FEEDBACK MATTERS: A STUDY OF THE LEARNING OF PRACTICING PRINCIPALS REGARDING FORMATIVE FEEDBACK FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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Positive learning experiences and achievement for students are significantly skewed to the knowledge, level of skill, and disposition of the classroom teacher (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rockoff, 2004). Ensuring teachers have professional learning experiences that develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions is critical. The aim of this research project was to bring to light the learning and practice of principals who engage in formative feedback for teacher instructional practice improvement. Additionally, deepening the understanding of how principals navigate obstacles in providing formative feedback for teacher instructional improvement.

The data for this qualitative project was collected through 13 semi-structured interviews and 3 follow-up interviews with principals identified as highly skilled in formative feedback practices. The purposive sample was selected by experienced principal supervisors in the three participating school districts.

Findings include insights into principals’ formal and informal learning through interconnectivity with practicing principals and principals’ learning through job-imbedded experiences. Additional findings include a description of the methods these principals implement to overcome challenges to providing formative feedback. This description includes insights into principals’ efforts to focus on teacher needs and prioritize time to be in classrooms. Other themes include a description of how a principals’ belief in the effectiveness of formative feedback influences their practice and how the utilization of an instructional framework influences principal practice.

Policies and practices that impact principal preparation programs, teacher evaluation systems, and support for practicing principals by school districts and state associations can be influenced and improved through consideration of the findings in this study. There is limited research on formative feedback practices. Most research does not differentiate between evaluative feedback and formative feedback. There is a need for research that focuses on teacher growth through a principal’s instructional leadership work with formative feedback. This study contributes to that. Additionally, a replicated version of the current study is recommended with sample participants being novice principals, perhaps those in their first 3 years of the principalship.