to get to the heart of discussions about how to improve educator practices.

Thus, because of my experiences as both an educator and evaluator, I suspected that the results of this research study might reveal that OTES is not the growth model it is purported to be. However, my findings are much more disturbing than what I could have ever imagined. The educators interviewed in this research study have shared experiences that expose the negative impact that OTES is having on them as educators. Even the participants who have been very successful with their evaluations expressed that the OTES evaluation process is not only not a growth model, but that it is a process that has a detrimental impact on them, on their students, and on the profession as a whole. The seven themes described below provide a detailed analysis of the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of educators as they are evaluated using this state-mandated evaluation system.
Theme 1

The first theme that was revealed within this research study was that it was possible for educators’ early evaluation experiences to positively impact their professional growth; however, educators’ early experiences of the OTES process were not beneficial to their growth. Research participants’ early evaluation experiences were highly variable within this study, and some of these early experiences had a positive impact on educator growth, while others had little to no impact on educators. To begin with, some participants were confused or upset by evaluator feedback, and frequently the feedback did not inspire professional growth. For example, Candace discussed her first evaluation experience more than 32 years ago:

In my first evaluation during my first year of teaching, my principal would come in to evaluate me; he would sit down and within five minutes he would be up at the board teaching the lesson. He felt I wasn’t doing it right. My feelings were so hurt; I was so upset. He was very authoritarian. I never really agreed with [his evaluations] because, he’d come in my room once a year for an hour. I don’t even remember scheduling a time; he would just pop in and I would get flustered. I’d just be so scared to death. I got written up because there was dust on my windowsills. Those are my earliest memories [of evaluation]. I also remember [another early evaluator] when I was pregnant with my second child. I was having reading groups and doing a great [job], but I had my feet up on a chair while we were having a group. That’s all he could bring up in my evaluation was that I had been sitting a lot more. My baby was due in March and this was January.

Research participant Marie also related an early evaluation experience with the OTES evaluation process that did not inspire professional growth:
My experience with evaluation at the charter school was very bizarre. The evaluation did not impact [my practice] at all. I can barely remember it. We were using OTES and we had people who would come in to observe us who were considered administrators for the franchise, but I don’t know if they were ever teachers. I don’t think they ever held pre-conferences. I do remember that we had a post-conference, but I don’t think we ever talked about my rating in the post-conference. The evaluator sent me a book and I ended up not reading it. I was just too frazzled at the time. I think it was about understanding kids who have behavioral issues and why they have those issues. I appreciated her gesture; I think she was trying to be helpful.

The above comments made by research participants’ evaluators indicated a lack of understanding of best instructional practices. In addition, evaluators’ comments were frequently focused on factors that were inconsequential to student growth and success. Research conducted in regards to evaluation reform found that measures used to identify best instructional practices must be based upon high-quality, clear, and transparent standards for teaching effectiveness (Partee, 2012). Many of the researchers’ early evaluation experiences focused instead on aesthetic aspects of the teacher or classroom environment.

Other early evaluations were very brief or non-existent as explained by the following participants:

Christian: From what I remember [at the charter school], there wasn’t really an evaluation system; you either performed or you didn’t. I think they looked at test scores but they were just happy to have a body to be honest. If you’re desperate for work as an
educator, you can always find a job at a charter school, but there wasn’t really any form of evaluation.

Carter: For my first evaluation [in a small rural district], I think my principal came in for ten minutes and he took some notes. I don’t know; it was probably a paragraph, honestly. It said, “Good job, we’ll be renewing your contract next year.” I’m sure that’s what it was; it was nothing formal. It was loose [back] then; nobody really even had a curriculum. [It was good in that] there was no stress. That’s for sure. I think if someone had been doing something really bad, it would have been a little bit different, like if you were really yelling at kids or coming to school intoxicated, they would have noticed. So, as far as personal development or anything, that was totally on me; I had to do that myself.

These early experiences do indicate a need for effective evaluation reform. State-mandated evaluation systems, such as OTES, are the products of such reform; however, for many of the research participants, there is little indication that OTES is an improved process when compared to earlier evaluation methods.

On the other hand, for several research participants, evaluation methods that were used prior to OTES did appear to have a positive impact on their professional growth. Educators indicated that this growth was due to a positive relationship with their evaluators, including feeling supported and respected by evaluators. For example, Christian stated the following:

We didn’t have OTES when I first started teaching [in Richardson], so it was just sitting down with [my administrator] and letting me know how I was doing. That was basically it, and I always had a good relationship [with my administrator], so I valued her
opinion and what she had to say to me. She was always supportive in anything I did and that built trust with me. The support that she gave me was worth more than any evaluation she could have given me. My early experiences with evaluation [in Richardson] were good because it was low stress. I think I got a lot more out of sitting down with my administrator and having her tell me what I was doing good and what I could improve on. There was nothing hanging over my head, like OTES is now where you have to keep your numbers or you’re not going to be accomplished or you’re going to be put on an improvement plan or all of the other stuff that we have to deal with now. It was more your leader sitting there telling you what you can do better, and what she enjoys seeing you do now, and I think I got a lot out of that.

In addition, Fiona explained the following in regards early evaluation methods that she viewed as beneficial:

I remember, in my first year of teaching [at Richardson], feeling so very lucky to feel a lot of support [from my administrator] right away. I knew she was going to stand up for me, that she had faith in me, and I think it empowered me to feel a little more confident as a first year teacher. During my first evaluation, [my administrator] had constructive things to say but a lot of positives, so I felt good about what I was doing and I wanted to improve not just for my students but for her too. She motivated us and empowered us; she was amazing. She instilled in all of us that drive to succeed and do our best. She did my evaluations for about seven years, for the first half of my career. She knew very much what was going on in my classroom and what my teaching style was. She was never condescending; she never made us feel like she knew more. She always sang our praises and had our backs.
In these examples, the evaluators also included positive feedback, along with constructive criticism, and frequently made contact with the educator to provide support and to maintain the relationship. Marshall (2009) explained that, under ideal conditions, there should be a mutual understanding between principals and teachers in regards to what good teaching looks like, and principals should give feedback on effective practices, as well as areas for improvement. It was this type of effective communication and ongoing support that appeared to be present for several educators during their early evaluation experiences, and they indicated that these experiences did inspire their professional growth.

**Theme 2**

The second thematic connection made during this research study was that educators experienced confusion as they navigated the OTES process due to a lack of professional development, unrealistic expectations, and evaluators’ breach of protocol. This theme of confusion was pervasive throughout all other themes within this research study and involved the role of the evaluator/administrator in shaping teacher understanding of OTES and in executing the OTES process according to the district and state guidelines. First, the amount of professional development provided to educators varied based on teacher level of experience. Educators who were in teaching roles in the Richardson Local School District at the inception of OTES received a prescribed series of professional development sessions to prepare for OTES. On the other hand, teachers who were new to the district after the inception of OTES received little, if any, professional development from their evaluators and these new educators expressed an abundance of confusion in regards to the process as noted below:
**Anastasia:** I first heard about OTES in college. [My professors] just said that our school districts will explain it to us and that they didn’t have the details because it’s constantly changing. When I was hired, there was sort of an explanation but I feel like there was unclear direction about what was actually expected, so even my brief discussion with my principal about [OTES] was very confusing. Our professional development that we just had on the [alternative framework portion of OTES] didn’t explain it very well, and a few of the teachers that I was sitting with said to tune our principal out because none of the information was right.

**Lorelei:** I had no professional development for OTES before it started.

**Marie:** I remember that, [when I started at Richardson], there was some morning professional development sessions where we talked about OTES, but that was about it as far as training goes. I was very confused about the whole thing. They talked about value-added, but they didn’t really talk about how to prepare for OTES.

Goe, Holdheide, and Miller (2011) advocated for securing and sustaining involvement with all stakeholders while also maintaining open lines of communication throughout the evaluation process. In addition, Goe and colleagues (2011) explained that stakeholders must assure that the system is valued and understood. The lack of OTES professional development provided to new hires in Richardson Local School District prevented their engagement in the evaluation process and limited the perceived value of the evaluation, while also contributing to the confusion that dominated the OTES process.

In addition, evaluators had unrealistic expectations for educators as evaluations were conducted. For example, Anastasia explained the following:
During my observation, my principal pointed out things that he thought I should have for my classroom, but the school doesn’t provide those things. At the time, I was the only salary. I really wanted to get these items for my classroom, but my family is not in that position right now, so I had to tell him that I didn’t have the money. It was embarrassing. At post-conference, my principal kept talking about how I didn’t have enough decoration in my classroom, but in special education classrooms, students get very distracted and so I like to put things up with purpose. I’m not putting things up to be pretty. He wanted to see motivational posters, which I like, but at the same time I think they’re a distraction. He basically said, “You might want to add more to your classroom but once again, you’re a first year teacher, you can’t afford all that stuff.” It felt like the post-conference was more of a focus on my classroom, and not necessarily on the instruction, even though I felt like my instruction was really good.

In addition, Jill related similar feelings that her evaluator held unrealistic expectations for her evaluation:

At the post-conference, I do remember being surprised that there were areas that weren’t in the highest category of the rubric. I remember leaving there thinking, “That was a damn good lesson, that was a great lesson, and it was a skilled activity?”

Furthermore, Marie explained the following in regards to her evaluators’ unrealistic expectations for her throughout the OTES process:

There’s a picture of an ideal setting that certain evaluators want to see, and I know what my evaluator wants to see, so I’m going to make my room and my day flow like that. In an OTES observation, I am making it look like what my evaluator’s ideal classroom should look like.
Research study participants indicated that these unrealistic expectations as noted above devalued and confused the evaluation process for them. Craig (2010), in his narrative inquiry focused on evaluation reform, found that there was an inequality of expectations for evaluators as compared to educators. While educators were expected to be transparent in their thinking throughout the evaluation process and were expected to supply copious amounts of evidence, evaluators were not held to the same standard (Craig, 2010). Craig (2010) stated, “Such behavior suggests that evaluation, in this particular case, was as an activity in which the evaluation team engaged in—not one fundamentally grounded in human relationships, interactions, and experiences and respect for the dignity of human beings” (Section 7, para. 4). This appeared to be the experience for some of the research study participants as well while being evaluated utilizing the OTES process at Richardson Local School District.

Further, some participants related events that took place with their evaluators that go against Richardson Local School District’s OTES protocol and guidelines. This breach of protocol took place for four of the eight total participants in this study, and it added additional confusion to the evaluation process for these educators:

Anastasia: [At the beginning of the year for OTES], we created our professional growth plan that included two goals for the school year. I didn’t really have an option with these goals. My principal wrote it for me and then said this is what you need to work on. I came back to him later because I was afraid to say anything [at the time]. He gave me one goal but you could parse it into seven goals. I just told him that I didn’t say anything last year because I was afraid to approach him about it, but I would like to change this to be more honed in on one thing. Also, last year, I gave my principal
[evidence for OTES] that he lost three or four times. I think he kept losing my papers, and that’s why he kept coming back and asking me questions. I was skilled last year, but the only thing that made me nervous was that my principal said that when I do have value-added, that it will bring me down a category. He said they always want to score special education higher, because [the growth measure] will always be lower due to our population.

Anastasia’s experiences reveal several areas in which the Richardson guidelines for OTES evaluations were not followed. First, professional growth plans are to be created by the teacher in collaboration with the administrator; goals are not to be dictated to the teacher by the administrator. In addition, all OTES evidence provided by the teacher is to be included in the teacher’s OTES evaluation; however, Anastasia’s evidence was repeatedly lost. Finally, certain groups of teachers, such as special education teachers, are not to be scored any differently from others. All scoring of observations is to be done with the same expectations in place for all types of teachers.

Christian: None of my evidence [submitted to my evaluator] was brought up in my post-conference I had with my principal. That bothered me. My first observation was a quick paragraph; that’s what I got in terms of feedback. This year, I’ve had an observation from a different OTES evaluator and I’ve got pages of feedback. Also, my first pre-conference was very informal - five to ten minutes tops, whereas this year it was a good hour. Also, the first year I was a little surprised that it was a quick twenty-minute observation.

Christian’s experiences also expose several areas in which Richardson’s OTES guidelines were not followed. To begin with, as was the case with Anastasia, evidence
that was provided to the evaluator was not included in the evaluation. In addition, the OTES rubric necessitates that feedback is more extensive than a “quick paragraph.” The rubric is comprised of ten sections that are very detailed and that are to be addressed thoroughly by the evaluator. Finally, pre-conferences are generally expected to be a half-hour, and observations are required to be a minimum of a half-hour.

Fiona: [My evaluator] made a point of telling me I was the only one at my grade level that was skilled. She sat down in the lunch room and said, “Well, you’re the only one I have to observe because you’re the only one that was skilled.”

It was just because of my value-added, but I was absolutely floored; that’s when it kind of devalued it for me. For this year’s OTES evaluation cycle, we were surprised that our professional growth goals were given to us. We were told it had to have the PBIS [behavior] goal in our plan. It said, “I will reduce the number of office referrals,” and our evaluator wanted that exact wording in there. I said, “Well, I can’t. That’s too subjective because I’m getting kids that [are new to me], so that’s a whole different dynamic. I don’t want to put that in there.” And then I just gave up and put it in there anyways. Everybody felt that way, but she came to everybody and talked to them and had them put it in and most of us were just like whatever. I wish my growth plan were something that was more personal to me, [focusing on] things that I need to improve upon, and that it was truly valid and informative, but I don’t feel like that’s what’s happening. The goal for the area of refinement [following the observation] is all the same for all of us too, which doesn’t hold validity to me.

Fiona’s experiences revealed three separate instances of a breach of district protocol. First, all evaluation information is considered confidential, and it is expected
that each staff member’s rating is not shared with other staff members. In addition, as was the case with Anastasia, the growth plan goals were dictated to Fiona, when professional goals are to be set by the teacher in collaboration with the evaluator. Further, these goals are to be individualized to the teacher’s professional needs, which are expected to differ from staff member to staff member. The same is true of the area of refinement. This area is to be individualized based on the results of the teacher’s observation. The area of refinement should be an area where the specific teacher needs to demonstrate his or her growth, and it is expected that each teacher will likely have different areas of refinement.

*Lorelei:* It was my understanding that I was supposed to have at least two walkthroughs, but I only got one. I think [the teacher’s union] started a grievance process because of this but I don’t think it was ever finished.

Richardson Local School District protocol, as well as the negotiated agreement between the teacher’s union and Richardson, states that teachers are to have a minimum of two walkthroughs each year that they are formally evaluated. The multiple examples of divergence from OTES protocol noted above appeared to engender additional confusion in the participants with regards to the OTES evaluation process. Also, the examples noted above did not allow teachers to have the expected opportunities to share evidence of their practice and professional growth, which may have had a negative impact on their overall evaluation results and may have colored their overall OTES evaluation experience.

Goe, Holdheide, and Miller (2011) explained that effective evaluation systems assure that stakeholders value and understand the system. For educators involved in this
research study, there was much confusion expressed in regards to the OTES evaluation process. The theme of confusion was woven into nearly every interview conducted during this research study, and it permeated all of the other themes that revealed themselves throughout the course of this research. Some additional areas that were particularly confusing for research study participants included what evidence was needed during pre-conferences, how growth measures were used and their accuracy and reliability, how the final rating was established, and evaluator expectations as described by research participants below:

_Anastasia:_ I guess I have just never really had a clear idea of what they’re looking for. [There is also] confusion because of the special education population. Sometimes they say your [growth measure] is value added, or sometimes it is performance-based. That has been confusing. I think there’s just a lot of confusion. I read through [the OTES rubric], and I aimed for [accomplished], but it was confusing how he rated me lower. I still have a [lack of understanding] about the whole OTES process overall. I feel like it’s been overviewed with us, but I still don’t necessarily understand it. So the whole process is, “Well, they’re going to tell me what to do, and I’ll just turn things in, and I’ll be devastated if my score comes back bad. But I really don’t know what else to do.” During the pre-conference, I felt that my principal expected me to know more than I did about what was in the rubric. He tried to explain it, but I still feel like maybe he didn’t understand it, so it wasn’t really [explained well]. I brought an example lesson and the materials I was using at the time, but he kept asking for more artifacts. He thought that, during my new teacher orientation, I had received training for OTES. I don’t feel like I was [able to share all of the evidence that I wanted to] at the preconference because
I wasn’t sure of the expectations. The comments [my evaluator made] were very sporadic, random, and taken from different moments in time. It’s just not straightforward.

_Candace:_ I’m so confused [about the alternative framework], and we just keep hearing [conflicting messages]: that it’s going to be a portfolio, no it’s not going to be a portfolio, well it may not be the portfolio that you think it’s going to be. All of us (the third grade teachers) are on improvement plans this school year, [meaning our growth measures were below expected growth]. We all feel pretty beat up because I think we’re the hardest working, strongest, and most disciplined grade level. It really does feel rotten, and it gets overwhelming because we have to do more assessment of our students. And our assessments are in math even though it was in reading where our grade level was [below expected growth]. We’re not sure why we're focusing on math; it’s easier to assess, but we’re all confused. I’m not even sure what our growth measure will be this year because it has changed so much. I don’t know for sure how the district plans to use the results of our evaluations. Our administrator said that it is a learning process.

_Christian:_ I remember eventually getting my final rating, which was accomplished. I asked how it worked and no one could really explain it to me at that point. I saw the final scores on the OTES evaluation, and I remember being completely baffled as to how we claim a percentage of a kid. The teachers get together and decide with each other who is going to claim what percentage of a child [for the value-added calculation]. That’s ridiculous to make a teacher do that. You’re pitting teacher against teacher in some instances.
Carter: Communication issues [arise] because I think, with a new rater, people
don’t know what the rater is expecting them to bring to that first conference because there
is no [specific] form you bring to the pre-conference. Do you bring a lesson plan; do you
bring a list of all your qualifications; what do you bring? It’s unclear, and some
principals, from what I understand, will take the lesson somebody suggested and they’ll
[let the teacher know that it needs] improvement before they come see it. And other
[principals] will just go and evaluate the lesson.

Fiona: I’m not sure what the district does with [OTES evaluations]. I know
there’s some contractual issues involved. Also, my understanding [of growth measures]
became very muddled when I realized that third grade went from [fall] STAR to [spring]
OAA to measure growth. It was like apples to oranges, and I can’t wrap my head around
that. I still don’t think anybody can wrap their head around that based on all the
questions that I’ve heard being asked.

Lorelei: At my first pre-conference, I had no idea what to take in [to meet with
my evaluator]. They were sending out forms that are sixteen pages long and I was like,
“Seriously? I have to fill this thing out before a preconference and then I still have to
plan the lesson?” The rubric is way too detailed for what we’re doing. Going to my first
pre-conference, I was very unsure of what was going to happen. It was very confusing. I
think that my administrator wasn’t even sure of what was going on so how can [teachers]
be sure what’s going on? There were lots and lots of questions. I don’t feel like I shared
my evidence during the pre-conference. I just remember a total sense in the overall
process of complete and total confusion and disconnect.
Marie: I’m also still confused with the observation cycles, and I’m confused with the data measures for OTES. I feel like I’m a very analytical person when it comes to looking at numbers and actually doing data collection and using it as part of some kind of evaluation and I want to know exactly what the reasoning is behind specific data collection. I’m also confused with the observation [portion of OTES]. For example, last year, my rating was accomplished but it doesn’t matter because I am a resident educator. I can’t be exempt from the evaluation process like other teachers are. For my first OTES observation at Richardson, we were told at the beginning of the year to submit our professional goals, and I asked my mentor to help me with them. I also asked my mentor what to bring to preconference because she had already had her preconference. She said, “Oh, I don’t know. I guess it’s no big deal. Just bring a brief lesson plan of what you’re going to do and you should be good to go.” So that’s what I did, and, when I went in there, my principal at the time said, “Oh, well you were supposed to bring this, this, and this.” I felt very caught off guard because if I had known that I needed to have so many pieces of evidence, I would have just brought them with me. I redid my first preconference because I was so confused with it; I felt so stupid. It was my first year there and I had worked so hard to be in this district; I felt like an idiot.

The success of the OTES evaluation process hinges on assuring that areas of confusion are addressed and remediated. Currently, there are no avenues in place to do so in Richardson Local School District. When areas of weakness within an evaluation system are not addressed, the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement is less likely to be accomplished (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012). For the research study participants, confusion was present throughout their OTES
evaluation experiences, and this confusion decreased the effectiveness of the evaluation process for these educators.

**Theme 3**

The third theme that emerged through this research study was that teachers do not view OTES as a viable method to measure what they define as teacher effectiveness and student growth. It is important that, when we discuss methods to measure teacher effectiveness and methods to measure student growth, we include research study participants’ viewpoints in regards to these issues. The educators involved in this research study were very clear about how they impact students and how to be an effective educator. They each shared specific thoughts in regards to how teachers grow and inspire students and in regards to what teacher effectiveness looks like and means to them:

*Anastasia:* [Teacher effectiveness] does have a lot to do with whether students grow, and depending on the type of disability that I’m working with, some students can only go so far even though I’m going to push them as far as they can go. They say [to] aim for the moon and you’ll fall somewhere in the stars, so you just have to see it for them, because often they can’t [see it for themselves]. I do try to aim for the moon. [As a teacher], I have a direct hand in bettering our society. And, I teach tolerance and teach my students to be good citizens, and ultimately that’s where we want them to be. Good teaching is compassion for every student, even the one that gets under your skin; compassion for all students, and the desire to make them grow further than your expectations.

*Candace:* I think [teachers] have to have compassion and empathy. They need to be able to feel where the kids are coming from to give them what they need. I also think
humor is important. Students will sense that you care [for them]; that’s how you get them to buy in. Recognizing growth in a classroom is difficult. It’s more than whether or not a classroom appears orderly. Effective teaching requires experiential immersion, taking learning to the next level. How do you evaluate that? The kids I’m the best with now are those average quiet ones that all they need is just someone to love them and tell them they can do it. I can get them to buy in. I want to build a love of life-long learning with students. I want to keep them busy and involved in the learning so they make it theirs; then they have something to take with them as they grow. And if I expect it, they can achieve it. My job is to make [students] want to come to school, and I want them to like being here. I want them to look forward to every day. I want them to love learning and, hopefully, that will lead them on to the next step to do whatever they can do. I think that’s part of being a teacher, there has to be a point where you just let it go and do what you know is right to help the kids, to make them happy and help them grow, to want to come to school and learn.

Christian: I think my beliefs about teaching have changed over the years. More than anything, I have learned that sometimes academics take a back seat to some of the kids that I had in my room. They’ve got different things on their mind than school and they want to be loved and they want to have a safe place where they don’t have to worry. The number one component of good teaching is patience. It is also knowing that not all kids are the same, all kids will learn different ways, and we have to reach out to kids and learn what their strengths are, what their needs are, and that takes a lot of extra work on an educator’s part. [Going] the extra mile when you’re tired and you don’t want to do it; that is what makes educators good. In my classroom, I [implement] a strict routine. [I let
my students know]. “This is what’s expected of you; you’re going to do it.” I have high expectations of everybody. I know it’s more than about just teaching and getting the numbers; you have to educate the whole student, whether it’s giving them inspiration or having those high expectations for students so they can see that you believe in them no matter where they come from and what their story is.

_Carter:_ I think teaching [is about] connecting with students and helping them grow. That’s what teaching means to me. [The components of good teaching] are connection, engagement, and growth. I think [a teacher’s role] is hopefully to create kids that are confident enough that they can go out and they can continue to learn what they need to learn. I mean it’s almost learning how to learn, because that’s the only way they’ll survive. That’s the only way they’ll be able to do a job, or live a life. Being open to innovation is important. I think you have to have empathy, you have to have an understanding of learning, and [you have to have] patience - that’s a big one.

_Fiona:_ Good teaching is being flexible and adapting yourself to meet the needs of kids, and to differentiate [instruction]. I think good teaching is knowing everything you can [about a child] and using [that knowledge] to find your way in, to get a little educating in, a little learning in there too. That connection [with students] is absolutely essential. I feel that a teacher, in today’s society, must be a good role model, because not every child has that. Also, teachers help create that to instill that [love of] life-long learning; it’s so valuable. I want to teach tolerance and get students to see other viewpoints.

_Jill:_ The most effective teachers are the ones who recognize the relationship with their kids first. And then the academics come a whole lot easier when there’s a
relationship there. There are teachers who aren’t mindful of that. It’s instinctive; you either have it or you don’t, but if you don’t, you better make it your business to figure it out. The relationships are at the heart of being an effective teacher. Children need to know that you’re their biggest fan, so you need to earn their trust. They also have to feel that you believe in them. They have to feel that you are on their side. Ultimately, your kids are going to show growth if you establish that relationship with them because they’re going to work for you, and that work leads to growth. In my years of experience, I’ve watched kids soar once they know you’re on their side and you’re on their team.

*Lorelei:* I feel like an effective teacher is somebody that goes in, teaches the curriculum they’re supposed to teach, and helps the kids learn it. [An effective teacher] walks them through things, changes things up, gets the kids involved, and treats them with dignity and respect. [Teachers] need to have passion for their subject and understanding of their subject. They have to want to help kids, and they have to have the belief that kids can learn and that they are capable of learning. Good teaching is trying to reach everybody the best that you can. And it may not look pretty at times, and it may not be completely possible at times because of all the other things on our plate, but it’s at least making that effort to try to get to everybody. Any time that you see the kids light up or they say, “Oh I’ve got it,” that makes me feel [effective as a teacher.] And sometimes I’m like, “Yay, let’s do the happy dance; we finally got you figured it out; we got to you.”

*Maria:* I think that good teaching facilitates that mindset of continuing to grow your knowledge. It’s hard for some students to have that intrinsic motivation to learn about other subjects that they may not have heard of before. I feel like that’s your job as
a teacher, to open their mind to new ideas, to new subject areas, to new content, and to new ways of thinking. I think it is [important for teachers] to have a sense of humor, empathy, and compassion. Also, [they should have] patience and the ability to go with the flow when they need to. I think the ability to communicate well with your coworkers and students is also important.

Thus, the teachers involved in this research study had very clear ideas about teacher effectiveness and student growth. Respondents discussed developing intense and positive relationships with students, a relentless focus on high expectations, and dedication to their roles as educators as key ingredients to effective teaching and student growth. Educational researchers have identified multiple qualities of effective teaching that appear to have a positive impact on student achievement (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Kane et. al., 2010; Stronge, Ward, & Grant 2011; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2008). These qualities included implementing specific instructional strategies, utilizing various classroom management techniques, and fostering specific types of relationships with students (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Kane et. al., 2010; Stronge, Ward, & Grant 2011; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2008). The teachers who participated in this study echoed these same components as key to teacher effectiveness and student growth; however, they did not believe that the OTES evaluation process was able to accurately capture evidence of these important educator practices.

Theme 4

Another prevailing theme within this research study was that the OTES evaluation process was similar to a dog and pony show that research participants found to be overwhelming, time-consuming, and subjective in nature. Teachers felt as if they were
expected to execute an elaborate performance for their evaluators, and some responded to this unstated expectation by ceding their participation, while others attempted to refrain from participating:

*Anastasia:* A lot of teachers do not teach the way they [do for their observations]; they just do it for the evaluation.

*Christian:* This would not be popular with my teacher friends, but I think observations should always be unannounced because what I see now is a dog and pony show. Teachers prepare for one lesson, and they spend hours and hours on this one lesson. I think, “Why are you doing that? What are you not doing on a normal basis if you had to spend that much time on an observation?” I think that’s ridiculous; I spend zero minutes on OTES observations because I’m that confident that what I’m doing is good enough for me and my students.

*Carter:* A lot of people were so obsessed with writing up these formalized lesson plans that they didn’t use every day. I found that part of OTES to be pretty stupid. Why would you write up this lesson plan that you don’t use every day? [For my observation], I just did my lessons the way I always do my lessons. I don’t change what I do.

*Fiona:* I have a problem with whether or not OTES is a true picture of what’s going on in the classroom. Basically, I see [OTES] as hoop jumping. I would like to know why there’s not more spontaneity for the observation [portion of OTES]. I feel like you can tell me when you’re coming in and I can prepare this fabulous lesson because I went to college and we learned how to write these really long lesson plans that we never use in the classroom. And I can give you that and I can go through the rubric and I can
put every little thing in there, whether it’s factual or not, and I can get a rating. I don’t know that this is necessarily an accurate assessment of what is going on.

_Jill:_ I remember typing it out exactly like an old college lesson plan, with everything I was planning on saying, and that just took a tremendous amount of time. I prepped my kids in the days before the observation. My kids were great, and I had them do a station rotation. I probably put more into making it look better than maybe I would have if I weren’t being evaluated.

_Lorelei:_ I prepared [for the observation] the way I normally prepare for any other day. I don’t put on a [dog] and pony show. I am a teacher; if you’re going to come and observe, you’re going to see me teach. I’m not one of those who does anything special other than prepare like I normally do.

Marshall (2009) pointed out that it is important for principals to visit classrooms to see typical teaching in action; however, evaluators who were engaged in the OTES process most often saw a lesson that was created after hours of planning and preparation. One research participant noted that it took her 36 hours to prepare for one OTES observation. All participants in the research study copiously discussed the overwhelming and time-consuming nature of the OTES process during their interviews. Whether they viewed themselves as active participants in the dog and pony show or not, they all shared that preparing for the observation was something that took time away from teaching and from their students, and many of them also shared that the observation had taken an emotional toll on them:

_Anastasia:_ [My first experience with evaluation last year] was a little overwhelming. [OTES] is taking away my time from the kids.
Candace: Now, I understand what the rubric says. I don’t feel concerned about the observation at all. I worry more about the writing of the lesson plan. It has to be much more detailed, and some of the things that I automatically just do have to be [documented] in the lesson plan. I probably take a good hour, if not more, writing the lesson plan.

Christian: More than anything, OTES is just a hassle for me. I’m frustrated with the process [because] it’s just time consuming and I feel like that’s time I could be spending with children that really need it more. It’s just wasted time. My first year, when I got fully observed with OTES, I was told to input all this data, all this [evidence]. I spent hours and hours submitting items because, at that point, I wanted to do well. I went through every standard for educators and made sure I had evidence for every standard and how they related to my classroom. And then I would go through and I would submit evidence to show that I was directly applying the standards to my room.

Carter: There’s also the whole issue of time; this whole evaluation process for principals takes so much time. My principal used to come in my classroom a lot; now, nobody comes in my classroom except when they have to evaluate me because I don’t think they have the time anymore. Now, I have my assistant principal and she’s been in my classroom a grand total of two times, one time to do my evaluation and one time to do my walk-through. It’s actually supposed to get [administrators] in the classroom more, but in my opinion, they’re in the classroom less. [The whole OTES process] is kind of almost a bother; I hate to say that, but it’s bothersome. It’s one more thing on my plate. I use my planning time to [prepare for OTES] because it’s not practical to do it at home. I can’t look at my kids’ data notebooks at home, and I can’t pull something from a file, and
I can’t pull a report that I need on data at home. So, I need to be in my classroom to get it all together because you’re compiling so much stuff and planning and figuring it out. I end up using a lot of my planning time for [OTES] instead of whatever else I would have been doing with it, which is more productive toward instruction.

_Fiona:_ I actually sympathize with my administrator [in regards to OTES because] it is a huge amount of work for [principals].

_Jill:_ I think the whole lesson plan of OTES is far too long, and there’s far too much writing that has to go into it, and I spend hours and hours and hours on it. And I feel like more and more of my time is now spent on these kinds of things rather than calling parents or designing a lesson that is fun and exciting. And all the data collection is just overkill. I’ve always had really high expectations for myself, which I also think has made OTES excruciating sometimes. I’ve managed to be accomplished, but sometimes I think, “At what cost?” I have found that the rubric is far too long and far too detailed. It’s a lesson plan format that someone designed, but it doesn’t work for everybody, yet we’re all bound by it now. I remember that my first OTES evaluation was absolutely exhausting. Everybody was totally stressed out. It was so overwhelming for our administrators too. It took me thirty-six hours to plan for the first observation, which lasted approximately an hour. [During that time], I prepared the framework of the lesson and the structure of the lesson itself. I had to make sure that I had a combination of a little bit of direct instruction, make sure there were some student-led activities, and make sure that I used some technology in there.

_Lorelei:_ This is my eighth year, and it just keeps getting worse. I keep getting more work piled on me. I don’t know, it’s just like we have to be superhuman and I’m
not superhuman. It takes a toll on my health because I don’t even have time to do the house cleaning, let alone exercise or eat well. You don’t go to sleep until late because you are up doing stuff. Then you wake up in the middle of the night, and you’re like, “Oh I have to do this and I have to do that, and this kid’s been driving me crazy; what am I going to do to help with that situation?” It [feels like] millions of pounds of pressure just pushing down on you. I am surprised I haven’t completely broken yet. I really am. I feel like the more that the state and the country put the microscope on teachers, the more the parents do it and then they expect more out of us too. They just keep piling more and more, and it’s like, “What do you expect from me?” I only have twenty-four hours in my day.

Marie: I feel like the resident educator is our evaluation, and then on top of that, we’re doing this OTES evaluation. [OTES and resident educator] are really similar; I feel like I’m doing double the work. Why can’t there be some kind of cohesive connection between the two, because I’m virtually doing double the work? OTES has been very stressful. The whole process is extremely stressful. I don’t see how it's helping. Just talking about OTES has made me more aware of how much of an impact it really does have on me. It’s brought up a lot of anxious and stressful feelings talking about the whole process in general. I think I’ve become a little bit spiteful and almost a little bit resentful. I hate saying that because I don’t like to feel that way about any aspect of my job. I understand that there are stressors, but things that are stressors are angry parents, a classroom emergency, or a building emergency. Things like that are what should stick out as stressors; I don’t think it should be what is supposed to be a self-reflection for me. I don’t think that should have such a negative feeling associated with
it. It feels like busy work. I spend a lot of hours preparing for OTES observation. I’d say it is about twenty hours for each OTES cycle. There are also so many expectations within that one lesson that it makes it a very big goal to reach, and it makes it stressful because you’re trying to show all of your abilities in just one or two observations.

Not only did research study participants feel that the OTES process was overwhelming and time-consuming, but they also explained that preparing for the OTES observation took time away from teaching and from their students, and many shared that the OTES evaluation process was taking an emotional toll on them as well. Danielson (1996) set forth a framework for teacher evaluation, and this framework was used as a model by the Ohio Department of Education for the creation of OTES (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). Goldstein (2014) pointed out that one possible downside to Danielson’s framework was that, historically, frameworks with so many competencies included within them (Danielson’s has 22) have not been viable over the long-term due to large amounts of time and paperwork required to complete the evaluation process. Research study participants expressed that the OTES process was extremely overwhelming for them, and that the rubric was much too long and detailed to be valuable for their practice.

In addition to being overwhelming and time-consuming, research participants noted that subjectivity was evident in a variety of ways during the OTES evaluation process. This subjectivity added additional confusion, stress, and frustration to the process:

_Anastasia_: When I first read the [OTES rubric], I [thought it was] very subjective, and so I wasn’t sure what [evidence I needed to provide] during my pre-conference. I’ve
[also] been thinking about the subjectivity of our evaluators, and it does make me nervous that I could be let go from a school district because they may determine that what I’m doing isn’t good enough. That’s kind of a scary thought. When I think back on my OTES evaluation [experiences overall], what stood out to me was that different evaluators can have different perspectives. What each evaluator is focusing on can be totally different, so it really depends on the evaluator, even [using the OTES] rubric. There are certain things that are important to each principal, but I think that makes the evaluation very subjective. If you were at one school, one principal may say, when they evaluate you, I think you’re fantastic, but then at another school they may say you’re a total mess and I don’t want you here.

*Candace:* I think sometimes that the difference between the skilled and the accomplished [designation on the rubric], is still subjective, and even though the principal is in here and watching for an hour, they still come with subjective biases. They can’t really always justify what they say. I think I get away with more than my teaching partner does. She will get good recommendations but she’s still skilled and I’m accomplished because I have a stronger rapport with the principal and more experience. The walkthroughs that are [required for OTES] are more prescribed than what I would call a walkthrough. I remember having one a couple weeks ago and I thought, just come in and walkthrough. But instead, it’s like a mini-observation – it’s a little much – a little too prescribed. I think the evaluator can also can get off on [a subjective tangent], based on whether they like the person or if what they saw was dynamic. It’s still so subjective, whether the administrator decides you’re skilled or accomplished. Even with all those verbs and all those acronyms, it still could go either way, and then with the value added
and the student scores, that’s a crap-shoot from year to year. You can do as much as you can but there are so many factors.

*Christian:* [With OTES], it’s all about an observation on one day, from someone who may or may not have a bias, that’s my opinion. This new system is supposed to take the bias out of it, [and] I don’t believe that it does. I have a good relationship [with my principal]; however, I am outspoken. I will tell her my opinion; I’m not afraid to back up what I need to say. I don’t look for conflict, but if something bothers me, I’ll let her know. That, in my opinion, can create human bias.

*Carter:* I do know it is supposed to be done holistically. And part of the problem is that it’s supposed to be objective, but a lot of it does become subjective because the whole idea of being holistic can be a bit difficult when people are looking at a given category. When people are kind of between two categories, it gets a little bit more subjective and difficult, because if there’s evidence of both, I think that’s where it’s difficult for the evaluator to make that choice. Just looking at [the rubric], there are things that overlap, and I would think that would be hard. I know I’ve heard other people complain. One of the things that stands out for me [in regards to OTES] is the fact that there are different evaluators and they view things very differently. There seems to be a lot of inconsistency. People are saying that they have one evaluator who’s concerned about the posters they have up in the room and another evaluator that really doesn’t care about that and is more concerned about the words I’m using with students. That’s inconsistency, and that seems to be a problem, that there’s that much diversity within our district and within the same building.
**Fiona:** I don’t feel that each of my grade-level colleagues and I are rated objectively. There are four of us, and two of us are more out-spoken and that seems to impact our evaluations. I know that we were told many times at our building that we could only have a certain number of accomplished teachers, which I find ridiculous because if you’re accomplished, you’re accomplished. A teacher told me that she was told she should be accomplished but our evaluator can’t have that many accomplished teachers so she has to be skilled. It’s a numbers game, and I feel like that’s what education is anymore.

**Jill:** It has to be somewhat subjective. I think that’s why initially people were kind of worried about administrators, because if you don’t trust your administrator, that’s a pretty lengthy process to have someone you don’t trust evaluate you.

**Marie:** I think OTES is subjective. For example, my observation this year was my literature circles, and my feedback was, “Well, you need to use more technology.” And I thought, “Well, I do use technology, just not in this lesson.” The evaluation process is totally different this year compared to last year because my evaluators have two completely different personalities. They have different expectations. [The observations] are reflective of the evaluator and what they want to see. And that’s why I get a little bit discouraged by OTES because I want to be accomplished or skilled, so I’m going to do what that evaluator wants me to do. She wants to see certain things, so I’m going to take the time to prepare a lesson where I can showcase all those things.

Thus, the subjectivity discussed by research participants added additional confusion, stress, and frustration to the evaluation process. Educators felt that evaluators showed preference to teachers who were unlikely to challenge the building status quo and
who were well liked by the administrator. Educators stated that teachers with these types of personal characteristics received higher OTES ratings. In addition, they felt that educators were often rated more highly if the evaluator’s personal preferences for classroom management, classroom arrangement, and lesson structure were highlighted during the observation. Goldstein (2014) stated the following in regards to this subjective use of the Danielson framework by evaluators:

Principals either go through the motions without making meaningful distinctions among teachers, or they find ways to use the great number of subjective variables in these rubrics – for example, “compliance with standards of conduct,” – in Danielson’s framework – as a way to target disfavored teachers for dismissal, regardless of more objective measures of performance. (p. 235)

Theme 5

The fifth theme that emerged from the data in this research study was that OTES does not satisfy the intended purpose as a growth model for educators. The evaluation process was thought of as a high-stakes process, as was pointed out by all eight research participants. The high-stakes nature of this process inhibited opportunities for growth because educators were focused on preserving their livelihoods, not on honing their skills as educators. Some examples of the high-stakes nature of OTES evaluations are provided below:

Anastasia: I didn’t realize that [our OTES evaluation] was tied into our contract. I agree with being evaluated, and I understand why they’re doing it, but at the same time it just makes things high stakes and creates anxiety [that] my job will always be on the line and I can be let go at any time. I think, “Is this going to be my whole life? Because I
just wanted to go in and enjoy teaching and help grow little minds.” Instead, I walk in the class and think constantly about how my evaluation is determined on my performance. It causes a lot of pressure, on the kids and on yourself, and I feel like you learn more, and the kids learn more, if you’re relaxed.

_Candace:_ Our principal tries to be very careful not to tell people [that we’re all on improvement plans], but we feel like it’s fine because the statistics [value-added measure] they use are flawed, they really are. But I feel sad for these younger [teachers] who feel like they could lose their job. The State Teachers Retirement System tells them they have to work until they’re sixty-five and they’re being told they’re not doing a good job. It’s hard for them; at least I can retire whenever I want. I feel sorry for them. A lot of teachers are very bitter about it because they know how hard they worked and the kind of kids they had. It has made them a little bitter towards education too. I think they still try to do their best but sometimes I think they feel like what’s it worth, but they’re still working hard. They don’t give up. I’ll walk in and they get mad and start ranting at me. I’m like, “I know I know I’m sorry I don’t know what to do.”

_Christian:_ I am always waiting for that one class to just come in and destroy my program, and so it’s always hanging over your head.

_Carter:_ All teachers want to be accomplished. And they struggle with the idea that accomplished is above and beyond. I think most teachers equate accomplished with an A, so they’re still working to get the top grade, and, in our district, we now have [reduction in force procedures] tied to your rating, so you want to be accomplished so that you’re in the top of the pile. The district can use the results of OTES for RIF
[reduction in force]. The higher levels of OTES ratings would be higher up on the seniority list, so that’s pretty important if we ever have cutbacks again.

_Fiona_: There was talk at one point that our OTES final summative rating might be published. I don’t know if that was accurate or not, but I remember all of us thinking that would be catastrophic.

_Lorelei_: I’ve heard that eventually the district is going to be basing my job on whether I do well on the evaluation or not. That means I won’t have a job because my test scores are still not where they need to be, and it's not like I’m not working toward it. This shows that [the evaluation process] is broken. If you’re working towards something, it takes time. It takes data over years, not in a short amount of time to truly show that you’re growing. It’s not fair to anybody to base our job, our pay, anything, on what somebody else does. You know, I can stand on my head to try to get them to learn, but if they’re not going to go in and take it seriously there’s nothing I can do about that.

_Marie_: I have heard that OTES is going to be a measure of whether we get to keep our jobs and I’ve also heard, “Oh well, it doesn’t necessarily matter.” I really couldn’t tell you how the district uses [the results of OTES]. I honestly couldn’t tell you if we’ve ever been told, “Your OTES score in this district is used for this.” Maybe that’s why I’m so scared. I just do my absolute best because I don’t know what [my OTES results] are going to be used for or who is going to see this information in the future. And if it’s supposed to reflect me, as an educator, in this district, then I am always going to want to do my best.

This high-stakes environment was also one in which fear abounded, as identified by participating educators. This fear shut down opportunities for growth because
educators were overwhelmingly concerned about preserving their livelihoods and reputations. When asked to explain the fear that existed in the process, participants noted the following:

*Anastasia:* [Fear exists] in the OTES process because you feel like your job is on the line every single day, and that creates stress. Nobody really works well under stress, there’s some people that will say they do, but it’s not good for your body and you can’t think clearly.

*Candace:* Fear does [exist in the OTES process]. I think it does for anyone who cares. I don’t want anybody to tell me I’m not doing something right or that I need to do something better. I don’t fear the administrator coming in, but I fear that my lesson won’t go the way I want it to or that students will not do what they should do [during the observation]. And I fear their scores at the end because again, it’s one given day, and I try to be so confident but who knows. There is fear with the growth measures, especially being on the improvement plan. I just found my improvement plan notebook that I forgot about. I was putting everything in another notebook to make sure I had it all documented and that I completed everything that is required in the plan. I have to write down how many times I give assessments to make sure that students are showing that growth. I’m fearful that I’ll get to the end of the year and that the district will find something that I didn’t do and should have done.

*Christian:* [Fear exists] in the OTES process – absolutely. I can attribute OTES to pushing me out of my [former] grade level. I don’t think I would have ever changed grade levels if it were not for OTES. I changed because there was a fear that one day your kids are going to come in and not perform on a test after you’ve worked all year.
There’s also fear that you’re not going to get all of your curriculum in by April when the tests take place. And so you are constantly hustling along whether they know it or not you’re pushing along. And that’s completely opposite of what I thought Common Core was supposed to do. So, there is a lot of fear built in to OTES because there’s so much you have to get done.

_Carter:_ I believe that fear does exist within the OTES process. It doesn’t necessarily for me, but I think some people do fear it, in the fact that they don’t trust the person evaluating them.

_Fiona:_ With my administrator, fear exists within the OTES process, because she’s a person who makes you feel like you are guilty until you have proven yourself innocent. I feel like we’re always trying to explain ourselves or do something when maybe it’s not even necessary.

_Lorelei:_ I don’t know that [OTES has] impacted my actual teaching practices, but fear does exist in the process, especially when you tie it to whether I’m going to have a job next year or not.

_Marie:_ I am afraid to fail. I know my students see me not ever wanting to fail when the principal is in there. They know when it’s business time. I’m afraid because this is the only snapshot of my teaching that they’re seeing. I feel like if I fail that one lesson, I am doomed.

As illustrated above, research study participants identified the OTES evaluation process as being high-stakes to their employment, and this colored the process overall for them. The fear within the process created an environment in which fear was a tangible and dominating part of the evaluation process that shut down any potential opportunities
for growth. Conley and Glasman (2008) studied the extent to which fear plays a part in the possible uses of teacher evaluation results. They explained that, particularly in the last decade, teacher evaluation results may be used as grounds for possible dismissal from the job; the fear of these high-stakes types of evaluations can then lead to a less than desirable evaluative environment (Conley & Glasman, 2008). They stated the following:

Individual teachers fearing a summative evaluation may be less than forthcoming about their performance shortcomings and/or goals, and supervisors may hesitate to give teachers detailed feedback. The result is that teachers may fear that evaluation is less about personal improvement involving professional growth and more of a political hurdle. (Conley & Glasman, 2008, p. 68).

Therefore, the entire evaluation process is compromised when educators fear how the evaluation outcomes will be used.

Throughout the implementation of the OTES evaluation system at Richardson Local School District, teachers and evaluators were continually reminded that OTES was expected to be a growth model for educators. This was billed as an improvement when comparing the OTES evaluation process to the evaluation process that was in place prior to the implementation of OTES. Many researchers noted that educator evaluation does have the potential to truly be a growth model (Goe et al., 2011; Goldstein, 2007; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marshall, 2009; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Towe, 2012; Tucker et al., 2003). However, from seven of the eight research study participants’ perspectives, OTES was not viewed as a growth model. This emerged as a strong and consistent theme across the majority of participants as described below:
Anastasia: I feel like OTES just has to be done, it’s something that we have to do to be able to teach kids; it’s more just paperwork pushing than an actual reflection [of my teaching].

Christian: I don’t think OTES makes me a better teacher. OTES is what it is. As a teacher, you just have to roll with the punches and play with what you’re given and right now it’s OTES. I’ve found a way that I’m comfortable with, but not a lot of other teachers are. They’re stressed out and they are overworked because of OTES. As long as politicians are making [the] choices, you are always going to have to deal with it.

Carter: Honestly, OTES is not helping me develop instructionally. It’s not growing me; it does a better job seeing what I do than the old forms. It seems to do a better job differentiating teachers, but it seems to waste a lot more of the evaluators’ time. And, it doesn’t necessarily help the evaluators get the vast majority of teachers to develop instructionally. It may help them develop one small group of teachers. I think the only teachers it helps are the ones that are in the developing [category], because the ones that are ineffective are probably not going to get better anyway, and the skilled and accomplished [teachers] probably aren’t going to change very much. So the developing ones are either going to develop into skilled, or else they’re going to go away into ineffective; one or the other.

Fiona: If you have somebody [conducting your OTES evaluation] that even has an inkling of condescension, whether in their words or their tone, it is very damaging to the morale. [With my current administrator], I feel very beneath her, and I don’t like that. It’s hard to accept feedback with her because it doesn’t come across sincere and there is no established rapport. I’m at the point right now where I have considered other options
[for my career] besides education, but I just have to, toughen up, ignore, and [focus] on my little people. As teachers, we differentiate our instruction and lessons to meet learning styles and to meet individual needs, but yet we’re evaluated on a one size fits all type model. What motivates me may not motivate you or the next person, and we all grow in different ways too. For me, being able to choose the professional development that I truly want to do would be powerful. I feel like OTES is hoop jumping; it is what it is. I have to do it, and I know the process now so I’m comfortable with it. I know what the administrator wants and what she looks for and how to write it accordingly. I don’t hate it; I just do it – kind of like attendance. I feel like it’s become a way to contain teachers; that’s what’s happening. It’s like we’re just unruly - like herding cats - and that’s where administrators come in to contain and control us. There are a lot of politics that I feel like are unnecessary in education now.

_Jill:_ I feel like we don’t have academic freedom anymore. I feel like this whole system of OTES and data-driven decisions and the structuring of the building improvement plans is bringing the worst teachers up, and that’s a good thing, but I feel like it’s taking your most excellent teachers, and pulling us down. I’ve always considered myself a teacher who loved to learn new ideas and new techniques. And I feel like the students’ excitement has to come through my passion, and all of this is really suffocating me. The kids don’t know any different; we’re the ones that know what it used to be like. And so my own sort of mourning happens within myself, and I try not to show it to the kids.

Some of us have instincts, and some of us don’t. OTES is not going to help people who don’t have instincts. I don’t know what will help them. But anybody can be
good on two to four days of the year and to me that’s kind of what OTES [measures]. The feedback from OTES does not help me to improve in my classroom. OTES has not inspired me, and I don’t think it’s inspired any of my colleagues. There’s just too much pressure associated with it. Teachers, by nature, are overachievers and we don’t really need that added pressure. I feel like I’m going to grow; I would just like to grow without so much pressure. Don’t pressure me to do it your way in that lesson plan that somebody else designed, and don’t ask me to spend time proving to you that I’m working with my kids.

Lorelei: There’s days I’ll just cry after school like, “What’s the point? Because I’m never going to succeed.” I have my cry and I get over it and I try to re-focus on something else that I can do better. But it’s terrible that the three years I’ve been here I think I’ve said each year [that it will be] my last year teaching. Because I just feel like I’m beat down constantly. And all the good things that I do are negated by test scores. It’s so much on us that that I don’t feel like it’s doing what they need it to do. OTES is not truly holding us accountable, it’s more of a gotcha. It’s not weeding out the people that need to be weeded out, it’s actually making it so the people who are the most passionate and the most caring are the ones that are leaving the profession.

Marie: As of yet, it hasn’t necessarily helped me reflect except for the fact that, since I’ve had different evaluators, I can start to reflect on what does this person want me to do more of, what does this person want to see more of in the classroom? And, because you get value-added at the end of the year, it doesn’t really tell me what I need to improve on during the year. I think I’m left at the end of every year thinking, “Oh thank goodness [my students’] scores were high enough.” I don’t ever think, “What did I do
this year that went really well?” We’re required to meet with students on a weekly or bi-
weekly basis to check in and observe their work and constantly evaluate their work. So why wouldn’t we do the same for teacher evaluation? I mean it just makes the feedback so much more meaningful.

In summary, Richardson Local School District has continuously espoused the viewpoint that OTES is a growth model of evaluation for educators. Despite these intentions for the OTES evaluation process, seven of the eight educators involved in the study strongly expressed the belief that they have not grown through the OTES process. Instead, OTES has been seen as just something else that had to be done, and, in some cases, it has been quite destructive to teacher morale and self-confidence. Several participants expressed the concern that it is actually turning potentially excellent teachers away from the profession as a whole.

In order to ensure that evaluations do have a positive impact on professional growth, the use of multiple measures of student growth is key to ensure increased accuracy and reliability (Goe, Holdheide, & Miller, 2011; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Stronge, Gareis, & Beers, 2003; Tucker et al., 2003). The alternative framework being introduced in Richardson Local School District is an additional measure of student growth; however, research participants appeared very confused about this measure and how it will impact the evaluation process. In addition, teacher observation and evaluation should take place consistently and repeatedly over an extended period of time (Goe et al., 2011; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013). Research study participants echoed this desire to have more frequent and more casual observations, rather than one or two formal observations that they likened to a dog
and pony show. Furthermore, professional growth and improvement should remain at the heart of the evaluation process (Goe et al., 2011; Goldstein, 2007; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Towe, 2012; Tucker et al., 2003). The participants in this research study clearly expressed that the OTES evaluation process does not grow them as educators, and that they improve their teaching practices in other ways that are not part of the OTES evaluation process.

Finally, the research participants had suggestions in regards to how to improve the evaluation process so that it might truly inspire their professional growth:

_Anastasia:_ I think evaluation could be improved by being based on student surveys, parent surveys, and teacher surveys. I think that it would be good for us [to look at that data.] I think all of [our assessment data] needs to be looked at and realized. I think it would be nice if there were more than one evaluator. That way you just have a fresh set of eyes. It would help if I was given constructive feedback during OTES; if my evaluator could tell me this is the person I want you to go observe, or this is the workshop I want you to go to. Teachers need to be given resources, like conferences and workshops and other people to observe, to help improve.

_Candace:_ Growth measures should definitely be used to guide teaching. I also think they should be used as an evaluation at the end of the year, as a personal reflection. That’s how I have always used them. Perhaps there could be an opportunity for the teacher to explain why growth may not have been shown. You have to look at where the kids came from and teachers need to share that information. If we take the stress off of growth measures, you can reflect, and reflect honestly.
Christian: I think teachers need observations; however, I don’t think it needs to be done by someone in the building. I think it needs to be done through a neutral observer that they don’t know because I believe there’s a human bias involved. OTES [could be improved] by using more than one data point, or collecting the same type of data for all teachers. Unannounced observations may create more stress but it may also create more time because teachers won’t spend hours and hours getting ready for one lesson. There are ways to work with the current system that we have and make it better if everybody is willing to do so.

Carter: I think OTES is just too cumbersome, too paperwork-oriented, and it requires the same level of paperwork for somebody who’s doing a good job as somebody who’s struggling. I can see [using] OTES for someone that’s really struggling because you want to give them clear information about what they’re doing and what needs to be improved. The rubric guides that and gives [struggling teachers] credit for the things they might be doing well, but it focuses in on the areas that they need to improve. It seems like there could be a condensed version of OTES. If we get accomplished in every category the first time through, why do we have to do a second evaluation? Even for people [who] are skilled across the board; is anything really going to change that much? It seems like there should be some point where the two people sit down together and say, “Okay, do we need to do another evaluation or not?”

Fiona: [Under our prior evaluation cycle], I could do a parent survey, peer survey, or a student survey. I found the student survey was the most beneficial to me as a teacher. I would chart them, it was anonymous, and they were very informative. To me, that was the most valuable piece of information for teaching and I did [student surveys]
until it wasn’t an option anymore. When I did student surveys, I really got to know an unbiased opinion from the [students] who I was supposed to be affecting, helping, and growing. Evaluation is very necessary and very valuable, but it needs to be a valid component so that teachers buy-in; you have to get the teacher buy-in.

*Jill:* You know I don’t feel like anybody listens to us, nobody even asks us anymore, and we used to always be a part of the decision making. Several years back that stopped. The whole evaluation system, the whole data collection thing, loses sight of the fact that [my students are] eleven and twelve, and dealing with things that sometimes we have no reference for. We have to think about not just the academics, we have to think about the whole life of the child, and I think we have to have high expectations. Kids will rise to the level of your expectations. I just think there are ways to help us be better teachers. I’m sure there are young teachers, and maybe some who’ve been teaching for a while, who need that structured plan. But why can’t we help those who need it and let the rest of us fly instead of holding the rest of us all in this corral where we all have to be the same? OTES does not make me better so I get angry. It’s not time well spent. It’s not best practices, it’s not best preparation, it’s jumping through a hoop that probably somebody who isn’t an educator created, and we’re stuck with it. We have no control over it. Once you’ve established yourself, and you have years of data to prove your effectiveness, I don’t see why we all have to be [using the same evaluation methods]. I would rather see our district set up true mentorship. I think that would be beneficial [for young teachers]. Once [a teacher] becomes an expert in best practices, maybe part of his or her evaluation is meeting with and mentoring younger teachers.
**Lorelei:** I don’t have an answer for how to [improve evaluation]. I think self-evaluation needs to be part of it; most of your really good teachers are very reflective of what they do in the classroom. Evaluation needs to be more free flowing and relevant to the teacher because everybody’s different.

**Marie:** For an educator, growth is about pushing yourself to do different things in the classroom that you [might not] typically do, and when you do push yourself, realizing your mistakes and fixing them. That’s when I feel like I am making growth. I want to be able to try different things, so come into my classroom and see me on a more regular basis so you can get a feel for what I’m doing, as opposed to coming in on time and then trying to tell me what I need to do to grow. I think if teachers feel trusted to do their jobs, they will do it right.

In conclusion, research participants had suggestions for specific ways to improve the evaluation process so that it might truly inspire their professional growth. Surveying students and parents or other teachers was mentioned as a potentially valuable data source, as identified by research study participants. Kane and Staiger (2012) investigated the use of confidential student surveys and found that the use of these surveys could provide valuable feedback in regards to teaching practices. In addition, several teachers expressed the desire for more frequent observations that were more casual in nature. Marshall (2009) explained that evaluation often breaks down in many schools due to a lack of observed teaching time by the administrators or the presence of the administrator during the observation changing the classroom dynamics. When this was the case, teachers tended to showcase a well-planned lesson, rather than exhibiting typical methods of daily instruction (Marshall, 2009).
In addition, several teachers felt that neutral or multiple observers might be beneficial. Participants felt that it was important to have teacher buy-in and to allow them to be part of the decision-making when it comes to evaluation. Little (2009) found that, in order to have a credible and meaningful evaluation system, all stakeholders should be involved in the development, revision, and refinement of the system. In addition, multiple measures of teacher effectiveness should be used to evaluate the many facets of good teaching, and valid and credible evaluation measures should be implemented with fidelity (Little, 2009).

**Theme 6**

Another dominant theme that emerged during the course of this research study surrounded the growth measures portion of the OTES evaluation process. Educators viewed the included student growth measures within the OTES process as inappropriate, confusing, and invalid methods for truly measuring student growth. The majority of the educators expressed this confusion, frustration, and a lack of control in regards to OTES growth measures; however, one participant expressed a preference for the use of growth measures when they are value-added measures, and a second participant expressed a preference for STAR vendor assessment growth measures. Participants also expressed varied levels of confidence in the different types of growth measures, with the least confidence being expressed in the accuracy of SLOs (student learning objectives). Again, confusion seemed to abound with continuous changes to the system, and an air of mystery surrounded the growth measures portion of the OTES evaluation process as described below:
Anastasia: I’ve found with the [growth measure portion of OTES], the special education population is so up and down and up and down [on the STAR assessment] that I don’t necessarily feel like it’s a good measure [of their growth]. I haven’t put too much stock in the growth measures part [of OTES]. I will have a growth measure this year. I wrote an SLO [student learning objective] based on the STAR reading assessment. I think the accuracy of this measure really depends on the child, especially with students who have a disability. Also, in the resource room, student growth measures impact us negatively because [students are] already coming in behind. I think a lot of teachers get upset if they are going to have the low kids or if they have special education kids because they will not show as much growth as the other kids. This creates an environment of yours and mine. The teacher will try to get her [regular education] kids as high as they can, because my kids are always going to be behind. I know people don’t intentionally want that to be that way, but that’s the environment that this has created. I don’t feel that I have control [over my student growth measure results]. I have kids that have unpredictable home lives, and, when they come in in the morning, you just know right away what happened last night.

Candace: The student growth measures [portion of OTES] really blew me away the first time I saw it because it focused on more than [passage rate] on the test. It was a total game changer. It was taking students’ prior grade level scores and then looking at their current year scores and asking if they grew a full year. I was so shocked. Maybe there should have been more training, but I think it wasn’t so much there wasn’t training as they didn’t know what to train us on yet because they weren’t sure what it was going to be either. I believed that a good energetic teacher could beat the odds [with regards to
student growth measures]. I didn’t, obviously I didn’t. It is so ridiculous [that the growth measures portion of OTES] are the test scores from two years ago - from a different group of children, but we have to do all this work this year with this year’s group of children, so does that really make sense?

Christian: [OTES] drove me out of third grade. I had finally had enough because I completely disagreed with how they were comparing STAR data to OAA data [to calculate value-added]. It still doesn’t make sense to this day how you can transfer STAR to OAA; you’re comparing apples to oranges. [In regards to student growth measures], I know how to get good data; I know how to get good numbers. I am a numbers freak. This year, I used my pre-test STAR from the fall screener, and we do monthly STAR tests, and I’m constantly evaluating and judging if they are growing or not on a monthly basis. One of the reasons I moved from third to second was I believed I could get even better data with STAR than relying on a state test [as third grade does]. I believe we have to use data, but everyone should be evaluated on the same data. I don’t think teachers in the third, fourth, and even upper [grade] levels, should be forced to be graded on a state test because it’s not fair to them, and it puts a heck of a lot more workload on them. [We’re] losing good teachers from third and fourth grade wanting to transfer to second, first, and kindergarten [because they can use vendor assessment]. Third grade is such a fundamental and important grade. So, if you’re going to use STAR, that’s fine, but I think there should be more than one source of data as well that you can average together. And whatever that may be [should be] the district’s choice. To use just one test on one specific day is unfair to teachers.
Carter: I have a very strong understanding of the [student growth measures portion of OTES]. I would much prefer to have value-added than I would have any other measure. I really don’t like that we have to have SLOs this year. Value-added is, quite simply, just more valid. It’s a better measure, in my opinion, than using an SLO. I don’t want to write my own test because I think that’s ridiculously unfair that people write their own test and see it during the SLO process [for social studies and science]. I mean come on; that, to me, is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. I don’t want to see my own test. I think that’s completely unfair, I don’t know how you can even count that. For my first year, my growth measure was value-added math, and I like to use value-added. I’ve always been very concerned about [my value-added] because I think growing students is my job. I think the value-added metric is a good one to measure student growth. All the excuses [as to why growth measures are not valid] are just not logical. For example, the one kid that has ADHD and doesn’t take his medicine on that day and then bombs the test [is balanced out by] the one kid that’s been just marginal in your class all year and somehow on that day guesses amazingly and scores accelerated when you’re not even expecting him to pass. You don’t go and say, “Take that person off my average.” [Instead], you say, “I reached that kid,” even though you know full well that [the test score] wasn’t really reflective of what they did. It evens out. If you don’t feel like you could influence kids and their scores, then you can’t influence their learning; why are you teaching? I think student growth measures should be used to guide instruction. A lot of people say they shouldn’t be used for evaluation, but I think for a three-year average, they’re fine for evaluation. I feel like I’m ninety nine percent in control [of my growth measures].
**Fiona:** My understanding [of growth measures] became very muddled when I realized that third grade went from [fall] STAR to [spring] OAA to measure growth. It was like apples to oranges, and I can’t wrap my head around that. I still don’t think anybody can wrap their head around that based on all the questions that I’ve heard being asked.

**Jill:** [In regards to the student growth measures portion of OTES], I haven’t felt it was really fair from day one because there are too many variables that I can’t control that go into that number, but it’s nationwide and people who aren’t educators are pretty much the ones that decided that this would be a great idea. I don’t think it would ever fly in the business world because in the business world you are measured on things you can control. We can’t control what happens to a child before they’re with us, or when they leave our rooms at the end of the day. Those kids who have support at home are the ones who are the most successful. It just doesn’t feel right. Also, people who do science and social studies SLOs [in Richardson] are all coming out accomplished. And, I think that is totally unfair. [The science and social studies SLOs are based on] a teacher-written, district-designed test. They know every question on that test because they give the exact same test in the fall. It’s like an elephant in the room that nobody talks about. But I think there have been some really good teachers that have moved out of math and ELA because of it. They absolutely teach to the test. It’s simply not equal. Math and ELA teachers definitely get the wrong end of the stick.

**Lorelei:** I keep getting rated as skilled [in the observation portion of OTES]. And I got pushed down to least effective due to my growth measure. The next year, I got moved to sixth grade, but I had to use value-added from the previous year. So I had two
years with the same group of kids, which meant I was automatically least effective again. I have trouble keeping back tears because it feels like I’m such a freaking loser. I feel so stressed about the [the growth measure] that I don’t have time to look at the observation [side of the] rubric. I don’t think I understand any of the process; it just doesn’t seem fair to me. I don’t feel like the OTES cycle is even set up for true feedback on what you can do to improve. It’s too convoluted and too complicated. And my growth measures [for my second year] did not at all reflect my efforts in the classroom for the current year because I had to use the same data from the previous year. It’s just not fair to who I am as a teacher. It just isn’t. I work my tail end off; I do lots and lots of things to help the kids learn. I believe you have to have long-range data to really have true data. I’m not going to have true data for years; this one little snippet of time isn’t true data. There are so many different variables to it. And each group of kids is so completely different than the previous one.

*Marie:* I was honestly so confused as to what they were talking about with value-added because I had never been measured or evaluated [in that way] before. The student growth measures change every year, so I don’t really get it. And I feel like such a dingbat. I remember that for growth measures the first year, we had to choose two classes, even though I taught four classes at the time, that I wanted to get evaluated on. So I chose two, and then I heard from other people, “Oh, you shouldn’t have chosen that one class because there’s not as many students in there. So that’s going to affect your scores negatively.” That didn’t make sense. And I would say that it is not a fair way to evaluate teachers. I don’t feel like I can depend on growth measures [to always reflect]
my efforts in the classroom. It’s almost like I put in all the work for something and then I ask somebody else to actually perform the skill.

In summary, another prominent theme that emerged during the course of this research study surrounded the growth measures portion of the OTES evaluation process. Overall, teachers who participated in the study often expressed confusion and frustration, as well as a lack of control, in regards to OTES growth measures. On the other hand, one educator did express a preference for the use of growth measures when they are value-added measures, and a second educator relayed a preference for STAR vendor assessment growth measures. Overall, participants noted varied levels of confidence in the different types of growth measures, with the least confidence being expressed in the accuracy of SLOs (student learning objectives). Confusion was a common feeling due to continuous changes to the system and an air of mystery surrounded growth measures and the validity of these measures depending upon the use of value-added data, vendor assessment data, or student learning objective (SLO) data.

In 2014, the American Statistical Association released a statement addressing the use of these student growth models for educational assessment. Specifically, they cautioned that value-added models (VAMs) are only as reliable as the information that comprises a particular assessment. They stated, “Ideally, tests should fully measure student achievement with respect to the curriculum objectives and content standards adopted by the state, in both breadth and depth. In practice no test meets this stringent standard…” (American Statistical Association, 2014, p. 4). They also expressed concern that classroom-level differences, such as class size and teaching high-needs or gifted students, are not accounted for. Further, they call for all value-added scores to always
include an explanation of their measures of their precision and a discussion of possible biases (2014). Finally, they caution that “overreliance on VAM scores may foster a competitive environment, discourage collaboration and efforts to improve the educational system as a whole” (American Statistical Association, 2014, p. 6). The participants in this research study echoed these same concerns about student growth measures used as part of the OTES evaluation process. Hoover (2014) also stated the following:

Having studied and researched VAM for a number of years, I will say without hesitation that value added as it is used in high-stakes education accountability systems represents a truly remarkable example of politicians and policy makers ignoring a vast amount of good research in favor of ideological and special-interest group motivations. (p. 1)

Specifically, Hoover (2014) cited similar concerns as those brought to light by the American Statistical Association (2014) about test validity. Further, he pointed out concerns regarding asymmetry. “For example, if teachers and administrators are held accountable for student achievement, but students are not, then there are likely to be concerns about the degree to which students put forth their best effort in taking the tests” (Hoover, 2014, p. 2). Finally, Hoover voiced his concern that there is an inappropriate assumption being made that there is a one-to-one correspondence between teacher and student achievement. He stated, “Value-added metrics assume that teachers are the direct cause of student scores—that a specific teacher’s effects are revealed directly and fully by standardized test scores. Value added assumes that teacher effects are significant, specific, and precisely quantifiable when they are not” (Hoover, 2014, p. 4). Again, the
teachers participating in this research study echoed these same concerns in regards to the use of student growth measures as part of the OTES evaluation process.

**Theme 7**

The final theme that was exposed during the course of this research study was that the teachers who participated had very clear ideas about what grew them as professionals and about how to improve the evaluation process so that it might achieve the goal of inspiring their professional growth. Research study participants expressed that their practice is improved by being involved in supportive collegial relationships, by observing fellow educators, and by participating in professional development. To begin with, teachers very clearly indicated that their initial, and often ongoing, growth as educators was predicated upon strong support systems that were comprised of fellow educators. All eight participants shared very vivid memories of these types of relationships and how they enhanced their professional growth:

**Anastasia:** For support, I lean heavily on my mother-in-law because she’s a teacher. My relationships with my teacher friends and my mother-in-law have impacted me positively because I’m learning something new every day. And, if I bring up a situation to them, they’ve been very helpful. I don’t know how I would have gotten through these first few years without them. I feel like I’m more independent now, and I can make more decisions now, but it is nice having someone to lean back on. I wish there was an ambassador - perhaps an older teacher – at every school. They could assist new teachers, explaining this is how our building works, here’s some things that you may not know, do you have any questions for me? New teachers could go to this person for
information. It would have been nice because, when you first come in [as a new teacher], it can be really overwhelming.

_Candace:_ [In my early years], I taught with another experienced dynamic woman. She was twelve or fifteen years into teaching, and so that’s where I got stuff from and we could see each other teach because we had a movable wall. We eventually did some co-teaching. She taught me a lot of good discipline and consequences [for students]. She had a nice, easy-going attitude that built good rapport with the kids so they loved her. She was the model teacher, and the school would put the new teacher with her, so she could help new teachers. I think that was the best way to get into my first year of teaching. Collaborating with my colleagues grew me as a teacher. Talking with colleagues and going in their room and observing the things that they do helps to improve my teaching practice. [These experiences] make me rethink the rationale behind what I am doing. I think our new teachers need to have mentors.

_Christian:_ I also had one of the best teachers in the district [to collaborate with]; she was a big influence on me. She got me through that first year. And then, of course, my wife’s a teacher and she is a big influence on me. Just having that support and having them saying, “You are doing it right, we are here for you if you need anything, call me, come get me, and I will sit and plan with you.” [The staff] at my school was a very tight-knit group, and I think that helped just having that whole kind of atmosphere. Not all buildings have that, knowing not only your grade level has your back, but the whole building has your back. That takes special people and it takes special leadership to put that kind of group together, and it just doesn’t happen often. To assure other educators grow professionally, [we need to] to stick them with a mentor. You have those certain
individuals in a building that are proving year after year after year that they know how to grow their kids, so why not use that to your advantage? Stick them with that teacher for a while, let them observe, let them meet once or twice a month, and use it to your advantage. Use your resources in your building and your district.

*Carter:* The other teachers were a source of support [in those early years]. The three other teachers I worked with that first year were all veterans, and they were good and they were helpful. They just kind of told you what to do; I mean that was it, because otherwise you wouldn’t have known. That was how you learned; it was just like, “They’ll tell you what to do.”

*Fiona:* I have partnered with my current teaching partner for most of my fifteen years of teaching. I started bonding with my partner when I was student teaching because it was new for both of us and we have a lot in common. Our management style is very similar; we have that balance. When we do conferences, we know how to support each other without even [speaking]. It’s hard to explain that timing we’ve had together; it just works very nicely. A lot of it is having similar teaching styles, similar organizational and management styles, and we both have a creative side. We’re very in sync. This relationship has really developed me [as an educator]. I’ve had a lot of great mentor teachers. Seeking out teachers who I want to emulate has improved my effectiveness in the classroom. I’ve worked with some great teachers. Bouncing ideas off of each other and collaboration are huge. Professional growth for educators is a collaborative process; we seek out teacher experts in [various] areas throughout our building. You become a tight-knit family; you become a team. And I think that’s where growth occurs; it is not
necessarily trying to do it all yourself, but knowing where your support is and who to go to.

_Jill_: Thank God I had great mentors for ten years or more. I think back to my early career and I just really latched on to seasoned teachers. I could sense they knew what they were doing, had success with their students, and had a great work ethic. It wasn’t a job for them either; it was a career; it was a life. Thank goodness I had plenty of those along the way. I got many ideas from these relationships, such as classroom management ideas, how to sort what’s most important, how to pick and choose priorities, teaching methods, and activity ideas. [My mentors] were passionate too, and that only stirs your own passion when you work with other people who are passionate, and other people who are just good with kids. In my early years, it was really those mentor teachers that helped me to improve, [as well as] my own desire to do professional development. I wanted to be a better teacher, and I latched myself on to people who I thought were great. My team is so important because we’re a family, and the more in sync the leaders of that family are, the better the kids function. It’s like a marriage; the kids function best when mom and dad are on the same page. Working with other teachers that I respect and value, and being part of the decision making for my building and district [inspires my professional growth]. Staying connected to the teachers above you and below you and feeling like we have some skin in the game because [our opinions] are taken into consideration. That is what inspires teachers. And then sprinkle in some coaches who bring you new ideas or offer book studies or classes. The solutions are not that far out of our reach, but the people who are making the decisions don’t get it.
Lorelei: I had a mentor teacher in [my first] district that really helped me. She was a total and complete math guru. She really taught me the common core before it was really big or anything. She taught me the connections [in math] and gave me hands-on examples. That really made my evaluations better because she was helping me be a better teacher. She would just pop in at times and she’d say, “Hey what are we working on now? What do you need? Here’s what I’m doing…” She had a lot of deeper knowledge. This mentorship totally impacted my practice that first year. I think it would be very helpful to have a mentor teacher here [like I did in Arizona]. There was somebody on the math team last year in my building that would have been a perfect mentor teacher. But he was dumped into another building this year. We have lots of new staff members each year. My mentor teacher made the biggest difference of all [in regards to improving my practice]. She helped me understand how the district ran, but then she took it further. We ended up sharing ideas and it became a friendship and we became partners in the teaching of our students. In that first year, [we were able to collaborate] at least once a week; sometimes more if I was having a rough patch. And then, as I got more confident, it became a little less often but that’s because she was so good at building my confidence and teaching me to begin with. She was willing to try new things and she was just really open. She was like, “Okay, so you screwed up - big deal. Let’s see what can we learn from that and move on from there.”

Marie: I did have some great colleagues [at my first teaching job in a charter school]. They were just very passionate about trying to help and trying to teach these kids the best that they could. I learned a lot from them about discipline. I really appreciated the bond that I made with my co-workers by dealing with difficult situations
together because we were all in the same boat. They were all very supportive too and that camaraderie and that family feeling was wonderful.

The collaboration I have with my peers makes me a more effective teacher, as does observing other teachers. I’ve had so many opportunities to observe different teachers, which has been wonderful. I’ve had other teachers come in my room to help me because I need somebody to tell me what to do sometimes. I like to see other ideas, and I’ve found that that’s so much more valuable and enriching because it’s much more candid. I love to take a component from their practice and put it into my own.

As highlighted by the above participant experiences, all of the educators involved in this study had very strong mentoring or support relationships that they felt were instrumental to their growth as educators. The conviction with which they spoke about these key relationships conveyed that these experiences were truly foundational to their success and growth in the classroom. Goe, Holdheide, and Miller (2011) advocated for educator evaluation that spurs this type of professional growth. They explained, “Evaluation results can then be used to identify individual, school, and district-wide needs; target professional learning; gauge teacher growth; and identify potential mentors” (p. 43). Several research study participants suggested assigning teachers who had demonstrated mastery of best instructional practices to positions of mentorship with teachers who were struggling and with teachers who were new to their positions.

In addition to supportive relationships, participants also indicated that observation of fellow educators had a strong impact on their growth as educators:

_Anastasia:_ I’ve learned the most [about teaching] when I have observed other teachers. [I think], “Oh, I should do that in my classroom.” [For example, from one
teacher], I got the idea to take the legs off a desk so that [students] could sit down and see
the board. That’s been so helpful because this [reduces] distraction. [Observing other
teachers] has been the most helpful because then I can see what others are doing and ask
questions. I find out all this information that no one ever [shared with me]. [My resident
educator supervisor] scheduled observations for me in other teachers’ classrooms. It was
so helpful and constructive. It made me feel really good. I had a reciprocal observation
with my co-teacher and we went and watched another co-teaching team and how they
delivered the curriculum, and that was very helpful. I also wanted to look at behavior
management with some of my girls, so I asked a counselor if I could watch her manage a
girls’ group.

*Candace:* Talking with colleagues and going in their room and observing the
things that they do helps to improve my teaching practice. [These experiences] make me
rethink the rationale behind what I am doing.

*Lorelei:* During our planning period [in Arizona], we would go observe other
teachers in our building, and we would use that to draw ideas from. A twenty-year
veteran would walk into my class and say, “I learned something from you.” I think that
openness that the district had being in each other’s classrooms and learning from each
other was really a positive experience overall. [Whenever observations were done, [the
feedback] was always positive. If we had to leave criticism for the teacher [after the
observation], I don’t think it would have gone over well. I think that’s why everybody
was scared to begin with; they felt like it wasn’t their place because they weren’t an
evaluator. I feel like I become a more effective teacher when I am able to talk with other
teachers, observe other teachers, and see what they’re doing differently than what I’m
doing. I can see what really works in their classrooms, and I can tweak that to make it work in mine.

*Marie:* The collaboration I have with my peers makes me a more effective teacher, as does observing other teachers. I’ve had so many opportunities to observe different teachers, which has been wonderful, I’ve had other teachers come in my room to help me because I need somebody to tell me what to do sometimes. I feel like every single person I’ve ever observed, I’ve taken something away from watching them. Probably everything I do in my classroom, I got from everybody else. I love everybody else’s ideas more than my own. I think that we should all have the opportunity to go observe who we want. I feel more effective when I can implement new ideas that I see other people doing, and I think that’s because it’s that mindset of, “Oh if they can do it, I can do it.” There’s comfort in knowing that somebody else is already doing this and it’s working for them.

Thus, observation of fellow educators had a profound impact on the improvement of research participants’ teaching practices. Hammersley-Fletcher and Osmond (2005) noted that peer observation can indeed be a powerful method for educator growth if educators have a clear idea of the reflective processes that should accompany observation. They explained the following:

Reflection is something more than simply thinking, and, just as we need to be taught how to think effectively, so we need to learn how to be effective reflective practitioners. The peer observation of teaching provides a vehicle for encouraging academics to develop their reflective thinking. (Hammersley-Fletcher and Osmond, 2005, pp. 222-223)
The teachers involved in this research study found observation to be a powerful process that enhanced their professional growth.

In addition to the strong impact that mentor teachers and observations had on the research participants, several educators also noted that specific types of professional development were beneficial to their teaching practices:

Anastasia: I love going to workshops because I get to meet more teachers and they all have different opinions, and I love meeting with other teachers to discuss what works for them.

Candace: I also love workshops and I love reading books.

Christian: [Instructional] coaches are very instrumental in my improvement, because I know I will have problems in my room, and when I do I will go straight to my coach. My coaches got me into the data and spent a lot of time in my room. [My coach also] got me started on [student] data notebooks, and it’s kind of evolved over the years with my data notebooks.

Carter: I think professional development and working with other teachers [helps to develop skilled and accomplished teachers]. There’s something to be said for philosophical growth that happens. [For example], I really think once I internalized the whole formative assessment practice, that really changed me as a teacher and developed me significantly. So, certain things like that can make a big change on the way that you see things. Sometimes going to conferences or reading articles about something new helps to improve my instruction.

It appeared that professional development had a positive impact on the participants when they personally sought out the learning experiences, whether it was a
book study, a conference, or collaboration with an instructional coach. Goe, Holdheide, and Miller (2011) stated, “Providing job-embedded, ongoing, individualized professional learning and support is necessary for teacher evaluation to have positive impacts on teacher practice” (p. 43). That is the same type of professional development that research study participants indicated had a positive impact on their growth as educators.

Some teachers would like to be given professional development resources and activities during an observation, and many teachers mentioned that the evaluation should be differentiated based on the need and skill level of the specific educator. Also, it was suggested that, once a teacher becomes an expert in best practices, they might serve as a mentor to younger, less experienced teachers. Goldstein (2007) found that a formalized system of mentorship can address the structural barriers typically found in evaluation systems and can stimulate more collaborative distributed leadership in schools as well as increased professionalization of educators.

In regards to growth measures, participants suggested that it was important to maintain high expectations without losing sight of the whole child. They called for the use of multiple types of assessment data and for growth measures to be used as method for personal reflection and to guide future instruction. Marzano and Toth’s (2013) research findings concurred with research study participants, stating, “Student growth should be measured in multiple ways and aggregated across multiple measures” (Marzano & Toth, 2013, p. 13). Because VAMs have severe limitations, additional measures of student growth, such as assessments across smaller units of instruction, must be collected and aggregated with VAMs to more accurately reflect student learning (Marzano & Toth, 2013).
Summary

In conclusion, I analyzed the data collected throughout this research study by utilizing Moustakas’ (1990, 1994) guide for the heuristic analysis of collected data and Seidman’s (2013) methodology for analyzing, interpreting, and sharing interview material. I crafted eight narrative profiles (Appendix Q) that conveyed the essence of the shared experience of evaluation across the participants in this research study. The resulting narrative profiles were written in first person to assure that they were a vivid and in-depth reflection of each individual educator’s experiences (Seidman, 2013). In addition, the chapter provided an overview of the research study participants and culminated with an identification and analysis of the emergent themes from the participant interviews.
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine teacher evaluation through multiple lenses. Many aspects of the evaluation process can either contribute to or hamper educator professional growth. This study provided an opportunity to examine the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of eight educators as they were evaluated utilizing a state-mandated evaluation system (OTES). It is hoped that educator viewpoints and insights might lend themselves to a more complete and comprehensive evaluative process if they are given appropriate consideration. This study utilized a heuristic phenomenological framework to shed light on these unheard educator voices – the voices at the heart of the evaluation process.

This chapter discusses the relationship between the research findings and the theoretical framework for this qualitative inquiry. In addition, an interpretation of the findings is included. Essentially, this final chapter will explain the meanings that can be made of the results of this research study. Implications for future practice, as well as recommendations for future research, are two additional key components of this chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of what the results of this research study meant to me as both an educator and an evaluator.

Findings and Theoretical Framework

This inquiry was analyzed within the framework of evaluation theory. Evaluation theory is rooted in social accountability, systematic social inquiry, and epistemology (Alkin, 2013). More specifically, this study encompassed various aspects of House’s (2005) theories of democratic evaluation. House (2005) defined democratic evaluation as
an evaluative process that is representative of a large array of viewpoints and interests. Democratic evaluation works toward including underrepresented and powerless groups as key stakeholders. It encourages these underrepresented and powerless groups to become an integral part of the evaluation process by giving a voice to their experiences (House, 2005).

The eight educators who participated in this research study felt underrepresented and powerless, as indicated by their responses to the open-ended research questions outlined in their narrative profiles. For example, Candace, a veteran teacher, stated the following:

A lot of teachers are very bitter about [OTES] because they know how hard they worked and the kind of kids they had. It has made them a little bitter towards education too. I think they still try to do their best but sometimes I think they feel like what’s it worth, but they’re still working hard. They don’t give up. I’ll walk in and they get mad and start ranting at me. I’m like, “I know I know I’m sorry I don’t know what to do.”

Further, Jill stated, “I don’t feel like anybody listens to us, nobody even asks us anymore, and we used to always be a part of the decision making. Several years back that stopped.” In addition, Fiona explained, “I feel like it’s become a way to contain teachers; that’s what’s happening. It’s like we’re just unruly - like herding cats - and that’s where administrators come in to contain and control us. There are a lot of politics that I feel like are unnecessary in education now.” When suggestions were made as to how to improve the OTES process, research participants advocated for their involvement in constructing meaningful evaluation procedures.
Unfortunately, an undercurrent of powerlessness and disconnect from the evaluation process was present throughout the narrative profiles and the thematic connections made in this research study. Lorelei explained her feelings of powerlessness in regards to OTES in the following way:

I just feel like I’m beat down constantly. And all the good things that I do are negated by test scores. It’s so much on us that that I don’t feel like it’s doing what they need it to do. OTES is not truly holding us accountable, it’s more of a gotcha. It’s not weeding out the people that need to be weeded out, it’s actually making it so the people who are the most passionate and the most caring are the ones that are leaving the profession.

Thus, the evolution of OTES into a democratic process, as advocated by House (2005), has yet to take place when considering this state-mandated evaluation process. The democratization of the process would include the representation of a larger array of viewpoints and interests, would promote stakeholder involvement throughout the process, and would provide opportunities for open discussion and deliberation (House, 2005). As evidenced by the research participants’ experiences with OTES, they did not view their evaluations as democratic processes. For example, Carter explained, “As long as politicians are making [the] choices, you are always going to have to deal with it.” Research participants’ experiences were rife with examples of those in power using that power to dictate teaching methods and practices that were desirable from their perspectives, without including opportunities for input, discussion, and compromise. Jill stated the following:
OTES has not inspired me, and I don’t think it’s inspired any of my colleagues. There’s just too much pressure associated with it. Teachers, by nature, are overachievers and we don’t really need that added pressure. I feel like I’m going to grow; I would just like to grow without so much pressure. Don’t pressure me to do it your way in that lesson plan that somebody else designed, and don’t ask me to spend time proving to you that I’m working with my kids.

Relevance of the Results

The results of this study will be significant to the examination of state-mandated teacher evaluation systems because the study involved understanding the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of educators as they were being evaluated utilizing OTES, a state-mandated evaluation instrument. The themes that were explicated from the research participant experiences while being evaluated can be used to refine and modify the current evaluation system, depending upon the extent to which policy makers are open and willing to reform current evaluation processes.

Unfortunately, educators have not often been included as key stakeholders in the development and implementation of evaluation systems such as OTES. Craig (2010) found that teachers were not included during much of the planning that was part of the reform process. In addition, evaluation theorists advocate for evaluation methods that are inclusive of all stakeholders, especially those that are viewed as powerless within the process to avoid a politically-controlled single narrative as the final product (Chelimsky, 2012; Everitt & Hardiker, 1996; House, 2005). The educators who participated in this research study had a number of recommendations as to how to improve the current evaluation system. These recommendations are backed up by multiple research studies,
as noted above. The voices of these educators are clear and, as essential stakeholders in the educational process, the time has come for their professional opinions to count for something. The years of discounting them as valuable participants in the evaluation reform process needs to come to an end.

**Implications for Educators and Administrators**

This research is significant for educators and administrators because this study has revealed that these stakeholders are working within a broken system. As noted above, I had always suspected that OTES was not a true growth model for educators due to my experiences as both an evaluated teacher and as a credentialed OTES evaluator. As a teacher, I spent many hours preparing myself and my students for the OTES evaluation process because I feared that the results of my evaluation might impact my future employment and my reputation. Later, as a principal conducting OTES evaluations, I sensed teachers’ fear and nervousness during the evaluation process. I also witnessed lessons that I knew had taken hours of planning and that did not reflect teachers’ typical instructional methods. As a result of these experiences, I questioned the extent to which OTES was a true growth model for educators.

However, I was saddened and disturbed when the findings of this research study revealed that the OTES process actually has adverse effects on educators. The seven themes that were revealed from the research data were almost entirely negative when examining them in context of the research question: What are teacher’s experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated evaluation system? The themes answer this question with sobering clarity, and there are a number of implications as a result of these findings for both educators and administrators.
To begin with, theme one clarified that educators’ early evaluation experiences can impact their professional growth; however, educators’ early experiences of the OTES process were not beneficial to educator growth in this research study. The implications of this for administrators and educators are that teacher growth must not be confined to the evaluation process, particularly not the OTES process. Rather, educator growth must be a focus throughout the school year and must be considered within the context of all building decisions and initiatives. Within this theme, it was noted that educators who had trusting and mutually respectful relationships with their administrators related that they had enriching evaluative experiences that were beneficial to their growth. Furthermore, Marshall (2009) explained that educators and evaluators should have a mutual understanding about what good teaching looks like, and that evaluators should give consistent feedback on effective practices and areas for improvement. Therefore, administrators should focus on building warm, mutually respectful, and trusting relationships with staff members in order to have an environment of openness in which conversations about instruction and professional improvement can occur.

Theme two revealed that educators experience confusion as they navigate the OTES process due to a lack of professional development, unrealistic expectations, and evaluators’ breach of protocol. There are many implications from this finding. In regards to professional development, it is imperative that improved methods are used to assure that both educators and evaluators are on the same page in regards to the evaluation process. In Richardson Local School District, teachers who had been in the district since the inception of OTES experienced a three-part professional development that was delivered in the same way to all staff members. Since that time, however,
employees who were new to the district did not receive formalized professional development. As a result, the new staff members who were involved in this research study expressed a lack of understanding about all aspects of OTES.

Districts must take steps to assure that formalized OTES training takes place as part of the new-hire orientation process. In addition, the district should provide similar professional development to evaluators on a continual basis in an attempt to calibrate and refine their practices. This professional development should be viewed as ongoing instead of seen as a “one and done” type of learning process. Goe, Holdheide, and Miller (2011) explained that, in order for the evaluation process to have a positive impact on educators, the system must first be valued and understood. Further, Donaldson and Papay (2012) and Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown (2011) found that the key to the successful use of a comprehensive teacher observation rubric is on-going professional development in which both teachers and evaluators are trained to use the rubric in a manner that promotes professional growth and improved classroom practices. This research study revealed a lack of understanding about the current OTES process, and this lack of understanding must be addressed through enhanced professional development in order for the system to prove beneficial to educator growth and improvement.

The third theme that emerged through this research study was that teachers do not view OTES as a viable method to measure what they define as teacher effectiveness and student growth. When asked about the most important components of teacher effectiveness, participants in this study indicated that connecting with students to help them grow, placing relationships with students as primary importance in the classroom, and letting students know that teachers believe in them were the key aspects of teacher
effectiveness and student growth. However, they did not feel as if the OTES process clearly measured these essential aspects of effective teaching. Therefore, evaluators must be made aware that teachers feel as if these are missing components within the evaluation process, and evaluators can more fully address these key areas as teachers participate in the OTES process. The OTES rubric does allow for documentation about relationships with students within the classroom environment (Appendix H, Table 5) section of the rubric; this area should be used to more adequately document these key components of educator success in the classroom.

In addition, another theme that became apparent during this research study was that teachers experienced OTES as an overwhelming, time-consuming, and subjective process. There are many implications of this finding for both administrators and educators. To begin with, the overwhelming and time-consuming nature of OTES needs to be minimized in order for the evaluation process to be more effective. This, in part, speaks to the need for policy changes as addressed in the subsequent section of this chapter, but it also speaks to how administrators use the rubric in their buildings. Marshall (2009) found that administrative write-ups from observations may be of poor quality, may miss the bigger picture, might fail to confront mediocre teaching, and often lacks suggestions for improvement.

The OTES rubric clearly states the following in regards to the collection of evidence for all sections within the rubric: “When completing the performance rubric, please note that evaluators are not expected to gather evidence on all indicators for each observation cycle. Likewise, teachers should not be required to submit additional pieces of evidence to address all indicators” (Appendix H, Table 1). This flexibility that is
currently allowed by the state in the use of the OTES rubric needs to be more commonly understood, as all research participants expressed that they were expected to provide evidence for all areas within the OTES rubric. Buildings and districts might choose instead to focus on specific areas within the rubric in the future to minimize the current practice where teachers feel the necessity to supply evidence for every area of the rubric.

In addition, research study participants shared multiple examples in which they felt the OTES rubric was used subjectively during the evaluation process. This subjectivity added additional confusion, stress, and frustration to the evaluation process. Specifically, educators felt that evaluators showed preference to teachers who were unlikely to challenge the building status quo and who were well liked by the administrator. Educators stated that teachers with these types of personal characteristics received higher OTES ratings. In addition, they felt that educators were often rated more highly if the evaluator’s personal preferences for classroom management, classroom arrangement, and lesson structure were highlighted during the observation.

Goldstein (2014) explained that subjectivity might be an unintended consequence when using the Danielson framework. The OTES rubric was designed using the Danielson framework as a model. Goldstein (2014) noted that evaluators may either not making meaningful distinctions amongst educators, or they may use the large number of subjective variables in the rubrics (Danielson’s framework has 22 measures) as a way to target disfavored teachers for dismissal, regardless of more objective measures of performance. In addition, Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown (2011) found that principals were more likely to rate teachers as distinguished in order to preserve relationships with staff members.
Administrators need to be made aware that there is a tendency to be subjective while using the rubric and should be required to participate in intensive professional development in order to avoid this subjectivity. Sartain et al. (2011) stated the following:

A successful evidence-based teacher evaluation system must ensure that these tools, ratings, and systems are supported by professional development that help teachers and principals to re-conceptualize teacher evaluation as a process intended to promote and support teacher development and as a vehicle to improve instructional practice. (p. 42)

The final theme that emerged from this research study was that participants identified specific ways in which they grew as professionals. They identified that their practices are improved by being involved in supportive collegial relationships, by observing fellow educators, and by participating in professional development. These practices are not currently included in the OTES process, and this is an area that needs to be improved in order to enhance educator growth. Hammersley-Fletcher and Osmond (2005) noted that peer observation is a powerful method for educator growth because it allows educators to learn how to be effective reflective practitioners. Therefore, both administrators and evaluators need to place peer observation as a practice of primary importance and encourage its continual use.

In addition, all research participants noted that peer collaboration and mentorship was key to their growth as educators. Marzano and Toth (2013) recommended evaluation systems should be structured in such a way that they enhance teachers’ skills and improve their practice by providing support that assures pedagogical improvement. In addition, Goldstein (2007) found that a formalized system of mentorship can address the structural
barriers typically found in evaluation systems and can stimulate more collaborative
distributed leadership in schools as well as allowing for the increased professionalization
of educators. Therefore, administrators should carefully place and schedule staff
members’ instructional days so that the opportunities for developing and sustaining these
important collegial relationships are maximized. In addition, highly effective and
experienced educators should be placed in positions of mentorship to assure that younger
and struggling educators have the opportunity to learn and grow from these educational
experts.

Finally, research study participants identified self-selected professional
development as key to their growth as educators. Goe, Holdheide, and Miller (2011)
explained, “Providing job-embedded, ongoing, individualized professional learning and
support is necessary for teacher evaluation to have positive impacts on teacher practice”
(p. 43). Opportunities for differentiated professional development should consistently be
made available to educators, and this professional development should be individualized
based on identified areas for teacher growth and improvement.

Implications for Policy

The significance of this research is key to inviting educators to have a place at the
table when shaping and refining evaluation reform specifically and education reform in
general. The research on educator evaluation stated repeatedly the importance of
assuring educator buy-in and stakeholder participation in the overall success of any
educator evaluation system. For example, Craig (2010) found that teachers were brought
into evaluation reform toward the end of the reform process, thereby causing them to feel
removed from many of the important aspects of the process. If the goal is to inspire true
educator professional growth, the voices of educators as they traverse the evaluative process are essential aspects to consider in framing a system that will attain that goal. The findings of this study and the themes that were revealed speak to specific aspects of the evaluative process that need to be addressed in order to truly positively impact both teacher practices and student growth and learning as noted within the seven emergent themes that resulted from this study.

In addition, evaluators are in need of additional training focused on how to effectively support educator growth. The examples shared in this research study of the failure of administrators to implement the evaluation system with fidelity are of great concern. These failures resulted in teachers feeling discouraged, devalued, confused, and unimportant. Thus, evaluation policy should include requirements for intensive and ongoing professional development for both educators and evaluators to address and remediate these concerns.

Furthermore, the relationships that administrators cultivate between and among staff members are key, and all district policies addressing staffing plans should take into consideration how to build mentoring relationships amongst staff members. As suggested by many of the research participants, teachers who are identified as accomplished can fulfill mentorship roles for new and struggling educators. As explained throughout the narrative profiles, teachers already informally seek out these relationships as they begin their teaching careers. In fact, they identified these relationships as key to their survival in their early years as educators. The formalization of these mentorships would serve a dual purpose of recognizing seasoned educators as
the experts that they are and would also assure that all educators new to the profession have an opportunity to benefit from these relationships.

Another theme that has implications for evaluation policy involved evaluators setting unrealistic expectations for educators’ formal observations. The implications for this include that teachers are more likely to showcase a lesson that took hours of preparation instead of a lesson that is more typical of their day-to-day instruction. If evaluators are not seeing real instruction that takes place on a regular basis in classrooms, they cannot help educators to identify areas for future growth and improvement. Marshall (2009) stated that principals must regularly visit classrooms to see typical teaching in action, while also identifying and remembering key points from the classroom visit.

However, due to the high-stakes consequences attached to the OTES evaluation process, educators are more likely to put on a dog and pony show for their evaluators in order to assure positive evaluation outcomes. Conley and Glasman (2008) examined how fear plays a part in the possible uses of teacher evaluation results. They explained that, particularly in the last decade, teacher evaluation results may be used as grounds for possible dismissal from the job. Further, the fear of these high-stakes types of evaluations can lead to a less than desirable evaluative environment in which evaluation is seen as a political hurdle rather than as an opportunity for professional growth (Conley & Glasman, 2008). Thus, in order for evaluation to truly operate as a growth model, the high-stakes consequences must be minimized through a change in policy. Educators should be given multiple opportunities to exhibit their day-to-day teaching practices without fear of the consequences of such openness. Evaluators and educators can then
work collaboratively to identify educator strengths and target areas for future improvement.

The research has also clearly shown that student growth measures used for teacher evaluations are problematic, and research study participants viewed student growth measures as inappropriate, confusing, and invalid measures of true student growth. There have been conflicting findings in regards to the relationship between teacher performance/observational data and teacher value-added data (Grossman et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2010; Papay, 2011). Further, Betebenner and Linn (2009) pointed out that using value-added data as the primary method for determining educator and school effectiveness can lead to unintended negative consequences including the demoralization of school employees. In addition, the American Statistical Association (2014) cautioned that an “overreliance on VAM scores may foster a competitive environment, discourage collaboration and efforts to improve the educational system as a whole” (p. 6). Thus, a shift toward using student growth measures to evaluate curricular programming and overall educational initiatives is recommended in order to appropriately use these data sources for program improvement rather than to inappropriately assess individual educators’ effectiveness.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The focus of this qualitative inquiry was to capture educators’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they were evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. This research study adds to the body of literature in regards to educator evaluation. By utilizing a heuristic phenomenological approach, this study uncovered the deeply personal experiences of each of the research study participants. It
would be beneficial to conduct a follow-up study to ascertain the degree to which the emergent themes found in this study are present in a larger population of educators’ experiences as they are evaluated using state-mandated evaluation systems.

In addition, due to the lack of consistency that was revealed in the ways that evaluators conducted educator evaluations, another area for research might be examining the evaluators’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they evaluate teachers utilizing the state-mandated evaluation system. Furthermore, another area for future research might be looking more closely at the impact that peer observations and mentorship has on new and/or struggling educators. This small sample of educators indicated that mentorship and observation were powerful experiences for them; it would be illuminating to examine these phenomena in more detail.

This research study also revealed the fear that is inherent in the current evaluation process due to the high-stakes nature of the evaluation. An area for future research might be the effectiveness of the observation portion of the OTES evaluation process if the fear is taken out of the equation. Can the current OTES observation rubric be used as a valuable tool for educator growth if teachers and evaluators can use it in a safe environment? Can the rubric be used by mentor teachers to inspire professional growth as they work with teachers who have just started their educational careers?

A final area for future research might be to explore how early experiences in school impact individuals’ decisions to pursue a career in education and how they develop relationships with their own students once they establish their own classrooms. The research participants in this study had very positive experiences in school and shared plentiful examples of positive role models. As educators shared these experiences, the
emotional connections to these individuals and these experiences were very evident. Does this play a part as well in developing future educators who are able to inspire student growth by developing highly nurturing and connected relationships with their own students? In essence, do educators who connect with students and make a strong impact on their lives lay the groundwork for the development of future educators who do the same for their students?

**Researcher’s Reflection on the Study**

At the outset of this research study, I had no idea where this journey would take me. This study has called into question everything I thought I knew about educator evaluation. I approached this research with some concerns about my personal experiences with the OTES evaluation process. I am now completing this research with a newfound awareness of the significantly negative impact that the OTES process has on educators.

Furthermore, the highly personal nature of the phenomenological interviewing process had a profound emotional impact on me. One entry in my reflective journal explained this personal transformation of my thinking in more detail:

I conducted my first interview today with Candace, a 35-year veteran of teaching. It struck me that her early evaluation experiences were so unconnected to the types of support she needed at the beginning of her career. She grew into an effective educator *in spite of* these experiences. What really supported this growth was a highly effective mentor teacher, teaching alongside her, saying, “We can do this.”

How many educators do we lose because they don’t happen to have that type of support? It was also interesting that she talked about not caring too much about the
evaluation, yet her body language and other comments communicated that she did. It’s as if she’s hopeful that enough positive self-talk will convince her that it doesn’t matter.

To think that she is on an improvement plan this year due to growth measures is a travesty. This is a woman who is in her final years of teaching, and, rather than using that time to allow her to mentor teachers and address real problems of practice, we are requiring her to “jump through the hoops” of an improvement plan due to student growth measures. It seems to be a waste of a precious resource!

This entry reflects just the beginning of my personal evolution in my thought process. As I conducted additional interviews, I became aware of the depth of the impact that high-stakes evaluation processes were having on these hard-working and dedicated educators. I was saddened when I learned of their aspirations to change the world one child at a time because I felt as if the system was standing in the way of them doing so. Each of them spoke about wanting to make a difference in students’ lives. But it became evident that the current educational and political systems put roadblocks up for them on a daily basis. It became a struggle to maintain that passion to impact their students in a bigger way than just improving their test scores.

In a very real sense, this research study illuminated for me the dangers of treating humans as if they were objects to be manipulated rather than people. As I continued to traverse the research process, I became increasingly depressed. I cried as the participants shared some of their most intimate fears. I still think of the participants daily; I think of teachers who just wanted to make a difference in the lives of children, and who instead feel like losers and idiots. How terribly sad - how very unjust. My final journal entry portrayed this very real sense of sadness and anger at a broken system:
I am completely overwhelmed, frustrated, and sad. I don’t like what I’m finding in my study, although I have to say that I am not totally surprised. OTES doesn’t change teachers – it stresses teachers. It taxes administrators. It is done in a completely haphazard and subjective manner in spite of our best efforts as administrators to align ourselves.

I am also realizing how draining my own job is – due to many of the current state requirements such as OTES. What good is coming from the long hours spent analyzing data, writing up teacher observations, complying with district and state mandates? Are we helping kids? Are we inspiring teachers? Are we supporting administrators in these tasks? Such wasted time and opportunities to BE with kids and CHANGE kids and GROW kids. So sad……
References


Retrieved from


Appendix A

JOB TARGET FORM

Staff Member's Name and Building (Please Print)_____________________________________________________

Instructions: The ultimate goal is to improve student success/achievement. The following list of job targets has been developed by the licensed staff member and the evaluator. These job targets are to be used as a guide for instructional improvement by the licensed staff member during the current school year. As such, they should be stated in specific terms, which make them relatively measurable and observable. The targets are not necessarily listed in priority order. It should be noted that there is space provided for the licensed staff member and/or the evaluator to comment upon any and all of the targets that are listed. Further, it should be understood that these targets do not preclude any item of the adopted Job Description. At the conclusion of the evaluation conference, a copy of this form will be inserted in the licensed staff member's official personnel file. Any disagreement on job targets may be addressed under the Comments section by both the licensed staff member and the evaluator.

JOB TARGETS:

TEACHER COMMENTS:

EVALUATOR COMMENTS:

________________________________________ Licensed staff member's signature _____________________ Date

________________________________________ Evaluator's signature

PINK - HUMAN RESOURCES DEPT. WHITE - TEACHER'S COPY CANARY - PRINCIPAL'S COPY
# Appendix B

## Evaluation Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Planning and Preparation</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Needs Improvement (NII)</th>
<th>Effective Practice (EP)</th>
<th>Refer to Comments</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrating knowledge of content.</td>
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<td>2. Demonstrating knowledge of students.</td>
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<td>3. Selecting instructional/educational goals.</td>
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<td>4. Demonstrating knowledge of resources.</td>
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<td>5. Designing coherent instruction/implementing effective intervention strategies.</td>
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<td>6. Assessing student learning and/or student/family progress.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Domain B: The Working Environment</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Needs Improvement (NII)</th>
<th>Effective Practice (EP)</th>
<th>Refer to Comments</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Creating an environment of respect, trust, and rapport.</td>
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<td>2. Establishing a culture for learning, understanding, and problem-solving.</td>
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<td>5. Organizing and maintaining a safe environment.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Domain C: Instruction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Communicating clearly and accurately.</td>
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<td>2. Engaging students/families in learning, problem-solving and planning.</td>
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<td>3. Using appropriate strategies, questioning, discussion and assessment techniques.</td>
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<td>4. Providing feedback to students/families.</td>
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<td>5. Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Domain D: Professional Responsibilities</th>
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<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Needs Improvement (NII)</th>
<th>Effective Practice (EP)</th>
<th>Refer to Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reflecting on teaching/efficacitiveness.</td>
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<td>2. Maintaining accurate records.</td>
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<td>3. Communicating with administration, staff, students and families (sharing ideas, resources, interacting professionally).</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Contributing to the school and district.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Growing and developing professionally.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Demonstrating professionalism.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see Evaluator’s Comments for explanation of any unsatisfactory areas, a plan for improvement, and the means by which to receive assistance to improve.

WHITE - TEACHER'S COPY CANARY - PRINCIPAL'S COPY PINK - HUMAN RESOURCES DEPT.
Appendix B (cont.)

EVALUATION SUMMARY (Page 2)

JOB TARGETS:

☐ The licensed staff member has met all job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.
☐ The licensed staff member has partially met the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form. ☐ The licensed staff member has failed to meet the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.

EXPLANATION - JOB TARGETS:

EVALUATOR'S COMMENTS:

LICENSED STAFF MEMBER’S COMMENTS:

EVALUATION CYCLE ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR:

☐ Annual Evaluation ☐ Comprehensive Evaluation ☐ Corrective Action Program

ANNUAL CONTRACT RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following contract recommendation will be made to the Superintendent of Schools:
☐ Currently under a multi-year contract ☐ Non-renewal ☐ Termination
☐ Renewal: ☐ One Year ☐ Two Year ☐ Three Year ☐ Continuing

The signature below certifies that the licensed staff member has reviewed this form in conference and has received a copy of it. This signature does not necessarily mean that agreement exists. Licensed staff member comments may be added to this sheet - dated and signed.

Date Report Discussed ____________________________
Licensed Staff Member’s Signature ____________________________ Date ________________
Evaluator’s Signature ____________________________

Appendix C

OBSERVATION FORM

Teacher________________________ Date__________ Time/Period________________________

Subject/Topics__________________ Grade__________ Building__________________________

Method of Presentation: ___lecture  ___lab  ___discussion  ___testing

___other _________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Needed Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Refer to Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. Knowledge and understanding of subject matter was evident.
2. Class activities related to instructional objectives.
3. Class activities were organized and effectively paced.
4. Opening activities were well planned and smoothly conducted.
5. Closing instructions, including an assignment, were clear and understandable.
6. Teacher interaction was positive and productive.
7. There was appropriate classroom control.
8. Students were on task.
9. Classroom was neat and attractive.

General Comments/Recommendations of the Observer:

The signature below certifies that the teacher has reviewed the above in conference and has received a copy of this form. This signature does not necessarily mean that agreement exists. Teacher comments may be added to this sheet — dated and signed. At the conclusion of the evaluation conference a copy of this form will be inserted in the teacher’s official personnel file.

Signature of Teacher________________________ Date__________________

Signature of Evaluator________________________

WHITE - TEACHER’S COPY CANARY - PRINCIPAL’S COPY PINK - HUMAN RESOURCES DEPT.
Appendix D

SELF-REFLECTION FORM

Licensed Staff Member (please print) ________________________________
Year __________________ Building __________________

Highlights, Accomplishments and Challenges of My Year
Appendix D (cont.)

EVALUATION SUMMARY (Page 2)

JOB TARGETS:

☐ The licensed staff member has met all job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.
☐ The licensed staff member has partially met the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form. ☐ The licensed staff member has failed to meet the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.

EXPLANATION - JOB TARGETS:

EVALUATOR'S COMMENTS:

LICENSED STAFF MEMBER'S COMMENTS:

EVALUATION CYCLE ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR:

☐ Annual Evaluation ☐ Comprehensive Evaluation ☐ Corrective Action Program

ANNUAL CONTRACT RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following contract recommendation will be made to the Superintendent of Schools:
☐ Currently under a multi-year contract ☐ Non-renewal ☐ Termination
☐ Renewal: ☐ One Year ☐ Two Year ☐ Three Year ☐ Continuing

The signature below certifies that the licensed staff member has reviewed this form in conference and has received a copy of it. This signature does not necessarily mean that agreement exists. Licensed staff member comments may be added to this sheet - dated and signed.

Date Report Discussed ______________________
Licensed Staff Member's Signature ______________________ Date _________________
Evaluator's Signature ______________________ Date _________________
Appendix E

PEER EVALUATION FORM

Licensed Staff Member (please print) ____________________________
Year ______ Building ______ PeerEvaluator's Name __________________

Section A: (To be completed by the Peer Evaluator)

1. Observed Strengths:

2. Suggestions for Improvement:

Section B: (To be completed by the Licensed Staff Member) Comments:
Appendix E (cont.)

EVALUATION SUMMARY (Page 2)

JOB TARGETS:

☐ The licensed staff member has met all job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.
☐ The licensed staff member has partially met the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.
☐ The licensed staff member has failed to meet the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.

EXPLANATION - JOB TARGETS:

EVALUATOR'S COMMENTS:

LICENSED STAFF MEMBER'S COMMENTS:

EVALUATION CYCLE ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR:

☐ Annual Evaluation ☐ Comprehensive Evaluation ☐ Corrective Action Program

ANNUAL CONTRACT RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following contract recommendation will be made to the Superintendent of Schools:
☐ Currently under a multi-year contract ☐ Non-renewal ☐ Termination
☐ Renewal: ☐ One Year ☐ Two Year ☐ Three Year ☐ Continuing

The signature below certifies that the licensed staff member has reviewed this form in conference and has received a copy of it. This signature does not necessarily mean that agreement exists. Licensed staff member comments may be added to this sheet - dated and signed.

Date Report Discussed ______________
Licensed Staff Member's Signature __________________________ Date __________________
Evaluator's Signature __________________________ Date __________________
Appendix F

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FROM STUDENT SURVEYS

Licensed Staff Member (please print) ____________________________________________
Year __________________ Building __________________

Summary of Results and Implications for Instruction
Appendix F (cont.)

EVALUATION SUMMARY (Page 2)

JOB TARGETS:

☐ The licensed staff member has met all job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.
☐ The licensed staff member has partially met the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form. ☐ The licensed staff member has failed to meet the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.

EXPLANATION - JOB TARGETS:

EVALUATOR'S COMMENTS:

LICENSED STAFF MEMBER'S COMMENTS:

EVALUATION CYCLE ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR:

☐ Annual Evaluation ☐ Comprehensive Evaluation ☐ Corrective Action Program

ANNUAL CONTRACT RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following contract recommendation will be made to the Superintendent of Schools:
☐ Currently under a multi-year contract ☐ Non-renewal ☐ Termination
☐ Renewal ☐ One Year ☐ Two Year ☐ Three Year ☐ Continuing

The signature below certifies that the licensed staff member has reviewed this form in conference and has received a copy of it. This signature does not necessarily mean that agreement exists. Licensed staff member comments may be added to this sheet - dated and signed.

Date Report Discussed ________________
Licensed Staff Member’s Signature __________________________ Date ________________
Evaluator’s Signature __________________________ Date ________________
Appendix G

**SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FROM PARENT SURVEYS**

Licensed Staff Member (please print) ________________________________
Year __________________ Building ________________________________

Summary of Results and Implications for Instruction
Appendix G (cont.)

EVALUATION SUMMARY (Page 2)

JOB TARGETS:

☐ The licensed staff member has met all job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.
☐ The licensed staff member has partially met the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.
☐ The licensed staff member has failed to meet the job targets as previously stated in the Job Target Form.

EXPLANATION - JOB TARGETS:


Evaluator's Comments:

Licensed Staff Member's Comments:

EVALUATION CYCLE ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR:

☐ Annual Evaluation ☐ Comprehensive Evaluation ☐ Corrective Action Program

ANNUAL CONTRACT RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following contract recommendation will be made to the Superintendent of Schools:
☐ Currently under a multi-year contract ☐ Non-renewal ☐ Termination
☐ Renewal: ☐ One Year ☐ Two Year ☐ Three Year ☐ Continuing

The signature below certifies that the licensed staff member has reviewed this form in conference and has received a copy of it. This signature does not necessarily mean that agreement exists. Licensed staff member comments may be added to this sheet - dated and signed.

Date Report Discussed _______________________
Licensed Staff Member's Signature _________________________ Date _______________________
Evaluator's Signature _________________________ Date _______________________

## Appendix H

### Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Rubric

#### Table 1

**Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Model**

**Teacher Performance Evaluation Rubric**

The Teacher Performance Evaluation Rubric is intended to be scored holistically. This means that evaluators will assess which level provides the best overall description of the teacher. The scoring process is expected to occur upon completion of each thirty (30) minute observation and post-conference. The evaluator is to consider evidence gathered during the pre-observation conference, the observation, the post-observation conference, and classroom walkthroughs (if applicable). When completing the performance rubric, please note that evaluators are not expected to gather evidence on all indicators for each observation cycle. Likewise, teachers should not be required to submit additional pieces of evidence to address all indicators. The professionalism section of the rubric may use evidence collected during the pre-observation and post-observation conferences as well as information from the Professional Growth and/or Improvement Plan (if applicable).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOCUS FOR LEARNING</strong></td>
<td>The teacher does not demonstrate a clear focus for student learning. Learning objectives are too general to guide lesson planning and are inappropriate for the student, and/or do not reference the Ohio standards.</td>
<td>The teacher communicates a focus for student learning, develops learning objectives that are appropriate for students and reference the Ohio standards but do not include measurable goals.</td>
<td>The teacher demonstrates a focus for student learning with appropriate learning objectives that include measurable goals for student learning aligned with the Ohio standards. The teacher demonstrates the importance of the goal and its appropriateness for students.</td>
<td>The teacher establishes challenging and measurable goals for student learning that align with the Ohio standards and reflect a range of student learner needs. The teacher demonstrates how the goals fit into the broader learning experiences that support content learning and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources of Evidence:</strong> Pre-Conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSESSMENT DATA</strong></td>
<td>The teacher does not plan for the assessment of student learning or does not analyze student learning data to inform lesson plans.</td>
<td>The teacher explains the characteristics, uses, and limitations of various diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments but does not consistently incorporate this knowledge into lesson planning.</td>
<td>The teacher demonstrates an understanding that assessment is a means of evaluating and supporting student learning through effectively incorporating diagnostic, formative, and/or summative assessments into lesson planning.</td>
<td>The teacher purposefully plans assessment and differentiation assessment choices to match the full range of student needs, abilities, and learning styles, incorporating a range of appropriate diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments into lesson plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources of Evidence:</strong> Pre-Conference</td>
<td>The teacher does not use or only uses one measure of student performance.</td>
<td>The teacher uses more than one measure of student performance but does not appropriately vary assessment approaches, or the teacher may have difficulty analyzing data to effectively inform instructional planning and delivery.</td>
<td>The teacher employs a variety of formal and informal assessment techniques to collect evidence of students' knowledge and skills and analyses data to effectively inform instructional planning and delivery.</td>
<td>Student learning needs are accurately identified through an analysis of student data, the teacher uses assessment data to identify student strengths and areas for student growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H
Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Rubric

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher’s lesson does not build on or connect to students’ prior knowledge, or the teacher may give an explanation that is illogical or inaccurate so how the lesson connects to previous and future learning.</td>
<td>The teacher makes an attempt to connect the lesson to students’ prior knowledge, to previous lesson or future learning but is not completely successful.</td>
<td>The teacher makes clear and coherent connections with students’ prior knowledge and future learning—both explicitly to students and within the lesson.</td>
<td>The teacher uses the input and contributions of families, colleagues, and other professionals in understanding and planning for prior knowledge and future learning to support academic development. The teacher makes meaningful and relevant connections between lesson content and other disciplines and real-world experiences and careers as well as promotes opportunities for students to apply learning from different content areas to solve problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIOR CONTENT KNOWLEDGE / SEQUENCE / CONNECTIONS (Standard 1: Students; Standard 2: Content; Standard 4: Instruction)</td>
<td>Sources of Evidence: Pre-Conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS (Standard 5: Students)</td>
<td>The teacher demonstrates a lack of familiarity with students’ backgrounds and has made no attempts to find this information.</td>
<td>The teacher demonstrates some familiarity with students’ background knowledge and experiences and describes one procedure used to obtain this information.</td>
<td>The teacher demonstrates familiarity with students’ background knowledge and experiences and describes multiple procedures used to obtain this information.</td>
<td>The teacher demonstrates an understanding of the purpose and value of learning about students’ background experiences. Demonstrates familiarity with each student’s background knowledge and experiences, and describes multiple procedures used to obtain this information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Evidence: Analysis of Student Data Pre-Conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING</td>
<td>The teacher’s plan for instruction does not demonstrate an understanding of students’ development, preferred learning styles, and/or student backgrounds/prior experiences.</td>
<td>The teacher’s instructional plan draws upon a partial analysis of students’ development, readiness for learning, preferred learning styles, and backgrounds and/or experiences. The plan is inappropriately tailored to the specific population of students in the classroom.</td>
<td>The teacher’s instructional plan draws upon an accurate analysis of the students’ development, readiness for learning, preferred learning styles, and backgrounds and/or experiences.</td>
<td>The teacher’s analysis of student data (student development, student learning and preferred learning styles, and student backgrounds/prior experiences) accurately connects the data to specific instructional strategies and plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher plans for and can articulate specific strategies, content, and delivery that will meet the needs of individual students and groups of students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix H

**Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Rubric**

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction and Assessment</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **LESSON DELIVERY**
(Standard 2: Content;
Standard 6: Instruction;
Standard 6: Collaboration and Communication)
Sources of Evidence: Formal Observation, Classroom Walkthroughs, Informal Observations
| A teacher’s explanations are unclear, inconsistent, or inaccurate, and are generally ineffective in building student understanding. The teacher uses language that fails to engage students, is inappropriate to the activity, or discourages independent or creative thinking. | Teacher explanations are accurate and generally clear but the teacher may not fully support information based on student questions. Ineffective activities or the teacher's use of language that is developmentally inappropriate, leading to confusion or limiting discussions. | Teacher explanations are clear and accurate. The teacher uses developmentally appropriate strategies and language designed to actively encourage independent, creative, and critical thinking. | Teacher explanations are clear, coherent, and precise. The teacher uses well-timed, individualized, developmentally appropriate strategies and language designed to actively encourage independent, creative, and critical thinking. |
| **DIFFERENTIATION**
(Standard 1: Students;
Standard 4: Instruction)
Sources of Evidence: Pre-Conference, Formal Observation, Classroom Walkthroughs, Informal Observations
| The teacher does not attempt to make the lesson accessible and challenging for most students, or attempts are developmentally inappropriate. | The teacher relies on a single strategy or alternate set of materials to make the lesson accessible to most students, though some students may not be able to access certain parts of the lesson and/or some may not be challenged. | The teacher supports the learning needs of students through a variety of strategies, materials, and/or pacing that make learning accessible and challenging for the group. | The teacher matches strategies, materials, and/or pacing to students’ individual needs, to make learning accessible and challenging for all students in the classroom. The teacher effectively uses independent, collaborative, and whole-class instruction to support individual learning goals and provides varied options for how students will demonstrate mastery. |
| **RESOURCES**
(Standard 2: Content;
Standard 4: Instruction)
Sources of Evidence: Pre-Conference, Formal Observation, Classroom Walkthroughs, Informal Observations
| Instructional materials and resources used for instruction are not relevant to the lesson or are inappropriate for students. | The teacher uses appropriate instructional materials to support learning goals, but may not meet individual students’ learning style needs or actively engage them in learning. | Instructional materials and resources are aligned to the instructional purposes and are appropriate for students’ learning styles and needs, actively engaging students. | Instructional materials and resources are aligned to instructional purposes, are varied and appropriate to ability levels of students, and actively engage them in ownership of their learning. |
# Appendix H

## Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Rubric

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction and Assessment</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT</strong> (Standard 1: Students; Standard 5: Learning Environment; Standard 6: Collaboration and Communication)</td>
<td>There is little or no evidence of strategies that address the needs of individual students. The teacher is not responsive to student needs or does not engage all students.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs in a way that is responsive to student needs.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs in a way that is responsive to student needs and engages students in meaningful learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are no procedures for managing classroom behavior. The teacher relies on verbal directions.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of strategies to manage classroom behavior.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of research-based strategies to manage classroom behavior.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of research-based strategies to manage classroom behavior and engage students in meaningful learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for little or no communication or engagement with families.</td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for communication and engagement with families.</td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for communication and engagement with families and families are actively involved in the learning process.</td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for communication and engagement with families and families are actively involved in the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are not established or are not clear or consistent.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear and consistent.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear, consistent, and enforced.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear, consistent, and enforced and are actively promoted in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruction</strong> (Standard 2: Content Knowledge; Standard 3: Instructional Planning and Design; Standard 4: Assessment)</td>
<td>The teacher’s instructional strategies are not developmentally appropriate or individualized.</td>
<td>The teacher’s instructional strategies are developmentally appropriate and individualized.</td>
<td>The teacher’s instructional strategies are developmentally appropriate, individualized, and effective.</td>
<td>The teacher’s instructional strategies are developmentally appropriate, individualized, and effective and are actively promoted in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is little or no evidence of instructional strategies that address the needs of individual students.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs in a way that is responsive to student needs.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs in a way that is responsive to student needs and engages students in meaningful learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are no procedures for managing classroom behavior. The teacher relies on verbal directions.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of strategies to manage classroom behavior.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of research-based strategies to manage classroom behavior.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of research-based strategies to manage classroom behavior and engage students in meaningful learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for communication and engagement with families and families are actively involved in the learning process.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are not established or are not clear or consistent.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear and consistent.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear, consistent, and enforced.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear, consistent, and enforced and are actively promoted in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong> (Standard 2: Content Knowledge; Standard 3: Instructional Planning and Design; Standard 4: Assessment)</td>
<td>The teacher’s assessment strategies are not developmentally appropriate or individualized.</td>
<td>The teacher’s assessment strategies are developmentally appropriate and individualized.</td>
<td>The teacher’s assessment strategies are developmentally appropriate, individualized, and effective.</td>
<td>The teacher’s assessment strategies are developmentally appropriate, individualized, and effective and are actively promoted in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is little or no evidence of assessment strategies that address the needs of individual students.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs in a way that is responsive to student needs.</td>
<td>The teacher effectively engages all students and addresses their individual needs in a way that is responsive to student needs and engages students in meaningful learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are no procedures for managing classroom behavior. The teacher relies on verbal directions.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of strategies to manage classroom behavior.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of research-based strategies to manage classroom behavior.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of research-based strategies to manage classroom behavior and engage students in meaningful learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for little or no communication or engagement with families.</td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for communication and engagement with families.</td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for communication and engagement with families and families are actively involved in the learning process.</td>
<td>The teacher creates a learning environment that allows for communication and engagement with families and families are actively involved in the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are not established or are not clear or consistent.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear and consistent.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear, consistent, and enforced.</td>
<td>Expectations for behavior are clear, consistent, and enforced and are actively promoted in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix H

### Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Rubric

#### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction and Assessment</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLASSEROOM ENVIRONMENT</strong> (Standard 1: Student Learning Environment; Standard 2: Collaboration and Communication)</td>
<td>There is little or no evidence of a positive rapport between the teacher and students. For example, the teacher may respond disrespectfully to students or ignore their questions or comments.</td>
<td>The teacher is fair in the treatment of students and establishes a basic rapport with them. For example, the teacher addresses students' questions or concerns but does not inquire about their overall well-being.</td>
<td>The teacher has positive rapport with students and demonstrates respect for and interest in all students. For example, the teacher makes eye contact and connects with individual students.</td>
<td>The teacher has positive rapport with students and demonstrates respect for and interest in individual students' experiences, thoughts, and opinions. For example, the teacher responds to individual students' needs and addresses their concerns, reducing barriers to student motivation or distress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Evidence: Pre-Conference Formal Observation Classroom (Walkthrough) Informal Observations</td>
<td>Transitions are inefficient with considerable instructional time lost. Lessons progress too slowly or quickly as students are frequently disengaged.</td>
<td>Transitions are efficient with considerable instructional time lost. Lessons progress too slowly or quickly as students are frequently disengaged.</td>
<td>Transitions are efficient and occur smoothly. There is evidence of varied learning situations (whole-class, cooperative learning, small-group and independent work).</td>
<td>Transitions are seamless as the teacher effectively maintains instructional time and combines independent, collaborative, and whole-class learning situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations for behavior are not established or are inappropriate and/or monitoring of behavior occurs. The teacher responds to misbehavior ignorantly.</td>
<td>Appropriate expectations for behavior are established, but some expectations are unclear or do not address the needs of individual students. The teacher inconsistently monitors behavior.</td>
<td>Appropriate expectations for behavior are established, and some expectations are clear or do not address the needs of individual students. The teacher consistently monitors behavior.</td>
<td>A classroom management system has been implemented that is appropriate and responsive to classrooms and individual needs of students. Clear expectations for student behavior are established and monitored or students' behavior is consistent, appropriate, and effective.</td>
<td>A classroom management system has been designed, implemented, and adjusted with student input and is appropriate for the classroom and individual student needs. Students are given ownership and responsibility for their behavior. The teacher uses research-based strategies to lessen disruptive behaviors and reinforce positive behaviors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix H
Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Rubric

### Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professionalism</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ineffective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Developing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skilled</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accomplished</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Evidence: Professional Development Plan or Improvement Plan; Pre-conference; Post-conference; daily interaction with others</td>
<td>The teacher fails to communicate clearly with students and families or collaborate effectively with professional colleagues.</td>
<td>The teacher uses a variety of strategies to communicate with students and families and collaborate with colleagues, but these approaches may not always be appropriate for a particular situation or achieve the intended outcomes.</td>
<td>The teacher uses effective communication strategies with students and families and works effectively with colleagues to examine problems or practice, analyze student work, and identify targeted strategies.</td>
<td>The teacher communicates effectively with students, families, and colleagues. The teacher collaborates with colleagues to improve personal and student learning through high-quality professional dialogue, peer observation and feedback, peer coaching and other collegial learning activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher fails to understand and follow regulations, policies, and agreements.</td>
<td>The teacher understands and follows district policies and state and federal regulations at a minimal level.</td>
<td>The teacher meets ethical and professional responsibilities with integrity and honesty. The teacher models and upholds district policies and state and federal regulations.</td>
<td>The teacher meets ethical and professional responsibilities and helps colleagues access and interpret laws and policies and understand their implications in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher fails to demonstrate evidence of an ability to accurately self-assess performance and to appropriately identify areas for professional development.</td>
<td>The teacher identifies strengths and areas for growth to develop and implement targeted goals for professional growth.</td>
<td>The teacher sets data-based short- and long-term professional goals and takes action to meet these goals.</td>
<td>The teacher sets and regularly revises short- and long-term professional goals based on self-assessment and analysis of student learning evidence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

OTES Alternative Framework

Ohio Teacher Evaluation System

Combining Teacher Performance and Student Growth Measures

Alternative Framework

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* For the 2016-2017 academic year and beyond, the teacher performance measure and student growth measure shall be equal percentages (with a minimum of 50% performance and student growth measures).
Appendix J

“A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Teachers Evaluated Utilizing a State-Mandated Teacher Evaluation System”

Introduction Letter

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Rebecca Hornberger, and I am the Principal at Local Elementary. I am contacting you to express my interest in conducting research on the experiences of teachers evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. I am currently working toward my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at Concordia University Chicago in River Forest, Illinois. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to capture the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of teachers as they are evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. I am seeking permission from you, as the superintendent, to conduct this research within the Richardson Local School District. Please read the information below and ask for clarification regarding your participation in this study. I appreciate your consideration in this matter.

**STUDY PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system.

**RESEARCH PROCESS:** If you agree to participate, I will be working with teachers in grades K-6 throughout the Richardson Local School District. Participating teachers will:

1. Complete face-to-face, audiotaped interviews with the researcher that will examine the context, the details, and the meaning of the educator’s evaluative experience.

2. Participate in a private live interactive blog that will allow for continuous communication throughout the duration of the study.

3. Upon completion of the interviews and blogging, a copy of notes will be provided to the interviewees upon request.
4. Participants will be asked to submit additional artifacts from their evaluation process, including, but not limited to, lesson plans, data notebooks, pre- and post-conference notes, walkthrough evidence, and rating documentation.

**ANONYMITY:** The actual name of the school district, school or teachers will be protected and kept anonymous. Information will not be used that will identify your district, school or teachers. Your district, school and teachers will be given a pseudonym to represent and protect their identity.

**BENEFITS AND RISKS:** Your participating in this research may be beneficial to you and your educators. Participation is voluntary. You may receive information on teachers’ perceptions of the evaluation system. There are no potential risks to participating in this study. However, if anyone becomes nervous, stressed or uncomfortable due to this process, they can inform the researcher and withdraw from the research process without a penalty. There is no evaluative component to this inquiry. They will not be paid for participating in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY:** Throughout the entirety of this research, all notes and information will be kept secure and on a computer that requires a password to gain access. The researcher will be the only person who has access to the data, with the exception of the committee, IRB and Concordia University.

**QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions about this project, please contact Rebecca Hornberger at 614-270-4375. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact my dissertation chair, Pamela Konkol, PhD (708-209-3540 or pamela.konkol@cuchicago.edu) or Amanda Mulcahy PhD, Director of the Concordia University Chicago Institutional Review Board (708-209-3159 or amanda.mulcahyirb@cuchicago.edu).

Should you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty. Thank you for your consideration.
Rebecca E. Hornberger

**Superintendent Name:** __________________________

**Superintendent Signature:** ________________________________

**Researcher Name:** Rebecca E. Hornberger

**Researcher Signature:** Rebecca E. Hornberger (electronically signed on 11-6-15)

**Date:** November 6, 2015
Appendix K

Educator Participation E-mail

Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral student at Concordia University Chicago. I am soliciting your participation in my research study. The focus of the study is to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. I hope to provide an opportunity for educators’ voices to be heard in regards to the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES).

If you should choose to participate in this study, your name and any additional identifying information will remain anonymous. The timeline for this study will be approximately 3 months, throughout the duration of the second round of OTES evaluations for the 2015-16 school year.

Please reply to this e-mail if you are interested in learning more about participating in this important research. I will then send you a personalized letter to explain more about your potential participation in this research study. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Hornberger
Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral student at Concordia University Chicago. I am soliciting your participation in my research study. The focus of the study is to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. I hope to provide an opportunity for educators’ voices to be heard in regards to the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES).

Your participation will involve three interviews lasting about 45-60 minutes each. With your permission, these interviews will be audiotaped and will examine the context, the details, and the meaning of the educator’s evaluative experience. In addition, you will be asked to participate in a private live interactive blog that will allow for continuous communication throughout the duration of the study.

Upon completion of the interviews and blogging, a copy of notes will be provided to you to check for accuracy. In addition, participants will be asked to submit additional artifacts from their evaluation process, including, but not limited to, lesson plans, data notebooks, pre- and post-conference notes, walkthrough evidence, and rating documentation.

In any papers I may write for this research, your identity will be protected and a pseudonym will be used if needed. You should understand, however, that I may quote directly from our interviews or blog but will not use your name in any part of the report.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this important research. I would like to meet with potential participants on _____ at ______ to finalize your participation in this study and answer any additional questions you may have at that time. I look forward to meeting with you!

Sincerely,
Becky Hornberger
Appendix M

Participant Release Agreement

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the experiences of teachers as they are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated evaluation system. I value the unique contribution that you can make to my study and am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate some of the things that we have already discussed and to secure your signature on the participant release form that is attached.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experience. In this way I hope to illuminate or answer my question: What are teachers’ experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they are being evaluated using the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES)?

Through your participation in this study, I hope to understand the essence of the phenomenon as it reveals itself in your experience. You will be asked to recall specific episodes or events in your life in which you experienced the phenomenon we are investigating. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you; your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience. You will be asked to share additional artifacts from the evaluation process, as well as participate in a private live interactive blog communicating your experiences as they are taking place.

I value your participation and thank you for the commitment of time, energy, and effort. If you have any further questions before signing the release form, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Hornberger

Appendix M (cont.)

Participant Release Agreement

**STUDY PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system.

**RESEARCH PROCESS:**
Participating teachers will:

1. Complete face-to-face, audiotaped interviews with the researcher that will examine the context, the details, and the meaning of the educator’s evaluative experience.

2. Participate in a private live interactive blog that will allow for continuous communication throughout the duration of the study.

3. Upon completion of the interviews and blogging, a copy of notes will be provided to the interviewees upon request.

4. Participants will be asked to submit additional artifacts from their evaluation process, including, but not limited to, lesson plans, data notebooks, pre- and post-conference notes, walkthrough evidence, and rating documentation.

**ANONYMITY:** The actual name of the school district, school or teachers will be protected and kept anonymous. Information will not be used that will identify your district, school or teachers. Your district, school and teachers will be given a pseudonym to represent and protect their identity.

**BENEFITS AND RISKS:** Your participation in this research may be beneficial to you in that you will have an opportunity to reflect on the evaluative experience and communicate with other educators involved in the process through the use of a blog. There are no potential risks to participating in this study. However, if you become nervous, stressed or uncomfortable due to this process, you can inform the researcher and withdraw from the research process without a penalty. There is no evaluative component to this inquiry. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY:** Throughout the entirety of this research, all notes and information will be kept secure and on a computer that requires a password to gain access. The researcher will be the only person who has access to the data, with the exception of the committee, IRB and Concordia University.
Appendix M (cont.)

Participant Release Agreement

QUESTIONS: If you have any questions about this project, please contact Rebecca Hornberger at 614-270-4375. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact my dissertation chair, Pamela Konkol, PhD (708-209-3540 or pamela.konkol@cuchicago.edu) or Amanda Mulcahy PhD, Director of the Concordia University Chicago Institutional Review Board (708-209-3159 or amanda.mulcahyirb@cuchicago.edu).

Should you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty. Thank you for your consideration.

Rebecca E. Hornberger

Research Participant Name: __________________________

Research Participant Signature: ________________________________

Researcher Name: Rebecca E. Hornberger

Researcher Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________
Appendix N

Interview Protocol Form 1

Project: Exploring The Experiences of Teachers Evaluated Utilizing a State-Mandated Teacher Evaluation System

Date: 
Time: 
Location: 
Interviewer: 
Interviewee: 
Current Position of Interviewee/Length of Time in Position: 
Prior Positions/Educational Experience if Applicable: 

Notes to interviewee: 
Thank you very much for your participation in this research study. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. Four teachers at the K-6 level will be interviewed three times each and will also participate in an interactive forum to communicate their experiences with evaluation both during and after the process.

All data gathered in this study will be stored on a password-protected computer and names will not be included with the data so that it remains confidential. Each of the three interview sessions will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length.

*Turn on the tape recorder and test it

First Interview: Used to establish the context of the participant’s experience

- Life History / Early Experiences:
  1. Tell me about yourself.
  2. Explain in detail your view of yourself as a child.
  3. Tell me a bit about your family as you were growing up.
  4. Describe how you interacted with your family as a child.
  5. Describe experiences with friends and in your neighborhood that stand out for you from your childhood.

- School Experiences
1. Tell me a bit about your impressions of school as a child.

2. How did you view your teachers as a student?

3. Are there particular memories that stand out for you about certain teachers?

4. Thinking about yourself as a student, how did you approach evaluation in your schoolwork?

5. What types of emotions, thoughts, and feelings did evaluation bring about for you during this time period?

- Path to Becoming an Educator / Early Experiences in Education
  1. How long have you been teaching?
  2. Where have you taught?
  3. What grades and subjects have you taught?
  4. Why did you choose to become an educator?
  5. How did your family and friends react to this decision?
  6. What early memories stand out for you about those first years of teaching?
  7. Tell me more about these first experiences…. (additional probing questions here as needed)

- Early Experiences with Educator Assessment
  1. Try to recall your first time being evaluated as an educator…explain this experience to me.
  2. Tell me more about this (additional probing questions here as needed).
  3. As you went through this first evaluation process, tell me about your thoughts and feelings….
4. In your view, what was your evaluator looking for during this evaluation?

5. Were your evaluative experiences early on similar to this first one or different?

6. How and in what ways? (additional probing questions as needed)

7. Looking back on these early evaluation experiences, do you feel they impacted your practice? How so/in what ways?

8. What would you say was good and/or not so good about these evaluative experiences?

9. Did you examine assessment data as part of these early experiences?

10. How did you go about this/how was this data used?

- Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

  1. What are your core beliefs about teaching/what does teaching mean to you? (additional probing questions as needed)

  2. What is “good teaching?” What are the components of this?

  3. In your view, how does a teacher impact student learning?

  4. Think of a specific instance when you felt highly effective as a teacher; explain that memory to me in detail (additional probing questions here as needed).

  5. In your view, what is a teacher’s role in our society?

  6. Give an example; tell me more about this…

Conclusion of the Interview
Again, your participation in this research study is very appreciated. Your responses and participation will remain completely confidential.

Time and Place for 2nd Interview:
Appendix O

Interview Protocol Form 2

Project: Exploring The Experiences of Teachers Evaluated Utilizing a State-Mandated Teacher Evaluation System

Date:
Time:
Location:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Current Position of Interviewee/Length of Time in Position:
Prior Positions/Educational Experience if Applicable:

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you very much for your continued participation in this research study. As you may recall, the purpose of this study is to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. Four teachers at the K-6 level will be interviewed three times each and will also participate in an interactive blog to communicate their experiences with evaluation both during and after the process.

All data gathered in this study will be stored on a password-protected computer and names will not be included with the data so that it remains confidential. Each of the three interview sessions will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length.

*Turn on the tape recorder and test it

Second Interview: Focused on the details of the participant’s experience

Learning/Understanding the OTES Evaluation Cycle

- When do you first remember hearing about OTES? (additional details)
- How was OTES introduced to you by the school district?
- What type of training/professional development did you have for OTES?
- Explain your level of understanding and perceptions of the OTES observation rubric?
- Explain your level of understanding and perceptions of the OTES student growth measures portion of the evaluation?

- Explain your level of understanding and perceptions of the alternative framework portion of the OTES evaluation (alternative framework)?

- Elaborate on any specific areas of OTES in which you feel you have a lack of understanding?

**The First OTES Evaluation Cycle (2013-14 school year or earlier if part of the pilot; later if a new hire)**

- Explain your experience in developing your professional growth/improvement plan for the first year of OTES?

- How were times set for your first pre-conference, observation, and post conference?

- Tell me about your first year of pre-conferencing for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)

- Tell me about your first observation for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)

- Tell me about your first post-conference for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)
• Tell me about your first experiences with walkthroughs for OTES? (what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)

• Did you feel that all evidence you provided of your practice through OTES was reflected in the observation portion of your OTES rubric?

• For your first year of OTES, what was used for your growth measure?

• What were your thoughts and feelings about this growth measure?

• What was the level of performance of your students for this growth measure?

• To what extent did you feel this growth measure reflected your efforts in impacting student growth?

• How did your evaluator go about explaining and assigning your final summative rating for the first year of OTES?

• What were your thoughts and feelings in regards to this final summative rating?

The Second OTES Evaluation Cycle (2014-15 school year or earlier if part of the pilot; later if a new hire)

• Explain your experience in developing your professional growth/improvement plan for the second year of OTES?

• How were times set for your second pre-conference, observation, and post conference?
• Tell me about your second year of pre-conferencing for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)

• Tell me about your second observation for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)

• Tell me about your second post-conference for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)

• Tell me about your second year of walkthroughs for OTES? (what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)

• Did you feel that all evidence you provided of your practice through OTES was reflected in the observation portion of your OTES rubric?

• For your second year of OTES, what was used for your growth measure?

• What were your thoughts and feelings about this growth measure?

• What was the level of performance of your students for this growth measure?

• To what extent did you feel this growth measure reflected your efforts in impacting student growth?

• How did your evaluator go about explaining and assigning your final summative rating for the second year of OTES?
What were your thoughts and feelings in regards to this final summative rating?

The Third OTES Evaluation Cycle (2015-16 school year or earlier if part of the pilot; later if a new hire)

- Explain your experience in developing your professional growth/improvement plan for this year of OTES?
- How were times set for this year’s pre-conference, observation, and post conference?
- Tell me about this year’s pre-conferencing for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)
- Tell me about this year’s observation for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)
- Tell me about this year’s post-conference for OTES? (how did you prepare, what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)
- Tell me about this year’s experiences with walkthroughs for OTES? (what was the experience like, did you feel that you were able to share all necessary evidence?)
- Did you feel that all evidence you provided of your practice through OTES was reflected in the observation portion of your OTES rubric?
- For this year of OTES, what will be used for your growth measure?
• What are your thoughts and feelings about this growth measure?

• To what extent do you feel this growth measure will reflect your efforts in impacting student growth?

• Any additional thoughts about this year’s OTES experience?

**Conclusion of the Interview**

Again, your participation in this research study is very appreciated. Your responses and participation will remain completely confidential.

Time and Place for 3rd Interview:
Appendix P

Interview Protocol Form 3

Project: Exploring The Experiences of Teachers Evaluated Utilizing a State-Mandated Teacher Evaluation System

Date: 
Time: 
Location: 
Interviewer: 
Interviewee: 
Current Position of Interviewee/Length of Time in Position: 
Prior Positions/Educational Experience if Applicable: 

Notes to interviewee:
Thank you very much for your continued participation in this research study. As you may recall, the purpose of this study is to describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers who are evaluated utilizing a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. Eight teachers at the K-6 level will be interviewed three times each and will also participate in an interactive blog to communicate their experiences with evaluation both during and after the process.

All data gathered in this study will be stored on a password-protected computer and names will not be included with the data so that it remains confidential. Each of the three interview sessions will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length.

*Turn on the tape recorder and test it

Preparation for the interview:

Third Interview: Reflecting on the meaning of the evaluative experience

Examining Qualities/Dimensions of the Experience

- Reflecting on our last interview and the discussions we have had surrounding OTES, what aspects of your experience stand out for you?
- Share any examples that are vivid and alive from the whole of your experiences with educator evaluation.
- Tell me about the feelings and thoughts that are generated from your OTES experience. (Probe for examples)
• Identify any bodily states or shifts in bodily presence that occur in the experience or when discussing the experience.

• Share with me any other significant ingredients or constituents of the experience. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 48)

**Connecting OTES to the Themes of Evaluation**

• In your view what is the purpose/goal of educator evaluation?

• To what extent does the current OTES evaluation system meet the goals and purpose of educator evaluation?

• How can the purpose/goals of educator evaluation be fully realized?

• How does the district currently use / plan to use the results of OTES evaluations?

• How do these uses of evaluation impact the process for educators?

• To what extent does OTES capture evidence of your practice?

• To what extent does OTES impact your teaching practices?

• Does fear exist within the OTES process? Explain this.

**Teacher Effectiveness**

• How do you define teacher effectiveness?

• How can the level of teacher effectiveness be identified and measured?

• What personal qualities are important for teachers to be effective?

• What improves your teaching practice/makes you more effective?

**Connections to Student Growth Measures**

• In your opinion, how should student growth measures be used?
• How does the inclusion of student growth measures within OTES impact the process?

• To what extent do you feel you have control over your student growth measure results?

• Explain the extent to which you believe your results reflect your effectiveness as a teacher?

• Tell me about the feelings and thoughts that are generated from your experiences with student growth measures. (Probe for examples)

**Connections to Professional Growth**

• How would you define educator professional growth?

• In what ways could evaluation inspire professional growth?

• Give examples of what this might look like.

• How effective have your evaluations been in inspiring your professional growth? An example?

• What has inspired your professional growth? How?

• How might we assure that other educators grow professionally?

• What hasn’t been said that needs to be said?

**Conclusion of the Interview**

Again, your participation in this research study is very appreciated. Your responses and participation will remain completely confidential.

*Encourage continued participation in the online blog.*
Appendix Q

Narrative Profiles

Anastasia

I’ve always lived in Ohio. I’m a middle child, and I’ve learned to communicate well [because of my birth order]. I was very independent as a child and learned how to do things on my own at a young age. [My experiences as a child] have helped with a lot of my students because I’m able to tell them what to say to their parents and then if they’re not able to communicate it, I usually step in, in a nice way. I don’t ever impose, and I always tell them every home life is different; I just want to let you know what I’m seeing. And what do you think we could do together to help your child be successful? I always try to highlight the positive things.

I really enjoyed coming to school because it was a safe place for me. It was always controlled. It was stable, unlike my home life, so I looked forward to it. I liked the routine. I really was social. I liked talking to everybody and making sure everyone was having a good day, which got me in trouble but I just had to make sure. I just had to check with everybody, so I totally get [my students’] desire to talk because I felt the same way. My principal was also really sweet. I always got good grades, [and] he would always have lunch with me and we’d talk. I really looked forward to it. I had a lot of positive teachers around me. Everyone was really understanding.

I’ve loved all my teachers and I actually still have close relationships with all of them. I just felt loved. When I would come in in the morning everyone would always pat me on the back or hug me, and that was nice because I didn’t get that at home. That made me feel really loved at school, and I loved positive praise. If I got a good grade, [the teachers] made me feel really good, and they would always [say], “You’re so smart,
They just built my confidence. I loved to read, and all [of my teachers] knew that. They would always have books ready to go [for me]. They always found books that I could read and it made me feel connected to them. Books bring you outside of your life too, so I felt like [my teachers] always gave me a book that I might have needed at that time. They were just all very intuitive and very sweet. Mrs. Cramer, my third grade teacher, was the one that built my confidence the most. She encouraged us by [telling us that we could be] anything you want to be when we grew up.

[As a student], I studied really hard. I knew I would get an A because I always studied. I’d study every night; I’d do flash cards with my sister, but at the same time I was practicing myself, and it helped me reinforce things. Standardized testing stressed me out because it was always the unknown. [Even now], it scares me; I get really horrible test anxiety. I feel shaky, my palms sweat, and I get really nervous. I feel like I have a mental fog. I can’t think clearly because I’m under stress. I totally understand [how my students feel]. I had older teachers that didn’t put stock in tests and they were very calm. But then as I got older, I had teachers that were so worried about your performance, that their stress made taking the test worse. Being on both of sides of it is terrible. I scored badly on all of them. People can say it’s a measure of my ability that’s fine, but it is just that the anxiety is numbing.

[I have been an elementary-level] intervention specialist in [Richardson Local School District] for two years now. [I chose special education because] I feel like I can connect with [students with learning disabilities] better, and have more success. I love it because I love giving back. [My first experience with evaluation last year] was a little overwhelming. [My evaluator] wasn’t clear, and he [was] explaining a rubric that’s
fifteen pages. When I read it, I [thought it was] very subjective, and so I wasn’t sure what [evidence I needed to provide] during my pre-conference. I guess I have just never really had a clear idea of what they’re looking for. And then this year, I was [encouraged to include] more differentiation, but in the resource room setting, everything’s a lot slower paced. I have kids with such high needs that I can’t necessarily just like put them at a table to work independently because they won’t [do it]. They’ll just sit there, so it’s kind of a different environment.

I’ve learned the most [about teaching] when I have observed other teachers. [I think], “Oh, I should do that in my classroom.” [For example, from one teacher], I got the idea to take the legs off a desk so that [students] could sit down and see the board. That’s been so helpful because this [reduces] distraction. My teaching partner [is in her] third year. We communicate really well, but we’re still really young and we just kind of figure things out as we go. We don’t have someone that’s older that’s mentoring us. We just try to figure things out as we go. [Observing other teachers] has been the most helpful because then I can see what others are doing and ask questions. I find out all this information that no one ever [shared with me].

[As a teacher], I have a direct hand in bettering our society. And, I teach tolerance and teach my students to be good citizens, and ultimately that’s where we want them to be. Good teaching is compassion for every student, even the one that gets under your skin; compassion for all students, and the desire to make them grow further than your expectations. They say [to] aim for the moon and you’ll fall somewhere in the stars, so you just have to see it for them, because often they can’t [see it for themselves]. I do try to aim for the moon.
I first heard about OTES in college. [My professors] just said that our school districts will explain it to us and that they didn’t have the details because it’s constantly changing. When I was hired, there was sort of an explanation but I feel like there was unclear direction about what was actually expected so even my brief discussion with my principal about [OTES] was very confusing. [There is also] confusion because of the special education population. Sometimes they say your [growth measure] is value added, or sometimes it is performance-based. That has been confusing. I think there’s just a lot of confusion, and so I’m sitting there, [in OTES professional development], trying to follow the power point, figure it out and take notes. My principal told me to put my pen down. I think he thought I was messing around and I really wasn’t. I was just trying to process it and write it down, to really understand what he was saying. He told me to put my pen down and just listen. And I’ve done that but it still hasn’t helped to explain it.

[During my observations], my evaluator usually puts me in the developing and the skilled [sections of the OTES rubric]. After he observes me, he asks me to show him more about my classroom and then he puts me in the accomplished category. I read through [the OTES rubric], and I aimed for [accomplished], but it was confusing how he rated me lower. He also said something about how I use whole group discipline, but I have eight kids in my resource room. One of my confrontational girls was giving the principal [nasty looks] during the observation, so I told her that it was not appropriate but then the principal marked me down for this on the [OTES] rubric. I’ve found with the [growth measure portion of OTES], the special education population is so up and down and up and down [on the STAR assessment] that I don’t necessarily feel like it’s a good
measure [of their growth]. I haven’t put too much stock in the growth measures part [of OTES].

Also, our professional development that we just had on the [alternative framework portion of OTES] didn’t explain it very well, and a few of the teachers that I was sitting with said to tune our principal out because none of the information was right. I really don’t have a clear understanding, but a few of the veteran teachers have a little bit more understanding. Everyone at the PD was freaking out and so one teacher just basically said not to listen and that she would explain it to us. She said it was not something that we need to be worried about. The alternative framework was presented in a way that made us think that we would have to do more work, instead of just using what we already had, and that we would have to create more pre- and post-assessments. Also, we were told that our peers would be rating us, and their score would be reflected on our OTES evaluation. During the professional development, everyone was panicking. Later, I was told [by a colleague] that this is not correct, that we are rating ourselves and that we can use what [assessments that we are] already using for Teacher-Based Teams and for STAR.

I still have a [lack of understanding] about the whole OTES process overall. I feel like it’s been overviewed with us, but I still don’t necessarily understand it. So the whole process is, “Well, they’re going to tell me what to do, and I’ll just turn things in, and I’ll be devastated if my score comes back bad. But I really don’t know what else to do.” [At the beginning of the year for OTES], we created our professional growth plan that included two goals for the school year. I didn’t really have an option with these goals. My principal wrote it for me and then said this is what you need to work on. I came back
to him later because I was afraid to say anything [at the time]. He gave me one goal but you could parse it into seven goals. I just told him that I didn’t say anything last year because I was afraid to approach him about it, but I would like to change this to be more honed in on one thing.

I told him I just feel really overwhelmed with all of it because I feel like you’re mentioning things that I do well already, and there were other areas I wanted to [focus on]. We did rewrite it and we focused my goals on pacing this year. This has also stressed me out because the curriculum department has said that we need to stay at a certain pace, but the resource room goes at a slower pace and so does the inclusion classroom. I was very honest with my principal and just told him that the pacing isn’t working. I explained that I’m not able to keep the same pace [as regular education classrooms] in the resource room or the inclusion classrooms. He told me that I shouldn’t be expected to, yet that is still my professional goal and what I am getting rated on. So I don’t really know what I’m doing.

To prepare for the pre-conference [portion of OTES] during my first year of teaching, my principal gave me the rubric and I read through it. During the pre-conference, I felt that my principal expected me to know more than I did about what was in the rubric. He tried to explain it, but I still feel like maybe he didn’t understand it, so it wasn’t really [explained well]. I brought an example lesson and the materials I was using at the time, but he kept asking for more artifacts. He thought that, during my new teacher orientation, I had received training for OTES. He also kept asking how I was going to differentiate the lesson. I explained that I differentiate all of it because I have to. I have to accommodate students with their IEP goals. I don’t feel like I was [able to share all of
the evidence that I wanted to] at the preconference because I wasn’t sure of the expectations.

During my observation, my principal pointed out things that he thought I should have for my classroom, but the school doesn’t provide those things. At the time, I was the only salary. I really wanted to get these items for my classroom, but my family is not in that position right now, so I had to tell him that I didn’t have the money. It was embarrassing. I did feel that [my first observation] went well. My principal walked in, sat in the back [of the classroom], and typed on his computer. I felt relaxed because I felt like he wasn’t really paying attention. My principal didn’t look at me and my kids were really good so it was just very relaxed. At post-conference, my principal kept talking about how I didn’t have enough decoration in my classroom, but in special education classrooms, students get very distracted and so I like to put things up with purpose. I’m not putting things up to be pretty. He wanted to see motivational posters, which I like, but at the same time I think they’re a distraction. He basically said, “You might want to add more to your classroom but once again, you’re a first year teacher, you can’t afford all that stuff.” It felt like the post-conference was more of a focus on my classroom, and not necessarily on the instruction, even though I felt like my instruction was really good. Students were answering higher-level questions.

[In contrast], during my resident educator observation, [my supervisor] stayed the whole time. She said, “I love listening to them; they were answering all these higher level questions.” She didn’t comment on the classroom, she commented on the instruction, and she had a lot of positive praise. She told me things I could improve on, but it was constructive and it didn’t hurt my feelings. It made me feel like I could make
the improvements. She scheduled observations for me in other teachers’ classrooms. It was so helpful and constructive. It made me feel really good.

My [artifacts] weren’t even attached to my OTES documentation last year, but this year I have started to scan it in myself. Last year, I gave my principal [evidence for OTES] that he lost three or four times. I think he kept losing my papers, and that’s why he kept coming back and asking me questions. So this year, I just don’t trust sending anything or giving him any paperwork. For my first year, I didn’t have a growth measure, so my OTES was based on the observation only. My final summative rating was discussed during my final post-conference. The comments [my evaluator made] were very sporadic, random, and taken from different moments in time. It’s just not straightforward. He would just say things like, “I think this puts you [in this category].” I was skilled last year, but the only thing that made me nervous was that my principal said that when I do have value-added, that it will bring me down a category. He said they always want to score special education higher, because [the growth measure] will always be lower due to our population.

I will have a growth measure this year. I wrote an SLO [student learning objective] based on the STAR reading assessment. I think the accuracy of this measure really depends on the child, especially with students who have a disability. I will likely see higher growth with my students who have a mild disability, but students who have an intellectual disability may not [show as much growth].

This year, I made my professional goals myself. I just came in telling my principal this what I’m going to do and he was [receptive to that]. My pre-conference also went well. I felt that I was able to share more of my evidence this year. I was very
blunt, and I showed him my version of the lesson plan, adapting to my students’ needs for more a more tangible understanding [of certain concepts].

My teaching partner has expressed that he feels that [our administrators] are not here for the kids; that they’re just here to make sure we’re doing our job. And guess what, we are, but [OTES] is taking away my time from the kids. He wonders if we’re doing what’s best for the kids or are we just reporting to the state? He’s been very frustrated. For support, I lean heavily on my mother-in-law because she’s a teacher. I ask her a lot of questions. I have had kind of a rough start because the teachers are really nice, they have a good heart, but sometimes they can be very catty. If you ask them a question, they’ll go tell four other people that you don’t know what you’re doing, so it makes you look incompetent even though you’re not trying to be. So I was more reserved the first year and relied heavily on my mother-in-law, I would just talk to her about what she thinks, and she, as well as other teachers I know, have guided me.

My relationships with my teacher friends and my mother-in-law [who is a teacher] have impacted me positively because I’m learning something new every day. And, if I bring up a situation to them, they’ve been very helpful. I don’t know how I would have gotten through these first few years without them. I feel like I’m more independent now, and I can make more decisions now, but it is nice having someone to lean back on.

I’ve been thinking about the subjectivity of our evaluators, and it does make me nervous that I could be let go from a school district because they may determine that what I’m doing isn’t good enough. That’s kind of a scary thought. I didn’t realize that [our OTES evaluation] was tied into our contract. I agree with being evaluated, and I
understand why they’re doing it, but at the same time it just makes things high stakes and creates anxiety [that] my job will always be on the line and I can be let go at any time.

When I think back on my OTES evaluation [experiences overall], what stood out to me is that different evaluators can have different perspectives. What each evaluator is focusing on can be totally different, so it really depends on the evaluator, even [using the OTES] the rubric. There are certain things that are important to each principal, but I think that makes the evaluation very subjective. If you were at one school, one principal may say, when they evaluate you, I think you’re fantastic, but then at another school they may say you’re a total mess and I don’t want you here.

When I was evaluated for the first time, I was really nervous about it and it gave me a lot of anxiety. And then this year at the beginning of the year I just thought, “You know what, I’m with special education population, and they may grow, they may not grow but I’m just going to do my best.” It seemed like no one could give us a clear answer [about how the evaluation process would work]. In college, we just kept getting overviews, and they would say that your evaluator will explain it in more detail, and then that never really happened.

I think everyone that goes into education has a good heart and they are there for the kids, or at least they should be, and I understand that they need to have something in place in case someone isn’t being effective. I feel like they’re not taking into account that there are a lot of other things, being a public school, that you encounter [in your classroom]. What needs to change is the attitude when an evaluator is going into [classrooms]. I think it needs to be more student focused - are the students enjoying school, are they participating in the discussion - because tests are snapshots.
OTES makes me really nervous. I am a perfectionist, like most teachers. I think, “Is this going to be my whole life? Because I just wanted to go in and enjoy teaching and help grow little minds.” Instead, I walk in the class and think constantly about how my evaluation is determined on my performance. It [causes] a lot of pressure, on the kids and on yourself, and I feel like you learn more, and the kids learn more, if you’re, relaxed. The goal of evaluation is to help improve the teacher, so that they can be the best teacher they can be, [but the goal] of OTES feel like a gotcha or a way to weed people out. I don’t like having to sell myself every day, but that’s what it feels like you have to do so that you get a good evaluation. I think OTES does help me to reflect on my teaching. But a lot of teachers do not teach the way they [do for their observations]; they just do it for the evaluation. I think evaluation could be improved by being based on student surveys, parent surveys, and teacher surveys. I think that it would be good for us [to look at that data.] I think all of [our assessment data] needs to be looked at and realized.

I feel like OTES has captured what I do as a teacher because I haven’t changed anything [during the observation]. But, my principal is more focused on my physical classroom, rather than the curriculum and how the students are interacting. The resident educator [process] has impacted my teaching practices the most because I am able to observe other teachers and that’s how I learn. I feel like OTES just has to be done, it’s something that we have to do to be able to teach kids; it’s more just paperwork pushing than an actual reflection [of my teaching]. Through resident educator, I can focus on things that I feel like I’m weak in. For example, I had a reciprocal observation with my co-teacher and we went and watched another co-teaching team and how they delivered
the curriculum, and that was very helpful. I also wanted to look at behavior management with some of my girls, so I asked a counselor if I could watch her manage a girls’ group.

[Fear exists] in the OTES process because you feel like your job is on the line every single day, and that creates stress. Nobody really works well under stress, there’s some people that will say they do, but it’s not good for your body and you can’t think clearly. I don’t have a solution as to how to measure teacher effectiveness. I think it needs to be multiple test scores. I think it would be nice if there were more than one evaluator. That way you just have a fresh set of eyes. [Teacher effectiveness] does have a lot to do with whether students grow, and depending on the type of disability that I’m working with, some students can only go so far even though I’m going to push them as far as they can go. I think teachers need to be very caring, optimistic, well educated, and well-versed in what is going on. Observations of other teachers improves my [effectiveness]. I also like to do student interviews during lunch. Students come in and I’ll talk to them, and just ask them how I’m teaching; I like to get student feedback.

Student growth measures [should be used] to inform instruction, and to assist with planning groups and instructional strategies. Including growth measures [as part of the OTES evaluation] impacts teachers differently depending on the type of classroom. If it is an inclusion classroom, students are going to move at a slower pace, so it may impact them negatively. Also, in the resource room, it impacts us negatively because [students are] already coming in behind. I think a lot of teachers get upset if they are going to have the low kids or if they have special education kids because they will not show as much growth as the other kids. This creates an environment of yours and mine. The teacher will try to get her [regular education] kids as high as they can, because my kids are
always going to be behind. I know people don’t intentionally want that to be that way, but that’s the environment that this has created.

I don’t feel that I have control [over my student growth measure results]. I have kids that have unpredictable home lives, and, when they come in in the morning, you just know right away what happened last night. I can’t control what happens at home, so when they come and test, it can be awful, or they can have a really good score. It’s so unpredictable because their life is so unpredictable. Also, their brains are structured differently for learning, and they may remember information one day and they may not the next. It’s an inconsistent population all around.

I love going to workshops because I get to meet more teachers and they all have different opinions, and I love meeting with other teachers to discuss what works for them. It would help if I was given constructive feedback during OTES; if my evaluator could tell me this is the person I want you to go observe, or this is the workshop I want you to go to. That would be more helpful to me, than, “Here’s where you fall on this rubric, here’s your numbers, alright bye.” It’s incredibly frustrating. I wish there was an ambassador at who was well versed in the district - perhaps an older teacher – at every school. They could assist new teachers, explaining this is how our building works, here’s some things that you may not know, do you have any questions for me? New teachers could go to this person for information. It would have been nice because, when you first come in [as a new teacher], it can be really overwhelming.

I think that OTES is a great idea in theory, and I do think it needs to stay in place, but it needs to be changed so that you’re not just with one evaluator. [It could be improved] by adding observations of other teachers because even experienced teachers
learn new things by observing other classrooms. Teachers need to be given resources, like conferences and workshops and other people to observe, to help improve. That would be more beneficial as opposed to, “Here’s your rating, good luck next year.”

**Candace**

I grew up in Ohio right around here, and, as a child, I was kind of a loner. I was the oldest, and I always had to take care of my little brother and sister. I usually had about one best friend, at least through elementary school, and that would come and go. I didn’t go to kids’ houses a lot. I was pretty popular in high school. I was a cheerleader then and had more friends. I really liked school. That was where the friends were, and that’s sometimes the hook for kids. I went to a Catholic school and I remember one teacher in seventh grade was so awesome [because] he started a guitar group with us. We went to the mayor’s house and sang, we went to nursing homes, and we recorded an album. I also remember the nun in science in eighth grade. She wrote on my report card, “You are a very good student.” Nobody had told me that [before]; I didn’t know I was a good student. I always did what I was told and my parents expected me to get A’s. People expected me to be a good girl, and I was a good girl. I remember in first grade I didn’t put my name on my workbook, and I had to stay in for recess and write my name on every single page of the workbook. I was devastated. I remember another good teacher in high school. She was the first teacher that would allow you take a test again if you had failed it. You’d come and you’d try again. You didn’t feel embarrassed because you failed a test. That was probably the first time I realized that it’s not bad to fail. I appreciated that she let me try again and sometimes I think, why not let kids try again? The goal is to learn.
[In my younger years], I approached evaluation as a challenge. I loved learning enough that if there was a project, I did it to the best of my ability, and luckily that was good enough to get the A. I remember just working at school as fast as I could so I could read more books. I never knew what I wanted to do for a career. I was in the dance company in college. The professor asked me to teach dancing lessons because the tap teacher had broken her hip and she knew I could tap, so I taught all winter and spring semester. So, when I had to decide on a career, [I took into account that] everywhere I go, people ask me to teach. I fought being a teacher but it felt like a sign that I should go into education. I was always teaching - crafts, swimming lessons, and dance.

I met my husband [who was also a teacher] and so we decided we wanted to work together, so we got our first jobs in Amish country in the same [school] system. I taught fourth and third grade. I had at least three different principals during those twelve years, and it depended on the principals’ philosophy what grade I would teach. If they thought third grade was the most important they would [place] me and my two friends in third grade because they liked the three of us. If they thought fourth grade was the most important grade, we’d find ourselves teaching fourth grade.

Then, my husband got a job in another city, so I was able to get out of my contract in December. I got a job with an outdoor education center. I worked with college kids; they were dewy eyed. We did the outdoor education experience for fifth graders from the city schools. I was the only one with an education degree. [My colleagues] had college degrees in biology or they were more science people. Eventually, they made me a coordinator so I would go to different schools and explain [outdoor education] to the kids and the teachers. I had time to stop and think about what I believe education should be.
Kids should be engaged in experiential learning. It was great to come back to the classroom after this experience. I knew my philosophies and I believed in kids interacting and experiencing education and covering tons of topics through one experience. I always believed in just keeping kids busy if they’re getting in trouble, then they need something more to do. And so that’s kind of how I approach things in my classroom as well. If students aren’t exhibiting the kind of behavior I expect, we stop and we handle it. And I think that’s come from trying to build that rapport, with students so that they’ll respect you. The kids I’m the best with now are those average quiet ones that all they need is just someone to love them and tell them they can do it. I can get them to buy in. I can tell my buy in kids, and then the ones that start to tune me out and we try another strategy.

For twelve years, I taught 3rd or 4th grade and then I did the outdoor education for two years. [I was hired as an elementary reading teacher] in Richardson before I got my third grade position, where I have been for about 20 years now, except for looping to fourth grade. I feel [the focus] in these grades is to just keep them reading, writing, and extending the vocabulary and delving into the sciences and social studies. At the heart of it, I chose to become an educator because I like to learn. I just enjoy learning about new things and, whenever we have a problem, I like to pilot [new programs]. Those new things come and I just believe education is what makes people strong. I’ll learn something and become a little better myself. I hope [my students] see me as a learner.

In my first evaluation during my first year of teaching, my principal would come in to evaluate me; he would sit down and within five minutes he would be up at the board teaching the lesson. He felt I wasn’t doing it right. My feelings were so hurt; I was so
upset. He was very authoritarian. I never really agreed with [his evaluations] because, he’d come in my room once a year for an hour. I don’t even remember scheduling a time; he would just pop in and I would get flustered. I’d just be so scared to death. I got written up because there was dust on my windowsills. Those are my earliest memories [of evaluation]. I also remember [another early evaluator] when I was pregnant with my second child. I was having reading groups and doing a great [job], but I had my feet up on a chair while we were having a group. That’s all he could bring up in my evaluation was that I had been sitting a lot more. I was due in March and this was January.

[In my early years], I taught with another experienced dynamic woman. She was a lot of fun. She was twelve or fifteen years into teaching, and so that’s where I got stuff from and we could see each other teach because we had a movable wall. We eventually did some co-teaching. This experience showed me how much I like that adult interaction [while teaching]. We collaborated a lot, and I think it also helped with pacing and discipline. She taught me a lot of good discipline and consequences [for students]. She had a nice, easy-going attitude that built good rapport with the kids so they loved her. She was the model teacher, and the school would put the new teacher with her, so she could help new teachers. I think that was the best way to get into my first year of teaching. Collaborating with my colleagues grew me as a teacher.

I want to build a love of life-long learning with students. I want to keep them busy and involved in the learning so they make it theirs; then they have something to take with them as they grow. And if I expect it, they can achieve it. I just encourage them to go as far as they can, whenever they can. It starts with building routines, expectations, and schedules so that students know what to expect. I am always making sure I’m
challenging the kids, and evaluating where they are and just building on that. [I want to
get them] to a point where they care about each other and they care about doing the right
thing where ever they are in the building.

I think [teachers] have to have compassion and empathy. They need to be able to feel where the kids are coming from to give them what they need. I also think humor is important. Students will sense that you care [for them]; that’s how you get them to buy in. I remember one little girl who was a lower student; she was heavy, very quiet and insecure – her SAI was in the eighties. I just [provided her with] compassion and caring, and told her she could do it. I gave her that extra time and that one-on-one positive reinforcement. By the end of the year her SAI had gone up like thirty points. She became so positive, so confident, and was getting good grades. That kind of experience just gives you affirmation [as a teacher] that I’m on the right track and I’m doing things that are right to help my students. My job is to make [students] want to come to school, and I want them to like being here. I want them to look forward to every day. I want them to love learning and, hopefully, that will lead them on to the next step to do whatever they can do.

I don’t even remember when I first [heard about OTES]. Our principal would tell us bits and pieces. We had professional development about OTES [to formally introduce it] and went through all of the criteria ourselves, looking at the skilled and accomplished [parts of the rubric] so that we would understand them. Now, I understand what the rubric says. I don’t feel concerned about the observation at all. I worry more about the writing of the lesson plan. It has to be much more detailed, and some of the things that I
automatically just do have to be [documented] in the lesson plan. I probably take a good hour, if not more, writing the lesson plan.

The student growth measures [portion of OTES] really blew me away the first time I saw it because it focused on more than [passage rate] on the test. It was a total game changer. It was taking students’ prior grade level scores and then looking at their current year scores and asking if they grew a full year. I was so shocked. Maybe there should have been more training, but I think it wasn’t so much there wasn’t training as they didn’t know what to train us on yet because they weren’t sure what it was going to be either. When I got my report showing that I was average [growth], I remember talking to my principal and telling her I was really mad. I know I’m better than average; this is really sad; average is not acceptable. Of course they grow one year in one class, but I want them to grow more than that.

I’m so confused [about the alternative framework], and we just keep hearing [conflicting messages]: that it’s going to be a portfolio, no it’s not going to be a portfolio, well it may not be the portfolio that you think it’s going to be. But on the other hand, it’s making us collaborate. I’m at a grade level that doesn’t collaborate. We collaborate at TBT [teacher-based team] time, but we do not sit down and plan together. I think it’s teaching style. I really think it comes down to that so there’s only so much [collaboration that can take place] when your teaching styles are totally different.

I think sometimes that the difference between the skilled and the accomplished [designation on the rubric], is still subjective, and even though the principal is in here and watching for an hour, they still come with subjective biases. They can’t really always justify what they say. I think I get away with more than my teaching partner does. She
will get good recommendations but she’s still skilled and I’m accomplished because I have a stronger rapport with the principal and more experience.

I didn’t really prepare for my first pre-conference; I just went in with my lesson plan. I felt comfortable [in the pre-conference] because we could talk and add to the evidence. Often, for the observation, the principal will say she wants to see reading or she wants to see math. I was definitely more stressed out and nervous for my first observation [using the OTES rubric] because I didn’t know what to expect. During post-conference, [my principal] went through the evidence [in my rubric]. I remember being a little out of sorts so there were some things that maybe could have been covered better. But then again, at thirty-five years, I feel like, “Okay, I did my best, I tried to follow the rules and play nicely, but when it comes down to it I don’t care.” The walkthroughs that are [required for OTES] are more prescribed than what I would call a walkthrough. I remember having one year a couple weeks ago and I thought, just come in and walkthrough. But instead, it’s like a mini-observation – it’s a little much – a little too prescribed. I think the evaluator can also get off on [a subjective tangent], based on whether they like the person or if what they saw was dynamic.

I think that the entire OTES process [has captured more evidence] of my instruction than I’ve ever seen in past evaluations. They are definitely more detailed and they require the principal to be an educational leader and the rubric gives them more guidance and a foothold [to provide instructional leadership]. All of us (the third grade teachers) are on improvement plans this school year, [meaning our growth measures were below expected growth]. We all feel pretty beat up because I think we’re the hardest working, strongest, and most disciplined grade level. It really does feel rotten, and it gets
overwhelming because we have to do more assessment of our students. And our assessments are in math even though it was in reading where our grade level was [below expected growth]. We’re not sure why we're focusing on math; it’s easier to assess, but we’re all confused.

Our principal tries to be very careful not to tell people [that we’re all on improvement plans], but we feel like it’s fine because the statistics [value-added measure] they use are flawed, they really are. But I feel sad for these younger [teachers] who feel like they could lose their job. The State Teachers Retirement System tells them they have to work until they’re sixty-five and they’re being told they’re not doing a good job. It’s hard for them; at least I can retire whenever I want. I feel sorry for them. A lot of teachers are very bitter about it because they know how hard they worked and the kind of kids they had. It has made them a little bitter towards education too. I think they still try to do their best but sometimes I think they feel like what’s it worth, but they’re still working hard. They don’t give up. I’ll walk in and they get mad and start ranting at me. I’m like, “I know I know I’m sorry I don’t know what to do.”

I see growth measures almost as a teaching tool. It’s made us really look at our teaching practices. I know we needed a different evaluation tool, but we’re in a subjective business. I believed that a good energetic teacher could beat the odds [with regards to student growth measures]. I didn’t, obviously I didn’t. It is so ridiculous [that the growth measures portion of OTES] are the test scores from two years ago - from a different group of children, but we have to do all this work this year with a different group of children so does that really make sense?
The [second year of OTES] was easier because I had more samples of lesson plans to write it from and I knew what to expect. I even think that [my evaluator] evaluated a little bit easier because she knew more about what I was doing in my classroom. I feel like it’s beneficial that the rubric has been the same [each year] because I’m finally getting the idea. I feel like my evaluator knows me more as an educator because of the OTES process. This year, she’s walking the balance of keeping us positive, trying to give good feedback, and yet trying not to score us too low because, if we get bad scores back again, they will have a [negative impact on our evaluations]. I’m not even sure what our growth measure will be this year because it has changed so much.

I think that’s part of being a teacher, there has to be a point where you just let it go and do what you know is right to help the kids, to make them happy and help them grow, to want to come to school and learn. I want them to come to school and like learning and then after that whatever happens outside of that is out of my control. I think that OTES is based on current research and best practices, so I do see it as a personal evaluation and reflection. As I’m writing up my lesson plan, I’m looking at my students and reflecting on whether or not I’m doing the right thing and asking how I can change and make it better.

[Under earlier evaluation systems], once I had a few, I didn’t have to be evaluated any more, so I really didn’t have much of a relationship with my administrator at all after those first couple years. Even when I had new principals come in, they pretty much took for granted that I was on tenure so it was pretty hands off. With OTES, it has caused a lot of upheaval but if you really look down deep, I think it’s been a good instructional practice for teachers to reflect and improve what they do. I’ve seen it with colleagues...
and I’ve seen it with myself. It’s so easy for a teacher to close the door. It’s pushing me and making me keep changing and keep up with all the new and current initiatives.

The [purpose of] educator evaluation is to assure that best practices are going on and that people are doing what they’re supposed to be doing. Administrators need to be able to [vouch for our work] honestly and with conviction. I think OTES does a pretty good job of [allowing that to happen]. It’s still so subjective though, whether the administrator decides you’re skilled or accomplished. Even with all those verbs and all those acronyms, it still could go either way, and then with the value added and the student scores, that’s a crap-shoot from year to year. You can do as much as you can but there are so many factors.

I don’t know for sure how the district plans to use the results of our evaluations. Our administrator said that it is a learning process. I feel some of the stress is off with the portfolio [alternative framework] because I feel like that’s something we’ve been doing, and I can control that better. I can pick my students I’ve had from the beginning of the year that I’ve had the good rapport with, so I can at least model my best teaching too [with the alternative framework]. I don’t think the rubric can ever show all aspects of my practice, but I’m happy with how much it does show. I also think it has impacted my [teaching practice]. As a more experienced teacher, it would be very easy to do the “same old-same old.” I was very successful with it, and sometimes I’m a little bitter when I have to change something that I think I’ve got all figured out. I believe that I should try new initiatives so that I do not get stale. I think I have a lot of growth going on compared to my first twenty years in teaching.
Fear does [exist in the OTES process]. I think it does for anyone who cares. I don’t want anybody to tell me I’m not doing something right or that I need to do something better. I don’t fear the administrator coming in, but I fear that my lesson won’t go the way I want it to or that students will not do what they should do [during the observation]. And I fear their scores at the end because again, it’s one given day, and I try to be so confident but who knows. There is fear with the growth measures, especially being on the improvement plan. I just found my improvement plan notebook that I forgot about. I was putting everything in another notebook to make sure I had it all documented and that I completed everything that is required in the plan. I have to write down how many times I give assessments to make sure that students are showing that growth. I’m fearful that I’ll get to the end of the year and that the district will find something that I didn’t do and should have done.

Recognizing growth in a classroom is difficult. It’s more than whether or not a classroom appears orderly. Effective teaching requires experiential immersion, taking learning to the next level. How do you evaluate that? We’ve got to show we’re doing it, but we’re closed in our little room and we don’t advertise all the great things we do but again, time is at a premium. A teacher needs to be adaptable, willing to take on a challenge and try new things, and remain focused but flexible. Talking with colleagues and going in their room and observing the things that they do helps to improve my teaching practice. [These experiences] make me rethink the rationale behind what I am doing. I also love workshops and I love reading books.

Growth measures should definitely be used to guide teaching. I also think they should be used as an evaluation at the end of the year, as a personal reflection. That’s
how I have always used them. Perhaps there could be an opportunity for the teacher to explain why growth may not have been shown. You have to look at where the kids came from and teachers need to share that information. If we take the stress off of growth measures, you can reflect, and reflect honestly. To a certain extent, I think growth measures do reflect my efforts in the classroom. Kids are accepting [the frequency of assessment] and wanting to do their best. They are keeping data notebooks for themselves, and they want to beat that goal they have. I like what growth measures are doing for teaching overall, but then again why am I on an improvement plan? But I think it’s good though because I know there are third grade teachers that are not on improvement plans, so someone needs to come help us obviously. And that’s why we even went to visit some other third grade teachers to find out what they are doing differently.

I think OTES is inspiring professional growth. Sharing the rubric and the qualities of good teachers, and encouraging teachers to strive to be better. It made me more conscientious in the areas where I can show improvement. As educators, in order to continue to grow, we have to be more positive and we have to be our own advocates. I think our new teachers need to have mentors. It does cross my mind sometimes that young people will stop going into education. Parents don’t want all of the struggles [that are part of a teaching career] for their kids. But I still think there’s a certain personality that still likes giving, and it’s a good job. There are so many good things that you can go home at night and feel good about.

Carter
I’m forty-six years old and I’ve been teaching for seventeen years. Before I taught, I was in the military. I was in the Army reserve for eleven years and I also was in business; that was my career before teaching. I got my degree in business and I had a master’s degree in business administration and a master’s degree in labor and human resources. I just decided that I just wasn’t really making a difference in the world. I wanted to do something where I was making a difference, and I had always wanted to go into education. My dad was a college professor and my mom was a high school English teacher, but my parents had discouraged me from going into education. My sister was actually the same way; she had wanted to go into education as well, but had been discouraged from that. I took a giant leap and I took one class in education at night while I was still working. Then, I realized you can’t really go back and get a teaching degree part time like you can now. It was pretty much you had to quit and go during the day, so I gave a month’s notice, quit my job, and went back to school full time to get a teaching degree.

As a child, I was definitely very school-oriented. I started kindergarten when I was four. I liked learning. I was a pretty nerdy child; I was in the smart class. I liked to try and get good grades. I had friends who were all similar. There was nothing else that I was really passionate about [besides] school. My favorite subject when I was younger was social studies. I was very competitive as far as school goes; I was really focused on grades and class rank and academic achievement. For the most part, I liked my teachers. In high school, I found some of them were much more stimulating than others. The teachers who were stimulating found ways to challenge me and found ways to [present] new material in an interesting way and relate it to something that was important to me.
When I was first hired, I taught at a very small rural district. I taught a year of second grade, I taught third grade, and then I taught gifted there. [I began teaching gifted] because the school knew I’d been in the gifted program as a child. They asked me, “Do you want to be our new gifted teacher? Go back and get your gifted license.” So, I taught gifted for three years. Then, the county gifted coordinator was moving into the position of curriculum coordinator for a school district, so she came to me and asked if I would be interested in interviewing for the position of county gifted coordinator. I was the gifted coordinator for five years, so during that time I had to go back and get my principal’s license because it was an administrative job.

That job was interesting because then I actually did have to supervise people and evaluate people [who were in] six different districts. It was nice in the fact that I did have that flexibility that you don’t have when you’re in the classroom. But I had also left the classroom way too young. I never really set out to be an administrator, and the whole point in leaving business was to make a difference and be with kids. Every year, I kept feeling like I was getting further and further away from kids. I was spending less and less time in the classroom. I barely even saw my teachers; I would just go to evaluate them or if they had an urgent need. In year four, I started thinking that I needed to work on trying to get back to the classroom. That’s when [Richardson] decided to [hire] a full time gifted person in each building. So I applied for the position [and got hired] for [gifted] math in fourth grade and third grade. We also did reading groups; we did whatever the building needed.

Then there was a [reduction in force], and, even though I’d been teaching for a long time, it hadn’t been long enough to get a continuing contract with [Richardson]. I
was offered a job teaching fourth grade at a different elementary school. [However], I also had a special education license, so I asked if I could do ED [emotionally disturbed] instead of fourth grade. And they thought I was crazy, but they gave it to me. So I taught ED for a year before I was offered back the gifted job for the following year. The ED job was so individualized. I had fourteen kids on my caseload at one point, and we were so overcrowded. It was just insane but it was good. It was probably the year I made the biggest difference in any kids’ lives. That was the good part of it; you felt like you really were making a difference in these kids’ lives. I was totally connected to the kids; I knew those kids better than I’ve ever known any kids.

For my first evaluation [in the small rural district], I think my principal came in for ten minutes and he took some notes. I don’t you know; it was probably a paragraph, honestly. It said, “Good job, we’ll be renewing your contract next year.” I’m sure that’s what it was; it was nothing formal. It was loose [back] then; nobody really even had a curriculum. The other teachers were a source of support [in those early years]. The three other teachers I worked with that first year were all veterans, and they were good and they were helpful. They just kind of told you what to do; I mean that was it because otherwise you wouldn’t have known. That was how you learned; it was just like, “They’ll tell you what to do.” I don’t even think any of the evaluations while I was at the rural district were ever anything different; they never got to anything beyond that little paragraph saying, “You’re good to go; keep going.” [It was good in that] there was no stress. That’s for sure. I think if someone had been doing something really bad, it would have been a little bit different, like if you were really yelling at kids or coming to school
intoxicated, they would have noticed. So, as far as personal development or anything, that was totally on me; I had to do that myself.

I think teaching [is about] connecting with students and helping them grow. That’s what teaching means to me. [The components of good teaching] are connection, engagement, and growth. I think [a teacher’s role] is hopefully to create kids that are confident enough that they can go out and they can continue to learn what they need to learn. I mean it’s almost learning how to learn, because that’s the only way they’ll survive. That’s the only way they’ll be able to do a job, or live a life. But it’s not just about learning information anymore; it’s learning how to live. I used to think that life was just a path you would take, but, now that I’m older, I feel like everybody is going to face a tragedy of some kind, and they’re going to have to learn how to deal with that.

I first remember hearing about OTES four years ago. I knew value-added would be part of it, and I knew the evaluation would be a lot longer. [The district] had meetings where the principals did canned presentations that were the same in every building. The principals had to follow a power point from the district and then, toward the end of the year, the people that were in the [OTES] pilot did speak a little bit at the presentations about their experiences. Currently, I feel really comfortable with my [level of] understanding of OTES. When it first came out, I spent a lot of time looking at it and trying to figure it out.

The rubric [for OTES] is fine. I do know it is supposed to be done holistically. And part of the problem is that it’s supposed to be objective, but a lot of it does become subjective because the whole idea of being holistic can be a bit difficult when people are looking at a given category. When people are kind of between two categories, it gets a
little bit more subjective and difficult, because if there’s evidence of both, I think that’s where it’s difficult for the evaluator to make that choice. Just looking at [the rubric], there are things that overlap, and I would think that would be hard. I know I’ve heard other people complain. I think the issue that people struggle with is everybody wants to be accomplished. All teachers want to be accomplished. And they struggle with the idea that accomplished is above and beyond. I think most teachers equate accomplished with an A, so they’re still working to get the top grade, and, in our district, we now have [reduction in force procedures] tied to your rating, so you want to be accomplished so that you’re in the top of the pile. A lot of teachers are perfectionists; they want to be the best, and they want to do their best. There’s a large group [of teachers] that really want to push and be accomplished, also because with all previous rating systems, it was pretty easy to be in the top category. It’s been a huge adjustment, and I think that’s hard for people.

There’s also the whole issue of time; this whole evaluation process for principals takes so much time. My principal used to come in my classroom a lot; now, nobody comes in my classroom except when they have to evaluate me because I don’t think they have the time anymore. Now, I have my assistant principal and she’s been in my classroom a grand total of two times, one time to do my evaluation and one time to do my walk-through. It’s actually supposed to get [administrators] in the classroom more, but in my opinion, they’re in the classroom less. I think that it can be very difficult, to be honest with you, for most teachers to get everything in in that short period of time, especially on the walk-through. For my walk-through, when my assistant principal walked in, I wasn’t at the place in my lesson for the day that she needed to see, so I was
just like, “Alright guys; let’s move forward to groups.” But I think a lot of teachers can’t do that on the spot, so they would keep going with where they were. If she only stayed for twenty minutes, and I just kept going in the plan that I had, she would have seen the wrong twenty minutes.

I have a very strong understanding of the [student growth measures portion of OTES]. I would much prefer to have value-added than I would have any other measure. I really don’t like that we have to have SLOs this year. Value-added is, quite simply, just more valid. It’s a better measure, in my opinion, than using an SLO. I don’t want to write my own test because I think that’s ridiculously unfair that people write their own test and see it. I mean come on; that, to me, is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. I don’t want to see my own test. I think that’s completely unfair, I don’t know how you can even count that. The bottom line is that OTES is about proving what I do, but it’s not helping my instruction or my kids. It’s a waste of that time and that’s the thing about OTES; it’s not really improving my instruction.

For my first pre-conference, [my principal and I] sat together and went over my data notebooks and information I had on students, but I didn’t write it up into a formalized lesson plan. A lot of people were so obsessed with writing up these formalized lesson plans that they didn’t use every day. I found that part of OTES to be pretty stupid. Why would you write up this lesson plan that you don’t use every day? [For my observation], I just did my lessons the way I always do my lessons. I don’t change what I do. I feel like the more you share up front, the better. They’re able to observe and know what’s going on, so I do feel like I share a lot up front. Post-conference is also fine; it’s usually shorter; at that point, it’s just going over the rubric.
For my first year, my growth measure was value-added math, and I like to use value-added. I’ve always paid attention to my value added growth even before there was OTES. It has always been important to me. I was obsessed with my value-added prior to this. I’ve always made sure that it was always in the highest category. I’ve always been very concerned about it because I think growing students is my job. And since I teach high students, I know they’re going to achieve, so growth has always been how I’ve measured myself. Even before OTES, I was really concerned about, “Am I growing the kids?” That’s always been my focus.

[This year], I have my vice-principal as my evaluator. I was more nervous going through a new person that I didn’t know. It is weird that we don’t know how we get assigned to anybody; it’s sort of random. You just get this email [saying who]. We’ve talked about it in our building, and nobody really seems to know if we’ll have her again. I don’t really care, but some people are really upset about it. There’s actually a lot of controversy around it. In a lot of people’s minds, the vice principal is much more picky than the principal. She scribes everything and she seems to be more picky, and so there’s some controversy about how they trade it off.

Honestly, OTES is not helping me develop instructionally. It’s not growing me; it does a better job seeing what I do than the old forms. It seems to do a better job differentiating teachers, but it seems to waste a lot more of the evaluators’ time. And, it doesn’t necessarily help the evaluators get the vast majority of teachers to develop instructionally. It may help them develop one small group of teachers. I think the only teachers it helps are the ones that are in the developing [category], because the ones that are ineffective are probably not going to get better anyway, and the skilled and
accomplished [teachers] probably aren’t going to change very much. So the developing ones are either going to develop into skilled, or else they’re going to go away into ineffective; one or the other.

I think professional development and working with other teachers [helps to develop skilled and accomplished teachers]. There’s something to be said for philosophical growth that happens. [For example], I really think once I internalized the whole formative assessment practice, that really changed me as a teacher and developed me significantly. So, certain things like that can make a big change on the way that you see things.

One of the things that stands out for me [in regards to OTES] is the fact that there are different evaluators and they view things very differently. There seems to be a lot of inconsistency. People are saying that they have one evaluator who’s concerned about the posters they have up in the room and another evaluator that really doesn’t care about that and is more concerned about the words I’m using with students. That’s inconsistency, and that seems to be a problem, that there’s that much diversity within our district and within the same building.

I feel like OTES takes a lot of time away from the principal being an instructional leader because I don’t feel like this is a good opportunity for them to be an instructional leader. It’s more of an opportunity for them to look at some specific things and maybe make a few recommendations here and there. Also, if someone’s really poor, [it may be an opportunity] to work with them, but if you were an instructional leader, you’d already be working with the person who’s really poor. So, for the vast majority [of teachers] who are doing okay, it’s more just kind of filling in the blanks, doing a lot of paperwork, and
not really providing a lot of true instructional leadership because so much time is spent on this.

[The whole OTES process] is kind of almost a bother; I hate to say that, but it’s bothersome. It’s one more thing on my plate. I use my planning time to [prepare for OTES] because it’s not practical to do it at home. I can’t look at my kids’ data notebooks at home, and I can’t pull something from a file, and I can’t pull a report that I need on data at home. So, I need to be in my classroom to get it all together because you’re compiling so much stuff and planning and figuring it out. I end up using a lot of my planning time for [OTES] instead of whatever else I would have been doing with it, which is more productive toward instruction.

Ideally, the [goal of educator evaluation] is coaching and instructional development, and also to make sure people are actually doing what they’re supposed to be doing. I don’t think OTES [achieves these goals]. I think it has some good points, but I think it’s just too cumbersome, too paperwork-oriented, and it requires the same level of paperwork for somebody who’s doing a good job as somebody who’s struggling. I can see [using] OTES for someone that’s really struggling because you want to give them clear information about what they’re doing and what needs to be improved. The rubric guides that and gives [struggling teachers] credit for the things they might be doing well, but it focuses in on the areas that they need to improve.

It seems like there could be a condensed version of OTES. If we get accomplished in every category the first time through, why do we have to do a second evaluation? Even for people [who] are skilled across the board; is anything really going
to change that much? It seems like there should be some point where the two people sit down together and say, “Okay, do we need to do another evaluation or not?”

The district can use the results of OTES for RIF [reduction in force]. The higher levels of OTES ratings would be higher up on the seniority list, so that’s pretty important if we ever have cutbacks again. Apparently, most people are clueless about this, so I don’t think anybody really knows that’s even out there. That was never shared by the [teachers’] union. Also, there’s always been rumors that they were going to try and balance the buildings between accomplished teachers and skilled teachers, but I’m not sure how that would all work, except for if we open a new building. You know, if they were smart, they’d try to recruit the accomplished teachers into the buildings that were struggling. But, in order to do that, you have to tie some kind of compensation to it.

I believe that fear does exist within the OTES process. It doesn’t necessarily for me, but I think some people do fear it, in the fact that they don’t trust the person evaluating them. Communication issues [arise] because I think, with a new rater, people don’t know what the rater is expecting them to bring to that first conference because there is no [specific] form you bring to the pre-conference. Do you bring a lesson plan; do you bring a list of all your qualifications; what do you bring? It’s unclear, and some principals, from what I understand, will take the lesson somebody suggested and they’ll [let the teacher know that it needs] improvement before they come see it. And other [principals] will just go and evaluate the lesson.

I think student growth can very easily be measured. I think the value-added metric is a good one to measure student growth. The SGP [student growth percentile derived from the STAR vendor assessment] is not the best thing in the world, but it seems
to work. And considering that all the value-added data is a three-year average, that’s the one bad thing about the SGP is it’s a one-year deal. And that is not as good; I’d like to see SGP [also] be a three-year average. All the excuses [as to why growth measures are not valid] are just not logical. For example, the one kid that has ADHD and doesn’t take his medicine on that day and then bombs the test [is balanced out by] the one kid that’s been just marginal in your class all year and somehow on that day guesses amazingly and scores accelerated when you’re not even expecting him to pass. You don’t go and say, “Take that person off my average.” [Instead], you say, “I reached that kid.” even though you know full well that [the test score] wasn’t really reflective of what they did. It evens out. If you don’t feel like you could influence kids and their scores, then you can’t influence their learning; why are you teaching? I think student growth measures should be used to guide instruction. A lot of people say they shouldn’t be used for evaluation, but I think for a three-year average, they’re fine for evaluation. I feel like I’m ninety nine percent in control [of my growth measures].

Sometimes going to conferences or reading articles about something new helps to improve my instruction. Also, working with other teachers, just trying things or something different with kids [improves my instruction]. Being open to innovation is important. I honestly think good teachers can figure out how to create their own things, so being creative in how to prepare a lesson, how to instruct, how to reach kids, and how to help kids figure out what’s going on [is important]. I think teachers who don’t create some of their own materials are probably not accomplished. If you’re not figuring out how to create some stuff then you’re not really meeting your kids’ needs. If you’re just always looking for what somebody else did, you’re not really looking at; what are the
needs of my kids today? [It is essential] that teachers care about kids and are able to build relationships and connect with kids; you have to have that personal connection. I think you have to have empathy, you have to have an understanding of learning, and [you have to have] patience - that’s a big one. I think you have to be organized, I really do. You can’t do this job and be completely disorganized, especially not in the OTES environment and the data driven environment. You have to be able to stay focused on what you’re doing because the days of just doing whatever are long gone.

Christian

I am from a little town in northeast Ohio. I attended a very good school district [as a child], and when I went to community college I had no idea [what I wanted to do], so I just got my two-year degree there. Then, I went to Ohio State and got my political science bachelor’s degree, and I thought was going into constitutional law at that point. However, I decided it wasn’t what I wanted to do, so I became a bank manager. During that time, I started volunteering in an elementary teacher’s classroom, so that’s how I [decided to] go into education. I did four years of subbing, in [Richardson], and then I taught fifth and sixth grades at a charter school downtown, and it was a pretty tough environment. It really turned me off [to] charter schools, so after the full year there I went back to subbing. I got a long-term [subbing position] for kindergarten and that turned into a full time job. [Currently], I teach second grade.

As a child, I lacked self-confidence; I was an introvert. Things came naturally as I got older in terms of grades. I was one of those kids that kept to myself and didn’t go out on a limb; I just did what was expected of me. My parents expected a lot of me and if it wasn’t done, you were going to get it, so that drove me a lot, but they also supported
me a lot. For my first six years I went to Catholic schools, and then we transitioned to a public school because we moved. It was hard transitioning; it was a complete difference, and it took a while to get over.

I had the normal student to teacher relationship where you have the ones that you liked, you had the ones that you really disliked, and then you had one or two that had a real effect [on me]. For example, my cross-country coach was my civics teacher, and he inspired me to go into political science, to want to be a lawyer, and then eventually to be a teacher for government. I was with him more than my parents at one point. So, he became that father figure, and when I was in school, I could go to him and he would help me. He had high expectations; he drove me and inspired me, but expected a lot of me at the same time.

[I chose teaching] because I wanted something more. I wanted something that was meaningful. I [wanted to] go home each day and feel good about myself; like I made a difference. It truly does make a difference, getting up each morning and feeling like you’re doing something worthwhile. Even though teachers have to put up with a lot of junk these days, when you close that door and you leave all that stuff outside, that’s when it means the most. If you can get through that nonsense and be able to get into a classroom and focus on what those kids need - that’s what I looking for.

[Working in the charter school] was an eye-opening experience; I never want to be part of a charter again. There was no real experienced leadership in the building, if you call it a building, and the kids were so rough. They just threw you in there and said go to it. From what I remember, there wasn’t really an evaluation system; you either performed or you didn’t. I think they looked at test scores but they were just happy to
have a body to be honest. If you’re desperate for work as an educator you can always find a job at a charter school, but there wasn’t really any form of evaluation.

We didn’t have OTES when I first started teaching [in Richardson], so it was just sitting down with [my administrator] and letting me know how I was doing. That was basically it, and I always had a good relationship [with my administrator], so I valued her opinion and what she had to say to me. She was always supportive in anything I did and that built trust with me. The support that she gave me was worth more than any evaluation she could have given me. My early experiences with evaluation [in Richardson] were good because it was low stress. I think I got a lot more out of sitting down with my administrator and having her tell me what I was doing good and what I could improve on. There was nothing hanging over my head, like OTES is now where you have to keep your numbers or you’re not going to be accomplished or you’re going to be put on an improvement plan or all of the other stuff that we have to deal with now. It was more your leader sitting there telling you what you can do better, and what she enjoys seeing you do now, and I think I got a lot out of that.

I also had one of the best teachers in the district [to collaborate with]; she was a big influence on me. She got me through that first year. And then, of course, my wife’s a teacher and she is a big influence on me. Just having that support and having them saying, “You are doing it right, we are here for you if you need anything, call me, come get me, and I will sit and plan with you.” [The staff] at my school was a very tight-knit group, and I think that helped just having that whole kind of atmosphere. Not all buildings have that, knowing not only your grade level has your back, but the whole
building has your back. That takes special people and it takes special leadership to put that kind of group together, and it just doesn’t happen often.

OTES is all about, data, and I’m a big fan of data. I’m all about numbers. [Teachers] in my building come to me for number advice. I know how to work the system pretty well now. But there’s always something, I don’t know what it is, I guess I am waiting for the ball to drop for one class, and not have good scores, and then in my opinion all hell would break loose. I am always waiting for that one class to just come in and destroy my program, and so it’s always hanging over your head. With the old system, we didn’t have that. [With OTES], it’s all about an observation on one day, from someone who may or may not have a bias, that’s my opinion. This new system is supposed to take the bias out of it, [and] I don’t believe that it does. [OTES] drove me out of third grade. I had finally had enough because I completely disagreed with how they were comparing STAR data to OAA data [to calculate value-added]. It still doesn’t make sense to this day how you can transfer STAR to OAA; you’re comparing apples to oranges.

I think my beliefs about teaching have changed over the years. More than anything, I have learned that sometimes academics take a back seat to some of the kids that I had in my room. They’ve got different things on their mind than school and they want to be loved and they want to have a safe place where they don’t have to worry about a mom or dad coming in and doing things to them and all of that kind of stuff. So, whereas when I first came in and I was all about just teaching, now I think I’m better at understanding my kids. I think it’s made me a better teacher, and it’s made me a better person. In my classroom, I [implement] a strict routine. [I let my students know], “This
is what’s expected of you; you’re going to do it.” I have high expectations of everybody. I know it’s more than about just teaching and getting the numbers; you have to educate the whole student, whether it’s giving them inspiration or having those high expectations for students so they can see that you believe in them no matter where they come from and what their story is.

The number one component of good teaching is patience, and that’s one of my goals every year is patience, patience, patience. It is also knowing that not all kids are the same, all kids will learn different ways, and we have to reach out to kids and learn what their strengths are, what their needs are, and that takes a lot of extra work on an educator’s part. [Going] the extra mile when you’re tired and you don’t want to do it; that is what makes educators good. High expectations have always been my philosophy. Even if a student [has a difficult] background, you have to hold yourself accountable and your students accountable. You can’t give in and say, “Oh they’re so low I can’t grow them as much. You have to hold yourself accountable to put that work in and get them to grow that year and then try to catch them up to where they need to be, so high expectations. I don’t think we have that enough in our district. You have to prepare them for what they’re going to face out in the world, even at first or second grade, because you’re developing those good habits that they’re going to carry on forever. So you begin molding them, and set those expectations: “You can do it, I don’t care what anybody tells you, in my room I believe in you and you’re going to do it.”

A teacher’s role in society is to be more than an educator. You are on call like a doctor, twenty-four seven. I’m answering emails, at, eleven, twelve, midnight. So, your job for that year you have that child [is to be] the focal point in their life and for those
parents too. So it’s more than just being a teacher; it’s being everything that that parent or that child needs you to be for that year. I always tell my students [that] once you’re a student of mine, you’re always going to be a student of mine, and they know that. Once you’re in my room, you’re going to be with me forever, and I will be checking up on you. So, for that year and beyond, you’re everything that that parent and especially that student need you to be.

I first heard about OTES three years ago. We had [a teacher at our building who] went through the pilot and she would give us updates during our professional development on a regular basis. She shared that it was completely different than what she was used to, and it was causing her a lot more stress than the previous type of evaluation. At that point, I really wasn’t too concerned. The district [formally] introduced teachers to OTES through professional development.

[In regards to my current level of understanding of OTES], I don’t understand what goes into an observation. To be honest, I’m not one of those types that needs OTES to tell me if I’m being a good teacher or not, so my time spent on OTES is very minimal compared to other teachers, especially my wife for example. She spends hours on OTES. I do not do anything different than I normally do, so, in terms of studying a rubric, I don’t study a rubric at all. I’m fully confident in what I’m doing and if someone wants to come into my room and observe me at any time they’re more than welcome to because I’m that confident that what I’m doing will suffice for any kind of rubric they can bring. I’m not one to strive for, the highest [level] of the rubric because I’m more concerned about if I’m reaching the needs of my children. A rubric is not going to tell me [whether] I’m doing that or not in my opinion. So, I might have a little different perspective than other
teachers. And I’m fully confident in my data; that my data will pull my scores up to where I need it to be.

[In regards to student growth measures], I know how to get good data; I know how to get good numbers. I am a numbers freak. I really am. This year, I used my pre-test STAR from the fall screener, and we do monthly STAR tests, and I’m constantly evaluating and judging if they are growing or not on a monthly basis. I have a growth chart that I’ve created that shows if they’re growing in percentiles, growing in grade equivalent, and growing in scaled score. Every student has one of these sheets and I send it home regularly to parents. I have a one-on-one conference with the students every month [to discuss their growth]. This impacts my instruction because if I have a student that is not growing, then I need to find out why and STAR can tell me areas where they’re not growing, and where they are growing. I can adjust my instruction. One of the reasons I moved from third to second was I believed I could get even better data with STAR than relying on a state test [as third grade does].

I think teachers need observations; however, I don’t think it needs to be done by someone in the building. I think it needs to be done through a neutral observer that they don’t know because I believe there’s a human bias involved. I have a good relationship [with my principal]; however, I am outspoken. I will tell her my opinion; I’m not afraid to back up what I need to say. I don’t look for conflict, but if something bothers me, I’ll let her know. That, in my opinion, can create human bias. This would not be popular with my teacher friends, but I think observations should also always be unannounced because what I see now is a dog and pony show. Teachers prepare for one lesson, and they spend hours and hours on this one lesson. I think, “Why are you doing that? What
are you not doing on a normal basis if you had to spend that much time on an observation?” I think that’s ridiculous; I spend zero minutes on OTES observations because I’m that confident that what I’m doing is good enough for me and my students.

I believe we have to use data, but everyone should be evaluated on the same data. I don’t think teachers in the third, fourth, and even upper grade levels, should be forced to be graded on a state test because it’s not fair to them, and it puts a heck of a lot more workload on them. [We’re] losing good teachers from third and fourth grade wanting to transfer to second, first, and kindergarten [because they can use vendor assessment]. Third grade is such a fundamental and important grade. So, if you’re going to use STAR, that’s fine, but I think there should be more than one source of data as well that you can average together. And whatever that may be [should be] the district’s choice. To use just one test on one specific day is unfair to teachers.

Also, the notion that you can only have two or three accomplished [teachers] in a building is absolutely ridiculous. I do remember when I first heard that, that you can only have a quota of two or three accomplished teachers in a building. That immediately turned me off. So my first impression of OTES was a negative one, but I’m confident in my data. I got a [skilled] in my first year on my observation and I knew that was coming; I knew she wouldn’t give me [accomplished]. My data kicked me up, so I’m fully confident that I can get those numbers that I need to get an [overall rating of accomplished].

My first year, when I got fully observed with OTES, I was told to input all this data, all this [evidence]. I spent hours and hours submitting items because, at that point, I wanted to do well. I went through every standard for educators and I made sure I had
evidence for every standard and how they related to my classroom. And then I would go through and I would submit evidence to show that I was directly applying the standards to my room. None of my evidence [submitted to my evaluator] was brought up in my post-conference I had with my principal. That bothered me. My first observation was a quick paragraph; that’s what I got in terms of feedback. This year, I’ve had an observation from a different OTES evaluator and I’ve got pages of feedback. Also, my first pre-conference was very informal - five to ten minutes tops; whereas, this year it was a good hour. Also, the first year I was a little surprised that it was a quick twenty-minute observation. This year was an hour and a half observation. I really appreciate it because that person gave me the time and took a couple days to write all this stuff down. It gives me a different perspective than my first [observation] experience.

I remember eventually getting my final rating, which was accomplished. I asked how it worked and no one could really explain it to me at that point. I saw the final scores on the OTES evaluation, and I remember being completely baffled as to how we claim a percentage of a kid. The teachers get together and decide with each other who is going to claim what percentage of a child [for the value-added calculation]. That’s ridiculous to make a teacher do that. You’re pitting teacher against teacher in some instances.

I don’t think OTES makes me a better teacher. OTES is what it is. As a teacher, I’m expecting change; it just seems like something new will come along so I don’t put a lot of effort into it. OTES doesn’t make me better because anybody can come into my room at any time and I will be doing the exact same thing as I would be if it weren’t an OTES evaluation. I like to hear feedback on my teaching, so that’s what I take from
OTES is my feedback. I guess I get more out of the informal observations than anything because it’s really off the cuff. More than anything, OTES is just a hassle for me. I’m frustrated with the process [because] it’s just time consuming and I feel like that’s time I could be spending with children that really need it more. It’s just wasted time.

I would say there are two goals for educator evaluation. I think the overall goal is to make the educator better, and it’s a well-intended goal. I do believe we have to be accountable as teachers, and I think somehow we have to get to that point. [Also], I think as an administrator you’re looking for teachers who just aren’t cutting it anymore. There’s a lot of the old guard that haven’t adjusted to the times, and I think OTES is another opportunity for administrators to really get their data and prove that some teachers aren’t doing what they need to be doing anymore.

OTES [could be improved] by using more than one data point, or collecting the same type of data for all teachers. Unannounced observations may create more stress but it may also create more time because teachers won’t spend hours and hours getting ready for one lesson. There are ways to work with the current system that we have and make it better if everybody is willing to do so. However, I don’t know if the district uses [the results of OTES evaluations] at all to be honest with you.

[Fear exists] in the OTES process – absolutely. I can attribute OTES to pushing me out of my [former] grade level. I don’t think I would have ever changed grade levels if it were not for OTES. I changed because there was a fear that one day your kids are going to come in and not perform on a test after you’ve worked all year for. There’s also fear that you’re not going to get all your curriculum in by April when the tests take place. And so you are constantly hustling along whether they know it or not you’re pushing
along. And that’s completely opposite of what I thought Common Core was supposed to do. So, there is a lot of fear built in to OTES because there’s so much you have to get done.

Teacher effectiveness is about whether or not you can touch every child and deal with what their issues are, what their growing needs are educationally. I think that’s teacher effectiveness, but that’s not good enough in today’s world. You can’t just say, “I’m appealing to every kid, I’m meeting their individual needs.” The public and the schools are demanding that you prove that, so right now in terms of teacher effectiveness it’s all about data. Whether that’s right or wrong, that’s for someone else to decide. We just have to play the game that’s given to us.

[Instructional] coaches are very instrumental in my improvement, because I know I will have problems in my room, and when I do I will go straight to my coach. My coaches got me into the data and spent a lot of time in my room. [My coach also] got me started on [student] data notebooks, and it’s kind of evolved over the years with my data notebooks. Also, being married to a teacher definitely helps me to collaborate. To assure other educators grow professionally, [we need to] to stick them with a mentor. You have those certain individuals in a building that are proving year after year after year that they know how to grow their kids, so why not use that to your advantage? Stick them with that teacher for a while, let them observe, let them meet once or twice a month, and use it to your advantage. Use your resources in your building and your district. As a teacher you just have to roll with the punches, and play with what you’re given and right now it’s OTES. I’ve found a way that I’m comfortable with, but not a lot of other teachers are.
They’re stressed out and they are overworked because of OTES. As long as politicians are making [the] choices, you are always going to have to deal with it.

**Fiona**

I grew up in California and we moved to [Richardson], when I was twelve, so I was here for seventh and eighth grade, then we moved to Tennessee, then Florida then back for my senior year so I actually graduated from Richardson. I am a mom of five with two step-children. I am a first-born and the oldest of four girls. My parents divorced when I was five. I’m the producer, the organizer, the manager, and the boss [of our family] – a typical first-born. My mom was a teacher, and [I always thought], “I’m not going to do that, there’s no money in that. However, [once I started] working with kids, I thought, “I can do this; this is rewarding; I kind of like it.” Now, I thank God every day that I did choose to be a teacher.

As a child, I loved school and hated to miss it. I was very social and school came very easy [to me]. I remember my first grade teacher was very serious and very structured and had high expectations. There was no nonsense; she had these high expectations and you were going to meet them and that was that. My fifth grade teacher is the one that to this day is the best teacher I ever I’ve ever had. She was young and she had all of these great ideas coming out of [college]. We did performances and she was very well rounded. My other teachers were good, but I had that connection with her. She was just gung-ho passionate.

I did not start out wanting to be a teacher; I was pre-med for a year, but I started working at a daycare and I really liked it, so I switched to a preschool and changed my major my sophomore year of college. When I started working with the preschool, I
realized that I was very passionate about [teaching]; I wanted to make things better, map out the curriculum, and plan out age-appropriate activities [for students]; I had that drive. It’s harder now with changes in education and with reform. You don’t get to actually teach sometimes.

[I am currently in my] fifteenth year of teaching. I teach fourth grade language arts and social studies, and I have partnered with my current teaching partner for most of those years. I started bonding with my partner when I was student teaching because it was new for both of us and we have a lot in common. Our management style is very similar; we have that balance. When we do conferences, we know how to support each other without even [speaking]. It’s hard to explain that timing we’ve had together; it just works very nicely. A lot of it is having similar teaching styles, similar organizational and management styles, and we both have a creative side. We’re very in sync. This relationship has really developed me [as an educator].

I remember, in my first year of teaching, feeling so very lucky to feel a lot of support [from my administrator] right away. I knew she was going to stand up for me, that she had faith in me, and I think it empowered me to feel a little more confident as a first year teacher. During my first evaluation, [my administrator] had constructive things to say but a lot of positives, so I felt good about what I was doing and I wanted to improve not just for my students but for her too. She motivated us and empowered us; she was amazing. She instilled in all of us that drive to succeed and do our best. She did my evaluations for about seven years, for the first half of my career. She knew very much what was going on in my classroom and what my teaching style was. She was
never condescending; she never made us feel like she knew more. She always sang our praises and had our backs.

You don’t realize [how important that is] until it’s gone; and when that is gone it is deflating. If you have somebody that even has an inkling of condescension, whether in their words or their tone, it is very damaging to the morale. [With my current administrator], I feel very beneath her, and I don’t like that. It’s hard to accept feedback with her because it doesn’t come across sincere and there is no established rapport. I’m at the point right now where I have considered other options [for my career] besides education, but I just have to, toughen up, ignore, and [focus] on my little people.

I actually sympathize with my administrator [in regards to OTES because] it is a huge amount of work for [principals]. There is a part of me that really, wants to do very well on [OTES], and then there is another part of me that says, “I know what I know, I know what goes on in my room, if you’re going to base [my evaluation] on one or two times that you come in, that I give you this canned performance, just show up.” I guess I don’t have a problem with OTES. I have a problem with whether or not it’s a true picture of what’s going on in the classroom. Basically, I see [OTES] as hoop jumping. [My evaluator] made a point of telling me I was the only one at my grade level that was skilled. It was just because of my value added, but I was absolutely floored; that’s when it kind of devalued it for me. [OTES] doesn’t hold value for me. [Under our prior evaluation cycle], I could do a parent survey, peer survey, or a student survey. I found the student survey was the most beneficial to me as a teacher. I would chart them, it was anonymous, and they were very informative. To me, that was the most valuable piece of information for teaching and I did [student surveys] until it wasn’t an option anymore.
When I did student surveys, I really got to know an unbiased opinion from the [students] who I was supposed to be affecting, helping, and growing.

I believe that every child can learn given the right set of tools and teaching methods. We just have to find the way to reach them. Not everybody’s cut out to do that, but my goal is to grow each kid [and help them have a] positive experience. I have an opportunity to make an impression on young people, in many cases, more so than their parents because they’re with me a lot more. That’s becoming a bigger and bigger role; it’s not just teaching anymore. Good teaching is definitely being flexible and adapting yourself to meet the needs of kids, and to differentiate [instruction]. Sometimes it is just getting over yourself. I can remember when I was student teaching it drove me crazy when students wouldn’t sit on their bottoms. If you walked into my room now, whoever needs to stand gets the seats in the back of the room. Showing that you care is half the battle. I think good teaching is knowing everything you can [about a child] and using [that knowledge] to find your way in, to get a little educating in, a little learning in there too. That connection [with students] is absolutely essential. I feel that a teacher, in today’s society, must be a good role model, because not every child has that. Also, teachers help create that to instill that [love of] life long learning; it’s so valuable. I want to teach tolerance and get students to see other viewpoints. Sometimes we have to take on parent roles.

At first, [OTES was] was kind of the unknown; nobody really knew what it was going to be like. For my first evaluation, I didn’t realize how much I needed to include in my lesson plan and writing to have the evidence in there. I feel like I have a pretty good grasp of what [my administrator] is looking for in each area now. I feel the rubric really
helps; if you know how to follow directions and you can read and put it all together it
should be pretty easy to do. You write your lesson plan, and put down the things that
need to be in there to show you’re skilled or accomplished. It’s pretty cut and dry.

[For growth measures], however, I don’t have any idea. My understanding [of
growth measures] became very muddled when I realized that third grade went from [fall]
STAR to [spring] OAA to measure growth. It was like apples to oranges, and I can’t
wrap my head around that. I still don’t think anybody can wrap their head around that
based on all the questions that I’ve heard being asked. Last year, we [switched to]
PARCC assessments, so nobody really knew what was going to happen with that again;
apples to oranges again. However, due to safe harbor [from the state], we are using
value-added from STAR (fall to spring), which seems to make sense. But, I keep getting
email after email about the student growth measures on STAR and how those are
calculated and then I know the math people have some concerns because there’s things
that are on STAR that aren’t even part of our standards. I think growth measures reflect
the efforts of every teacher the student has had, the efforts of the student, and a lot of
other factors.

I would like to know why there’s not more spontaneity for the observation
[portion of OTES]. I feel like you can tell me when you’re coming in and I can prepare
this fabulous lesson because I went to college and we learned how to write these really
long lesson plans that we never use in the classroom. And I can give you that and I can go
through the rubric and I can put every little thing in there, whether it’s factual or not, and
I can get a rating. I don’t know that this is necessarily an accurate assessment of what is
going on. And I don’t know that there’s any way to get an administrator to know every
single classroom and know the day-to-day, that’s just not feasible. I’m not saying there’s a right answer or solution.

For this year’s OTES evaluation cycle, we were surprised that our professional growth goals were given to us. We were told it had to have the PBIS [behavior] goal in our plan. It said, “I will reduce the number of office referrals,” and our evaluator wanted that exact wording in there. I said, “Well, I can’t. That’s too subjective because I’m getting kids that [are new to me], so that’s a whole different dynamic. I don’t want to put that in there.” And then I just gave up and put it in there anyways. Everybody felt that way, but she came to everybody and talked to them and had them put it in and most of us were just like whatever. I wish my growth plan were something that was more personal to me, [focusing on] things that I need to improve upon, and that it was truly valid and informative, but I don’t feel like that’s what’s happening. The goal for the area of refinement [following the observation] is all the same for all of us too, which doesn’t hold validity to me.

I remember that I was [irritated] that first year during my post-conference because my evaluator brought up the other language arts teacher at our grade level who had applied for a grant for some instructional tools. She said she couldn’t give me the accomplished [rating] in student-driven learning and suggested that I look into getting those same instructional tools. Then the next year she told me that I was the only fourth grade teacher that was skilled. She sat down in the lunch room and said, “Well, you’re the only one I have to observe because you’re the only one that was skilled.” I don’t feel that each of my grade-level colleagues and I are rated objectively. There are four of us, and two of us are more out spoken and that seems to impact our evaluations. There was
talk at one point that our OTES final summative rating might be published. I don’t know if that was accurate or not, but I remember all of us thinking that would be catastrophic.

As teachers, we differentiate our instruction and lessons to meet learning styles and to meet individual needs, but yet we’re evaluated on a one size fits all type model. What motivates me may not motivate you or the next person, and we all grow in different ways too. For me, being able to choose the professional development that I truly want to do would be powerful. I feel like OTES is hoop jumping; it is what it is. I have to do it, and I know the process now so I’m comfortable with it. I know what the administrator wants and what she looks for and how to write it accordingly. I don’t hate it; I just do it – kind of like attendance.

The purpose of evaluation is to have an accountability factor. It should also be [a goal] to help educators grow and become better, to self-reflect and to see areas that are needed for refinement. Evaluation is very necessary and very valuable, but it needs to be a valid component so that teachers buy-in; you have to get the teacher buy-in. Evaluation is very messy but I do think it’s important. I’m not sure what the district does with [OTES evaluations]. I know there’s some contractual issues involved. I know that we were told many times at our building that we could only have a certain number of accomplished teachers, which I find ridiculous because if you’re accomplished, you’re accomplished. A teacher told me that she was told she should be accomplished but our evaluator can’t have that many accomplished teachers so she has to be skilled. It’s a numbers game, and I feel like that’s what education is anymore.

With my administrator, fear exists within the OTES process, because she’s a person who makes you feel like you are guilty until you have proven yourself innocent. I
feel like we’re always trying to explain ourselves or do something when maybe it’s not even necessary.

I’ve had a lot of great mentor teachers and seeking out teachers who I want to emulate has improved my effectiveness in the classroom. I’ve worked with some great teachers. Bouncing ideas off of each other and collaboration are huge. Also, when you have an administrator who supports you and believes in you, you want to perform for them. I realize, not everybody’s going to like their boss, and vice-versa but I think in an educational setting, it has to be looked at like a classroom and you have to have rapport with your staff so that you are able to help them grow. Professional growth for educators is a collaborative process; we seek out teacher experts in [various] areas throughout our building. You become a tight-knit family; you become a team. And I think that’s where growth occurs; it is not necessarily trying to do it all yourself, but knowing where your support is and who to go to.

I don’t want to say I’m bashing the [OTES] process, because I don’t know that there is a right answer. You need to have a process, and I think this is a great idea, but in reality, is it truly helping teachers grow or is it helping people keep tabs? Are they accurate tabs? I feel like it’s become a way to contain teachers; that’s what’s happening. It’s like we’re just unruly - like herding cats - and that’s where administrators come in to contain and control us. There are a lot of politics that I feel like are unnecessary in education now.

Jill

This is my twenty-eighth year of teaching, and I have traditionally thanked God that as a nineteen, eighteen-year-old person, that I was smart enough to choose this
[career] because I really do feel like it’s always been my passion. It’s not a job for me, it’s not a career for me, it’s a life. I feel like school is my normal place, almost to the point where I have to remember that home exists too. With that being said, I feel like the last several years my passion is being sucked out of me. And, I know that has to do with not any one thing in particular, it has to do with several factors. I feel like I’m kind of mourning my profession that no longer is the way it was.

I feel like we don’t have academic freedom anymore. I feel like this whole system of OTES and data-driven decisions and the structuring of the building improvement plans is bringing the worst teachers up, and that’s a good thing, but I feel like it’s taking your most excellent teachers, and pulling us down. We have to be on a certain page on Monday, and then we have to go to this lesson on Tuesday. Everything is so dictated now, and it’s never been that way in my whole career. My freedom of choice is gone. [I am no longer able to] look at my group of kids, go at the pace I know they need me to go, and use whatever resources I feel work best for that group in that particular year, or to use multiple resources, which is what we’ve always done before. I’ve always considered myself an excellent writing teacher. You don’t have to tell me how to teach a personal narrative. But in the current [prescribed program], I have to use the techniques that are in a book.

I’ve always considered myself a teacher who loved to learn new ideas and new techniques. And I feel like the students’ excitement has to come through my passion, and all of this is really suffocating me. I used to do a huge project on service learning, and we had the three core novels and then we could supplement whatever we felt each group of kids needed it. I can’t do that now because I have to show up at a meeting and prove
that I’ve used [a certain] strategy and maybe that strategy doesn’t work for every kid. The kids don’t know any different; we’re the ones that know what it used to be like. And so my own sort of mourning happens within myself, and I try not to show it to the kids. I think the whole lesson plan of OTES is far too long, and there’s far too much writing that has to go into it, and I spend hours and hours and hours on it. And I feel like more and more of my time is now spent on these kinds of things rather than calling parents or designing a lesson that is fun and exciting. And all the data collection is just overkill.

When I was young, I loved school; I was wired for school. I couldn’t wait to get there, and I loved every teacher I had. I just had an ultimate respect for what happened in a classroom, if I would have done anything wrong I would have been mortified. I was the one who would be on the edge of their seat listening to what the teacher was saying. My parents weren’t college educated. They were of the generation where they put one hundred percent of their faith into the school district. Nothing was ever questioned. I don’t even think they ever really looked at my grade cards that closely because they knew I was doing well because that was just who I was as a person. I was athletic; I was involved in sports clubs, leadership, and student council. I’ve always had really high expectations for myself, which I also think has made OTES excruciating sometimes. I’ve managed to be accomplished, but sometimes I think, “At what cost?”

And then I look at how they’ve changed the way we are using the STAR assessment data, and that’s our SLO this year. They’ve changed the criteria to use a median score, and, I remember it being sold to us at the beginning of the school year that all this is great. We had a young teacher who is actually on an improvement plan because her STAR scores weren’t very good last year, and she spoke at the meeting and said that
if it would have been median scores last year, then she wouldn’t be on an improvement plan. But I was accomplished last year because I used the percentages, but if they would have looked at my median score, I’d be skilled. There again, you’re taking the top teachers who are growing their kids in high percentages and bringing them down.

Thank God I had great mentors for ten years or more. I think back to my early career and I just really latched on to seasoned teachers. I could sense they knew what they were doing, had success with their students, and had a great work ethic. It wasn’t a job for them either; it was a career; it was a life. Thank goodness I had plenty of those along the way. I got many ideas from these relationships, such as classroom management ideas, how to sort what’s most important, how to pick and choose priorities, teaching methods, and activity ideas. [My mentors] were passionate too, and that only stirs your own passion when you work with other people who are passionate, and other people who are just good with kids. Some of us have instincts, and some of us don’t. OTES is not going to help people who don’t have instincts. I don’t know what will help them. But anybody can be good on two to four days of the year and to me that’s kind of what OTES [measures].

There’s a thought among teachers that the district doesn’t want to be audited, and that they don’t want too many people to be accomplished. It makes me feel let down again like here’s one more thing, one more kick in the teeth. One more punch in the stomach. You know I don’t feel like anybody listens to us, nobody even asks us anymore, and we used to always be a part of the decision making. Several years back that stopped.

[When I think about the teachers I had as a child], I always think of my third grade teacher and a high school teacher that I had. You could tell they loved what they
did, you could tell they loved school, and you could tell they loved kids. They didn’t raise their voice, they were patient, they were funny, they had a sense of humor, but they [also] had standards and rules. I did not like a teacher where everything was too loosey goosey or the expectations weren’t clear. [My high school teacher] made school fun, and he made you want to achieve. He made you want to do well. He’s the one that gave me the idea of competing against the test. He would tell us to try to beat the test; “Don’t let the test beat you, you beat the test.” Well that’s all somebody had to say to me, and I was all over it. And I kind of have that same philosophy with my kids. I try to make it a competition, to make it personal, to make it meaningful for them and something they can latch on to.

My husband was in the military and I finished my bachelor’s degree in North Carolina where he was stationed, and I actually got hired at a Marine base. I got hired to teach seventh grade. We didn’t have behavior issues, and if we did, we were to call the military parent at work, which was typically dad. And if dad didn’t do anything about the child’s problem we called dad’s commanding officer. I taught [in this position] for one year, and then we moved back to Ohio. I got hired in Ohio teaching seventh grade reading. A lot of kids came with nothing, and they weren’t very interested in school. But there were some really good teachers there; some really dedicated people. There was an assistant principal who took me under his wing. He was working on [his master’s degree], and he came in and videotaped me doing some lessons and then he videotaped her doing some lessons and then we watched some together and kind of critiqued and talked things out. It was valuable, and I liked it when administrators were in the building,
or in your room a lot. But as soon as I got my job in [Richardson] my administrator really wasn’t in my room very often.

I came to Richardson to teacher sixth grade ELA, and I remember the first year feeling a little bit like a fish out of water. My team kept changing, [but once I had a stable team], that was the start of the glory years. Really good times, really good years. Our philosophies were on the same page; everybody was dedicated, professional, and everybody’s approach to kids was virtually the same. Even our conduct in a parent conference was the same. Assessment of kids was accurate and the same, and everybody carried their own weight. We had fun together and we laughed together. My team is so important because we’re a family, and the more in sync the leaders of that family are, the better the kids function. It’s like a marriage; the kids function best when mom and dad are on the same page.

Parents taught me a lot when I was a young teacher. I was a parent too, but not of school aged children, so you don’t have that perspective as a young teacher. Parents just want to know that you hear them; they just want to know that you hear what they’re saying. Don’t get defensive, don’t be adversarial; they just want to know that you hear them. And sometimes it's oaky to concede and say, “You know what, you’re right. I hadn’t thought of it that way.” But I think that comes with confidence and experience, and those mentor teachers, I can remember running to them sometimes and showing them nasty grams from parents. And talking it out with them and then you proceed. I think that’s what mentors do the best.

For my first observation [after I moved to Ohio], we had to write our objective for the day in our lesson plans. It was a little bit more of a formatted plan, but it was nothing
like OTES. I can remember two formal evaluations, and I can remember meeting with the administrator afterward and discussing [my evaluation]. I did get constructive criticism. There might have been a category or two that was good, and then a comment on how to improve it. At this point, my evaluator was looking for my technique as a teacher. He’s the one who videotaped me. There was a checklist of things that he was looking for within the lesson, but what was on the checklist was only a third of what encompassed the evaluation, like being on time, and how you looked, how you presented yourself. These early experiences didn’t really help me to improve.

In my early years, it was really those mentor teachers that helped me to improve, [as well as] my own desire to do professional development. I wanted to be a better teacher, and I latched myself on to people who I thought were great. I was always a team teacher kind of person. I loved the idea of teaming because it’s that family atmosphere. Also, we have to understand that, as a teacher, we are not just dispensing information. Children need first of all to know that you’re their biggest fan, so you need to earn their trust. I’ve heard some people in the past make the comment, “Well I don’t have to earn their respect; they should [just] respect me.” Respect only comes from forming a relationship with them. I think relationships are extremely important in what we do, and I think that’s the difference between a good teacher and a great teacher. They also have to feel that you believe in them. They have to feel that you are on their side. The whole evaluation system, the whole data collection thing, loses sight of the fact that [my students are] eleven and twelve, and dealing with things that sometimes we have no reference for. We have to think about not just the academics, we have to think about the
whole life of the child, and I think we have to have high expectations. Kids will rise to the level of your expectations.

There was a quote that was something like, “Teachers are responsible for all the other professions in the world,” and that is so true. We are responsible and I truly believe that we do instill a love of learning in kids, that’s our hope. The impact that we have on an individual child or on society is huge, and that’s why I’m so saddened by the fact that OTES is making it so difficult to attract teachers. Are we really attracting the best of the best anymore or are those people now turned off due to all of the regulations?

I first heard about OTES a couple of years before it started. At that time, the coaches were trying to give us just enough information to let us know that a change was coming, but I don’t remember feeling too overwhelmed or anything initially. I think they introduced it to us fairly slowly, which was a good thing. Now that I’m more familiar with it [from having used it the last couple of years], I have found that the rubric is far too long and far too detailed. It’s a lesson plan format that someone designed, but it doesn’t work for everybody, yet we’re all bound by it now.

[In regards to the student growth measures portion of OTES], I haven’t felt it was really fair from day one because there are too many variables that I can’t control that go into that number, but it’s nationwide and people who aren’t educators are pretty much the ones that decided that this would be a great idea. I don’t think it would ever fly in the business world because in the business world you are measured on things you can control. We can’t control what happens to a child before they’re with us, or when they leave our rooms at the end of the day. Those kids who have support at home are the ones who are the most successful. It seems like everybody’s always trying to find the reason
why kids aren’t achieving. Why aren’t schools achieving? But to me, we’re looking in the wrong places; we need to be looking at the families. The only way I think we’re ever going to really [close] the achievement gap is by helping parents become better parents.

I remember that my first OTES evaluation was absolutely exhausting. Everybody was totally stressed out. We knew that [Richardson] had chosen to do OTES before most other districts. We felt like the level of expectation was already to the roof, whereas a lot of other districts were phasing things in for teachers. There was high stress among teachers. It was so overwhelming for our administrators too. I almost feel like I wish they would have phased us in a little more slowly, maybe even one section of the rubric at a time until it all hit and then we had to do it, but maybe focusing on one part of it at a time would have been a lot easier.

It took me thirty-six hours to plan for the first observation, which lasted approximately an hour. [During that time], I prepared the framework of the lesson and the structure of the lesson itself. I had to make sure that I had a combination of a little bit of direct instruction, make sure there were some student-led activities, and make sure that I used some technology in there. I remember typing it out exactly like an old college lesson plan, with everything I was planning on saying, and that just took a tremendous amount of time. I prepped my kids in the days before the observation. My kids were great, and I had them do a station rotation. I probably put more into making it look better than maybe I would have if I weren’t being evaluated. I would have still done the activity, but it might not have looked exactly the same. I remember being tremendously relieved when it was over. I mean you can breathe until January and the next round of observations.
At the post-conference, I do remember being surprised that there were areas that weren’t in the highest category of the rubric. I remember leaving there thinking, “That was a damn good lesson, that was a great lesson, and it was a skilled activity?” It has to be somewhat subjective. I think that’s why initially people were kind of worried about administrators, because if you don’t trust your administrator, that’s a pretty lengthy process to have someone you don’t trust evaluate you. I don’t see how you can capture everything about what we do on one rubric. There [are] so many intangibles. For example, the value of the conversations you have with parents; how do you make that fit into the rubric?

For my SLO [student growth measure] that year, they had me choose two classes of my four. I remember at different points in the year thinking, “I should have chosen this [other] class because I’m seeing more growth from this group than I am from this group. It’s kind of the luck of the draw which class you choose. It ended up working out okay for me but I can remember sweating it out. I remember I had one kid who had just gotten contacts and he didn’t score very well; we had to stop his test because his contacts were bothering him. I had another kid that had some kind of a medical issue and I remember in that teeny tiny moment in time, it was hard to look at a kid and not say, “Well you know I can’t help it if you have a stomach ache right now; this is my evaluation on the line.” It just doesn’t feel right.

People who do science and social studies SLOs [in Richardson] are all coming out accomplished. And, I think that is totally unfair. [The science and social studies SLOs are based on] a teacher-written, district-designed test. They know every question on that test because they give the exact same test in the fall. It’s like an elephant in the room that
nobody talks about. But I think there have been some really good teachers that have moved out of math and ELA because of it. They absolutely teach to the test. I even heard one year that there was a teacher who actually verbally quizzed her students using the same questions or similar questions. Whereas, when you’re doing a state test, it’s a shot in the dark. I know that there’s a teacher from one building who among teachers and parents is thought of as a poor teacher. He got an accomplished rating last year because he knew exactly what he had to teach. The kids knew what was on the test. It’s simply not equal. Math and ELA teachers definitely get the wrong end of the stick.

The feedback from OTES does not help me to improve in my classroom. I guess it could be used in a master teacher kind of lesson, but you’re not a master teacher every day. OTES has not inspired me, and I don’t think it’s inspired any of my colleagues. There’s just too much pressure associated with it. Teachers, by nature, are overachievers and we don’t really need that added pressure. I feel like I’m going to grow; I would just like to grow without so much pressure. Don’t pressure me to do it your way in that lesson plan that somebody else designed, and don’t ask me to spend time proving to you that I’m working with my kids.

I try to remain positive about [OTES], and I try to focus on the good parts of it, but when you know you have that lesson coming up and the prep that has to go into it, resentment just ends up filtering in no matter what. It’s like, “Oh my God, I’ve got to sit down and type out that whole long lesson plan.” I just think it’s unnecessary. It’s not making me a better teacher. I just think there are ways to help us be better teachers. I’m sure there are young teachers, and maybe some who’ve been teaching for a while, who need that structured plan. But why can’t we help those who need it and let the rest of us
fly instead of holding the rest of us all in this corral where we all have to be the same? OTES does not make me better so I get angry. It’s not time well spent. It’s not best practices, it’s not best preparation, it’s jumping through a hoop that probably somebody who isn’t an educator created, and we’re stuck with it. We have no control over it.

It just seems like the new path in education is that people who haven’t taught very long, or not at all, are the decision makers. And that in itself tells you about the credibility of those decisions. You take somebody who’s been in the classroom for fifteen years, and they’ve been around so they’re probably going to have a great perspective from which to make decisions. The goal of educator evaluation should be to make sure that a teacher is teaching the standards, and that the methods that he or she uses are effective in helping the kids grow. I think OTES goes way overboard [in meeting those goals]. Nobody could keep that planning up; there’s just no way. We’re working with human beings; they’re little people. They’re not buckets that we can just dump things into because that’s what my lesson tells me I have to do today.

To improve educator evaluation, I think that they could focus more on helping teachers implement best practices, rather than designing a lesson. Maybe younger teachers need something a little bit more structured, so it would make sense to me if, as a district, we had young teachers following a certain lesson design. But then once you’ve established yourself, and you have years of data to prove your effectiveness, I don’t see why we all have to be the same. Let’s face it, administrators for years did not do their jobs. There have been bad teachers everywhere, and they’re just either moved from building to building or ignored. And, I think because of that, the rest of us are now under this system that ties everybody with the same rope. I would rather see our district set up
true mentorship. I think that would be beneficial for young teachers. Once a teacher becomes an expert in best practices, maybe part of his or her evaluation is meeting with and mentoring younger teachers.

The most effective teachers are the ones who recognize the relationship with their kids first. And then the academics come a whole lot easier when there’s a relationship there. There are teachers who aren’t mindful of that. It’s instinctive; you either have it or you don’t, but if you don’t, you better make it your business to figure it out. The relationships are at the heart of being an effective teacher. Ultimately, your kids are going to show growth if you establish that relationship with them because they’re going to work for you, and that work leads to growth. There may be a few that it doesn’t happen for, but in my years of experience, I’ve watched kids soar once they know you’re on their side and you’re on their team.

Working with other teachers that I respect and value, and being part of the decision making for my building and district inspires my professional growth. Staying connected to the teachers above you and below you and feeling like we have some skin in the game because our opinions are taken into consideration. That is what inspires teachers. And then sprinkle in some coaches who bring you new ideas or offer book studies or classes. The solutions are not that far out of our reach, but the people who are making the decisions don’t get it. I just think that there needs to be more local teacher decision makers. If there was some kind of a council of teachers where decisions were made, and problems were solved, that would save my profession.

Lorelei
I’m the youngest of three. My mom and dad are still married, which is sometimes a shocking thing. I went to like a very small rural school here in Ohio surrounded by cornfields. Teaching [in Richardson] is much different than where I grew up. I was in girl scouts and I have the highest award in girl scouting. Later, my mom would do trainings for cub scouts, and I would go and be her right hand person at the trainings. I also took dance lessons, band, I was in band, and I was a cheerleader.

As a child, I was a perfectionist. Everything at school had to be A’s, everything on my desk had to be perfect. I think the main reason that I was like that is because I wanted the attention. Being the youngest, I never got any attention and nobody was really impressed when I brought home all A’s. I really loved going to school. I loved being with my friends and learning. Most of my teachers were really awesome, and they really cared about us, and they were here to teach us. One teacher that sticks out is my third grade teacher. She’s the reason I decided I wanted to be a teacher. She would read to us, and she gave us one-on-one attention. She was organized and she would do creative things.

I got my teaching degree in Ohio and then ended up [starting my teaching career] in Arizona. It was a rural district close to the Mexican border, so we had some students who snuck across [the border] every morning to come to school. I taught math for three years in seventh grade and then two years in eighth grade. When we moved back [to Ohio], I got the job here in [Richardson] right away.

This is my eighth year as a teacher; five years in Arizona and then three here in [Richardson]. I remember my first evaluation in Arizona being nerve-wracking. I got very positive feedback from the principal. It was a good thing; he gave me some tips and
some things to change because there were so many behavior issues. He said that overall my teaching was great, [and that I] just needed to work on the management issue. I also had a mentor teacher in that district that really helped me. She was a total and complete math guru. She really taught me the common core before it was really big or anything. She taught me the connections [in math] and gave me hands-on examples. That really made my evaluations better because she was helping me be a better teacher. She would just pop in at times and she’d say, “Hey what are we working on now? What do you need? Here’s what I’m doing…” She had a lot of deeper knowledge. This mentorship totally impacted my practice that first year.

During our planning period [in Arizona], we would go observe other teachers in our building, and we would use that to draw ideas from. A twenty-year veteran would walk into my class and say, “I learned something from you.” I think that openness that the district had being in each other’s classrooms and learning from each other was really a positive experience overall. [Whenever observations were done, [the feedback] was always positive. If we had to leave criticism for the teacher [after the observation], I don’t think it would have gone over well. I think that’s why everybody was scared to begin with; they felt like it wasn’t their place because they weren’t an evaluator.

I think teaching is the most important job in the world because, if you think about it, everybody is a teacher. Everybody has the capability to learn; not everybody’s going to learn at the same rate and not everybody’s going to be plugged into learning or want to learn, but everybody has the ability to do it. We just have to be creative on how that happens. Good teaching is trying to reach everybody the best that you can. And it may not look pretty at times, and it may not be completely possible at times because of all the
other things on our plate, but it’s at least making that effort to try to get to everybody. Any time that you see the kids light up or they say, “Oh I’ve got it,” that makes me feel [effective as a teacher.] And sometimes I’m like, “Yay, let’s do the happy dance; we finally got you figured it out; we got to you.”

I feel like [educators are] the heel of society right now. Everybody has this negative view of teachers. I feel like we are just beat down constantly by everybody else, and there are very few parents who are very supportive of teachers anymore. It’s like, “Why is my son in trouble; what did you do wrong?” It makes it feel like our job’s impossible, really, no matter what I do it’s not going to be good enough and then you add in the test scores, and the child who refuses to engage in school, or the child that’s absent for forty days. I’m getting graded on that? They missed half the instruction. You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make them drink. You can take a kid to school but you can’t make them learn.

There’s days I’ll just cry after school like, “What’s the point? Because I’m never going to succeed.” I have my cry and I get over it and I try to re-focus on something else that I can do better. But it’s terrible that the three years I’ve been here I think I’ve said each year [that it will be] my last year teaching. Because I just feel like I’m beat down constantly. And all the good things that I do are negated by test scores.

I remember hearing about test scores being part of our evaluation in Arizona, but, at the time, I thought it was no big deal because I have really good success with the kids, but I’m finding that that’s not the case here [in Ohio]. I had no professional development for OTES before it started. At my first pre-conference, I had no idea what to take in [to meet with my evaluator]. They were sending out forms that are sixteen pages long and I
was like, “Seriously? I have to fill this thing out before a preconference and then I still have to plan the lesson?” The rubric is way too detailed for what we’re doing.

I keep getting rated as skilled [in the observation portion of OTES]. And I got pushed down to least effective due to my growth measure. The next year, I got moved to sixth grade, but I had to use value-added from the previous year. So I had two years with the same group of kids, which meant I was automatically least effective again. I have trouble keeping back tears because it feels like I’m such a freaking loser. I feel so stressed about the [the growth measure] that I don’t have time to look at the observation [side of the] rubric. I don’t think I understand any of the process; it just doesn’t seem fair to me.

Going to my first pre-conference, I was very unsure of what was going to happen. It was very confusing. I think that my administrator wasn’t even sure of what was going on so how can [teachers] be sure what’s going on? There were lots and lots of questions. I don’t feel like I shared my evidence during the pre-conference. I prepared [for the observation] the way I normally prepare for any other day. I don’t put on a horse and pony show. I am a teacher; if you’re going come and observe, you’re going to see me teach. I’m not one of those who does anything special other than prepare like I normally do. I didn’t know what to expect for the post-conference either, so I just went. I just remember a total sense in the overall process of complete and total confusion and disconnect. Also, it was my understanding that I was supposed to have at least two walkthroughs, but I only got one. I think [the teacher’s union] started a grievance process because of this but I don’t think it was ever finished.
I always had the highest scores, other than my mentor teacher, in Arizona, so my [low student growth measures] were very upsetting. I didn’t really feel like I clicked with anybody in the building to talk to them about it. I’ve never felt very supported here. This is my first year where I’ve actually felt like I’ve had support. I actually have a coach working with me a little bit closer and more one-on-one. For my second year, I ended up with a position in the building, but at a different grade level, so I completely changed who I was working with basically. I’m going from all the fifth grade teachers now to sixth grade teachers and have to completely learn a new set of colleagues.

I don’t feel like the OTES cycle is even set up for true feedback on what you can do to improve. It’s too convoluted and too complicated. And my growth measures [for my second year] did not at all reflect my efforts in the classroom for the current year because I had to use the same data from the previous year. I’m doing different things because I’m in a different grade level and I’m learning a new curriculum so it wasn’t even reflective at all of what I was doing as a teacher that year. At the end of the second year, we had to sit down again and do the improvement plan again. It was kind of a continuation of the previous year’s improvement plan. It’s just not fair to who I am as a teacher. It just isn’t. I work my tail end off; I do lots and lots of things to help the kids learn. I’m constantly working, which sucks for my personal life. I’m constantly trying to figure out new things and better things and how to manage [my classroom] better and it’s just not being reflected in the test score that is just one day in a child’s life.

I believe you have to have long-range data to really have true data. I’m not going to have true data for years; this one year little snippet of time isn’t true data. There are so many different variables to it. And each group of kids is so completely different than the
previous one. There’s also so much change going on because the principal just keeps moving people, so I haven’t worked with the same two people yet, and I probably won’t get to work with the same two people next year either because [my principal] moves people around all the time.

I think it would be very helpful to have a mentor teacher here [like I did in Arizona]. There was somebody on the math team last year in my building that would have been a perfect mentor teacher. But he was dumped into another building this year. We have lots of new staff members each year. The [last three years] have been very tumultuous for me. And every year I’ve said I think this might be my last year teaching. This OTES is killing me. It's taking all the joy out of teaching.

Because of the situation I’m in with those test scores, I feel like a complete and total loser most of the time and it’s like I’m fighting this battle that is impossible to win. Emotionally, I’m an absolute wreck and I’ve actually considered leaving the teaching profession every year [since] I’ve been back here in Ohio. I even said something to my husband the other night about it. I said, “I think it’s time.” This is my eighth year, and it just keeps getting worse. I keep getting more work piled on me. I don’t know, it’s just like we have to be superhuman and I’m not superhuman.

It takes a toll on my health because I don’t even have time to do the house cleaning, let alone exercise or eat well. If I can’t do it in thirty minutes it isn’t getting done. You don’t go to sleep until late because you are up doing stuff. Then you wake up in the middle of the night, and you’re like, “Oh I have to do this and I have to do that, and this kid’s been driving me crazy; what am I going to do to help with that situation?” It
[feels like] millions of pounds of pressure just pushing down on you. I am surprised I haven’t completely broken yet. I really am.

I feel like the more that the state and the country put the microscope on teachers, the more the parents do it and then they expect more out of us too. They just keep piling more and more, and it’s like, “What do you expect from me?” I only have twenty-four hours in my day. I have eighty-two students, but I need to email you and call you, every time your child steps out of line, or every time they miss an assignment? I don’t know how they expect us to keep going like this. Can’t they help us out here and realize that it’s a team effort? I can’t do it all.

I feel like the goal [of evaluation] is supposed to be to [determine] whether educators are doing the job that they were hired to do. However I think the set up is, “Prove you’re not a crappy teacher.” It’s so much on us that that I don’t feel like it’s doing what they need it to do. OTES is not truly holding us accountable, it’s more of a gotcha. It’s not weeding out the people that need to be weeded out, it’s actually making it so the people who are the most passionate and the most caring are the ones that are leaving the profession.

I don’t have an answer for how to [improve evaluation]. I think self-evaluation needs to be part of it; most of your really good teachers are very reflective of what they do in the classroom. Evaluation needs to be more free flowing and relevant to the teacher because everybody’s different. I’ve heard that eventually the district is going to be basing my job on whether I do well on the evaluation or not. That means I won’t have a job because my test scores are still not where they need to be, and it's not like I’m not working toward it. This shows that [the evaluation process] is broken. If you’re working
towards something, it takes time. It takes data over years, not in a short amount of time to truly show that you’re growing. It’s not fair to anybody to base our job, our pay, anything, on what somebody else does. You know, I can stand on my head to try to get them to learn, but if they’re not going to go in and take it seriously there’s nothing I can do about that.

I don’t know that [OTES has] impacted my actual teaching practices, but fear does exist in the process, especially when you tie it to whether I’m going to have a job next year or not. It feels like, “What show can I put on today even though I don’t believe in putting on a show?” I don’t feel like that’s the right thing to do but if I don’t, will I have a job next year? I feel like an effective teacher is somebody that goes in, teaches the curriculum they’re supposed to teach, and helps the kids learn it. [An effective teacher] walks them through things, changes things up, gets the kids involved, and treats them with dignity and respect. [Teachers] need to have passion for their subject and understanding of their subject. They have to want to help kids, and they have to have the belief that kids can learn and that they are capable of learning.

I feel like I become a more effective teacher when I am able to talk with other teachers, observe other teachers, and see what they’re doing differently than what I’m doing. I can see what really works in their classrooms, and I can tweak that to make it work in mine. My mentor teacher made the biggest difference of all. She helped me understand how the district ran, but then she took it further. We ended up sharing ideas and it became a friendship and partners in the teaching of our students. In that first year, [we were able to collaborate] at least once a week; sometimes more if I was having a rough patch. And then, as I got more confident, it became a little less often but that’s
because she was so good at building my confidence and teaching me to begin with. She was willing to try new things and she was just really open. She was like, “Okay, so you screwed up - big deal. Let’s see what can we learn from that and move on from there.”

Marie

I grew up here in [Richardson]. I had a happy upbringing; I was silly and, playful outgoing, and very girly. I have a brother and a sister. I was the middle child and I was always the peacekeeper. I loved school; my brother and I would play school all the time. I just remember being able to be challenged and being able to be creative and imaginative in school. I always thought of my teachers as being basically like moms. They were always very caring and very nurturing.

During high school, I remember one science teacher in particular who I really cared about. She was always willing to be helpful, and she was non-judgmental and just open to me talking to her about whatever. I felt like she was approachable, and seeing her now, we still have great conversations. She was also a coach for me too in high school. Even when you’re young, you can tell when somebody is invested in you, or just cares to know what’s going on in your life. I was always somebody who felt like I had to do my absolute best. I always wanted to make my teachers happy, so I would get anxiety about testing, but I was always a good test-taker from the results that I saw, and I always got positive feedback.

I was a dancer, and in high school, I taught ballet for 3 to 5 year olds. I absolutely loved it. It was just such a fun experience. My mom was always very supportive of my decision to become a teacher. My teachers and my principal were supportive and they said it was a really good choice that I was making for myself. I feel like I got a lot of
positive reassurance in making the decision to teach. Overall, I would say that everybody’s been supportive, especially because my best friends in college, except for one, are all teachers.

I graduated high school in 2006. I went on to college, where I joined a sorority and that is where I made my lifelong friends; my five best friends, and I also met my husband there. While I was there, I actually wanted to study early childhood education, but our professors told us that we’d probably never find jobs and that we should probably consider a different education route. They had also told us that they were going to make the program selective, so only a number of people would be able to get in, which they didn’t end up doing. So I went ahead and changed my major to middle childhood, and I was reluctant to do that only because I wanted to teach all subjects and I’ve always enjoyed younger kids.

Ultimately, my goal was to be back in [Richardson] because I had such a great experience growing up going to these schools. I ended up graduating in 2010, and I couldn’t find a job for two and a half years, so I had all kinds of odd jobs. I worked at preschools and at daycares. I finally got a full time job at a charter school, and I thought, “You know what? A job is a job, and, I’m just going to be happy and grateful to be here. I’m going to do the best I can.” Well, it was a lot to handle. The experience really put a bad taste in my mouth for charter schools in general. There were only three total special education teachers in that building, and it was a K-8 building. The majority of students were lower performing, if they were not already on an IEP. And, of course, there was no inclusion. The pull out time that they had was a joke. I also had three emotionally
disturbed students in my class who didn’t receive any services. And that was so hard to deal with.

There was a lack of support from what was supposed to be the administration. Our principal was twenty-eight years old and he didn’t have any experience working in charter schools or with kids with behavioral needs. When I did send students to see him, I’d go down there and they’d be sitting at his desk with him or sitting on his desk and just being all chummy. So, eventually, they wanted to go see the principal. I was the sole disciplinarian, and most of the students were fine, but because of the chaos that was going on in the room, it was crazy. They also didn’t have a recess at ten and eleven years old. The school day was an extended school day, and everybody was miserable.

I did have some great colleagues. They were just very passionate about trying to help and trying to teach these kids the best that they could. I learned a lot from them about discipline. I really appreciated the bond that I made with my co-workers by dealing with difficult situations together because we were all in the same boat. They were all very supportive too and that camaraderie, and that family feeling was wonderful. I stayed until March, when I was offered a job at Richardson for a pilot program in Junior High. The next year I was at a middle school in Richardson, but enrollment dropped so I was transferred to my current middle school.

My experience with evaluation at the charter school was very bizarre. The evaluation did not impact [my practice] at all. I can barely remember it. We were using OTES and we had people who would come in to observe us who were considered administrators for the franchise, but I don’t know if they were ever teachers. I don’t think they ever held pre-conferences. I do remember that we had a post-conference, but I don’t
think we ever talked about my rating in the post-conference. The evaluator sent me a
book and I ended up not reading it. I was just too frazzled at the time. I think it was
about understanding kids who have behavioral issues and why they have those issues. I
appreciated her gesture; I think she was trying to be helpful. A year later, she sent me a
message on facebook and told me she ended up moving out of state. She’s never
working for a charter school again, and she’s happier than ever.

Teaching is about nurturing [students] and facilitating learning in an environment
where students feel accepted and they feel like you want them to be there and that you are
passionate about the subject area. When I teach something that I don’t like, I’m pretty
sure it’s obvious to the students. I also try to make connections with my students that
don’t necessarily relate to content every single day. I ask them about their families and
try to get them excited about a specific subject and motivated to continue to learn. And
not necessarily to just get them to be motivated to do well on a test, but just to get them to
be motivated to want to continue to learn about something. I think that good teaching
facilitates that mindset of continuing to grow your knowledge. It’s hard for some
students to have that intrinsic motivation to learn about other subjects that they may not
have heard of before. I feel like that’s your job as a teacher, to open their mind to new
ideas, to new subject areas, to new content, and to new ways of thinking.

I remember that [when I started at Richardson], there was some morning
professional development sessions where we talked about OTES, but that was about it as
far as training goes. I was very confused about the whole thing. They talked about
value-added, but they didn’t really talk about how to prepare for OTES. I was honestly
so confused as to what they were talking about with value-added because I had never
been measured or evaluated [in that way] before. The student growth measures change every year, so I don’t really get it. And I feel like such a dingbat. I remember that for growth measures the first year, we had to choose two classes, even though I taught four classes at the time, that I wanted to get evaluated on. So I chose two, and then I heard from other people, “Oh, you shouldn’t have chosen that one class because there’s not as many students in there. So that’s going to affect your scores negatively.” That didn’t make sense. And I would say that it is not a fair way to evaluate teachers.

I’m also still confused with the observation cycles, and I’m confused with the data measures for OTES. I feel like I’m a very analytical person when it comes to looking at numbers and actually doing data collection and using it as part of some kind of evaluation and I want to know exactly the reasoning is behind specific data collection. I’m also confused with the observation [portion of OTES]. For example, last year, my rating was accomplished but it doesn’t matter because I am a resident educator. I can’t be exempt from the evaluation process like other teachers are. I feel like the resident educator is our evaluation, and then on top of that, we’re doing this OTES evaluation. [OTES and resident educator] are really similar; I feel like I’m doing double the work. Why can’t there be some kind of cohesive connection between the two, because I’m virtually doing double the work?

For my first OTES observation at Richardson, we were told at the beginning of the year to submit our professional goals, and I asked my mentor to help me with them. I also asked my mentor what to bring to preconference because she had already had her preconference. She said, “Oh, I don’t know. I guess it’s no big deal. Just bring a brief lesson plan of what you’re going to do and you should be good to go.” So that’s what I
did, and, when I went in there, my principal at the time said, “Oh, well you were supposed to bring this, this, and this.” I felt very caught off guard because if I would have known that I needed to have so many pieces of evidence, I would have just brought them with me. I redid my first pre-conference because I was so confused with it; I felt so stupid. It was my first year there and I had worked so hard to be in this district; I felt like an idiot.

During the first observation, I was shaking the whole time. I like to impress people, and I like to do a good job. I like to have things perfect and that’s why I got so upset and just flustered when I wasn’t prepared. I think OTES is subjective. For example, my observation this year was my literature circles, and my feedback was, “Well, you need to use more technology.” And I thought, “Well, I do use technology, just not in this lesson.” I think that’s where it gets really confusing. Am I supposed to be showcasing literally every single thing I do in my class, or do you want to see just this lesson? I don’t feel like I can depend on growth measures [to always reflect] my efforts in the classroom. It’s almost like I put in all the work for something and then I ask somebody else to actually perform the skill. I don’t know if I could say that my students’ scores reflect my effort. But their scores reflect the best that they could do.

The evaluation process this year is totally different this year compared to last year because my evaluators have two completely different personalities. They have different expectations. [The observations] are reflective of the evaluator and what they want to see. And that’s why I get a little bit discouraged by OTES because I want to be accomplished or skilled, so I’m going to do what that evaluator wants me to do. She wants to see certain things, so I’m going to take the time to prepare a lesson where I can
showcase all those things. OTES has been very stressful. The whole process is extremely stressful. I don’t see how it's helping. As of yet, it hasn’t necessarily helped me reflect except for the fact that, since I’ve had different evaluators, I can start to reflect on what does this person want me to do more of, what does this person want to see more of in the classroom?

I typically try to just get through something and sweep it under the rug and just let it go, but just talking about OTES has made me more aware of how much of an impact it really does have on me. It’s brought up a lot of anxious and stressful feelings talking about the whole process in general. I think I’ve become a little bit spiteful and almost a little bit resentful. I hate saying that because I don’t like to feel that way about any aspect of my job. I understand that there are stressors, but things that are stressors are angry parents, a classroom emergency, or a building emergency. Things like that are what should stick out as stressors; I don’t think it should be what is supposed to be a self-reflection for me. I don’t think that should have such a negative feeling associated with it. It feels like busy work. I spend a lot of hours preparing for OTES observation. I’d say it is about twenty hours for each OTES cycle.

The purpose of evaluation is to let [the educator know] what you can improve on and what you are doing well. It depends on the evaluator if OTES is able to fulfill that purpose. There are also so many expectations within that one lesson, that it makes it a very big goal to reach, and it makes it stressful because you’re trying to show all of your abilities in just one or two observations. And, because you get value-added at the end of the year, it doesn’t really tell me what I need to improve on during the year. I think I’m left at the end of every year thinking, “Oh thank goodness their scores were high
enough.” I don’t ever think, “What did I do this year that went really well?” We’re required to meet with students on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to check in and observe their work and constantly evaluate their work. So why wouldn’t we do the same for teacher evaluation? I mean it just makes the feedback so much more meaningful.

I have heard that OTES is going to be a measure of whether we get to keep our jobs and I’ve also heard, “Oh well, it doesn’t necessarily matter.” I really couldn’t tell you how the district uses [the results of OTES]. I honestly couldn’t tell you if we’ve ever been told, “Your OTES score in this district is used for this.” Maybe that’s why I’m so scared. I just do my absolute best because I don’t know what [my OTES results] are going to be used for or who is going to see this information in the future. And if it’s supposed to reflect me, as an educator, in this district, then I am always going to want to do my best.

There’s a picture of an ideal setting that certain evaluators want to see, and I know what my evaluator wants to see, so I’m going to make my room and my day flow like that. In an OTES observation, I am making it look like what my evaluator’s ideal classroom should look like. I am afraid to fail. I know my students see me not ever wanting to fail when the principal is in there. They know when it’s business time. I’m afraid because this is the only snapshot of my teaching that they’re seeing. I feel like if I fail that one lesson I am doomed.

I think it is [important for teachers] to have a sense of humor, empathy, and compassion. Also, [they should have] patience and the ability to go with the flow when they need to. I think the ability to communicate well with your coworkers and students is also important. The collaboration I have with my peers makes me a more effective
teacher, as does observing other teachers. I’ve had so many opportunities to observe
different teachers, which has been wonderful, I’ve had other teachers come in my room to
help me because I need somebody to tell me what to do sometimes. I like to see other
ideas, and I’ve found that that’s so much more valuable and enriching because it’s much
more candid. I love being able to see what other people are doing in their rooms. I love
to take a component from their practice and put it into my own. I feel like every single
person I’ve ever observed, I’ve taken something away from watching them. Probably
everything I do in my classroom, I got from everybody else. I love everybody else’s
ideas more than my own. I think that we should all have the opportunity to go observe
who we want. I feel more effective when I can implement new ideas that I see other
people doing, and I think that’s because it’s that mindset of, “Oh if they can do it, I can
do it.” There’s comfort in knowing that somebody else is already doing this and it’s
working for them.

[In regards to growth measures], it’s hard for me to stomach the fact that one test
is affecting my entire year’s worth of teaching. I like the idea of using different data
points. I get frustrated because, there are so many different factors, that go into a
student’s learning; how do you know you’re going to get it perfect with every single kid
and in every single aspect every time? And, it’s not only what you’re doing [at school],
but what do they go home to at night? What are they eating or not eating, what are they
thinking about when they’re taking these tests? It’s so questionable; there are so many
things that don’t make sense.

For an educator, growth is about pushing yourself to do different things in the
classroom that you [might not] typically do, and when you do push yourself, realizing
your mistakes and fixing them. That’s when I feel like I am making growth. I want to be able to try different things, so come into my classroom and see me on a more regular basis so you can get a feel for what I’m doing, as opposed to coming in one time and then trying to tell me what I need to do to grow. I think if teachers feel trusted to do their jobs, they will do it right.