

The MiraVia Learning-focused Supervision Model: Rationale and Research

Developed by

Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, Co-directors MiraVia LLC

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Teacher evaluation processes are changing dramatically. The focus of the supervisory process is shifting from fulfilling contractual obligations to promoting opportunities for growth, from using data to prove to using data to improve, from evaluation as an event to evaluation as a process, and from teachers asking “what are my scores?” to asking “what are my goals?”

Much of the impetus for these initiatives stems from two related concepts: Teacher effectiveness links directly to student learning, and skillful supervision links directly to teacher effectiveness. High-quality evaluation systems require three essential components: 1) Clearly articulated and well understood standards with associated performance scales; 2) High levels of supervisor observation and analysis skills to support the framing of consistent evidence-based judgments; and 3) Both formative and summative conferences aimed at teacher development, not remediation.

Recent studies suggest that the first two components are insufficient for motivating teacher skill development and changes in practice without the third component in place. The supervisor’s confidence and competence in conducting learning-focused conferences makes the fundamental difference in teacher growth.

Thus, for supervisors, the ability to structure and facilitate powerful learning-focused conversations lies at the heart of both one-to-one and collective work with teachers. Standards provide the *what* to talk about; learning-focused supervision offers the *how*.

The MiraVia Learning-focused Supervision model is based on the following premises:

1. Quality teaching matters for successful student learning. All learners, especially the most vulnerable, need highly skilled teachers.
2. Effective teaching can be measured and described by clearly articulated standards, based on scales expressed in rubrics.

3. Skillful supervision, focused by data-based conferencing skills and timely feedback, motivates and sustains teacher learning and growth.

This paper offers support for these three premises drawn from the research-base and current educational literature. The key citations, brief syntheses, and salient quotes that follow support these premises.

Why Good Teaching Matters

Premise 1: Quality teaching matters for successful student learning. All learners, especially the most vulnerable, need highly skilled teachers.

Meeting the learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population requires an expanding repertoire of teaching and practical problem-solving skills. However, current research confirms that excellent teaching is thinly spread in this country and the neediest students are poorly served in many schools.

Education for Empowerment, Interview with Linda Darling-Hammond, Education Sector July 17, 2013 <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/news/articles/977>

In this interview, noted researcher Linda Darling Hammond makes the case for dramatically expanding the pool of highly qualified teachers to serve the growing needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

“The only way we can ensure that kids who have different backgrounds, learning styles, and experiences get an equal educational opportunity is if they have teachers who know how to teach content well and how to reach diverse learners. Without highly skilled teachers, you can’t get to excellence; and highly skilled teachers matter the most for the kids who have the fewest opportunities.” (p. 3)

“Teaching children who have particular learning needs or who may not speak English requires extraordinary skill, sophisticated skill. It’s not enough to be able to go in and be enthusiastic and love the kids. That’s great. But if you don’t know how to help kids learn, [kids] who come from so many different contexts and often don’t have someone reading to them at home or other outside-of school learning opportunities, having that highly skilled, committed teacher is the No.1 path to educational opportunity.” (p. 3)

Barber, M. & Mourshed, M. (2007). How the world’s best performing school systems come out on top. <http://mckinseysociety.com/how-the-worlds-best-performing-schools-come-out-on-top/>

Sanders, W., & Rivers, J. (1996). Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Value-Added Assessment Center.

This McKinsey & Company report was widely circulated when first released in 2007. It lays out important facts about the effects of good teaching and how various countries go

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about promoting that aim by citing seminal studies by Sanders and Rivers.

“The available evidence suggests that the main driver of the variation in student learning at school is the quality of the teachers. Ten years ago, seminal research [by Sanders & Rivers] based on data from Tennessee showed that if two average 8-year-olds were given different teachers – one of them a high performer, the other a low performer—their performance diverge by more than 50 percentile points within three years.” (p. 15)

“Another study, this time in Dallas, shows that the performance gap between students assigned three effective teachers in a row, and those assigned three ineffective teachers in a row, was 40 percentile points. In Boston, students placed with the top-performing math teachers made substantial gains, while students placed with the worst teachers regressed – their math got worse. (p. 15)

Hanushek, E. A. & Rivkin, S. G. (2006). Teacher Quality. *Handbook of the Economics of Education, Volume 2*. p. 1052-1078.

Hanushek, E.A. (1992). “The trade-off between child quantity and quality”. *Journal of Political Economy* V. 100 (1). 84–117.

These two studies use detailed statistical analysis to analyze the effects of high and low skill teaching on student outcomes. Results indicate profound differences in the outcomes produced by teachers with different levels of skill.

“The magnitude of estimated differences in teacher quality is impressive. [Research] shows that teachers near the top of the quality distribution can get an entire year’s worth of additional learning out of their students compared to those near the bottom. That is, a good teacher will get a gain of 1.5 grade level equivalents while a bad teacher will get 0.5 year for a single academic year.” (Hanushek & Rivkin p.106)

Hamre, B. K. & Pianta, R. C. (2005). Can instructional and emotional support in the first-grade classroom make a difference for children at risk of school failure? *Child Development* 76 (5). 949-67.

This study examines the ways in which students from disadvantaged backgrounds thrive in the classrooms of the best teachers and struggle in the classrooms of less skillful teachers.

“Participants were 910 children in a national prospective study. Children were identified as at risk at ages 5–6 years on the basis of demographic characteristics and the display of multiple functional (behavioral, attention, academic, social) problems reported by their kindergarten teachers. By the end of first grade, at-risk students placed in first-grade classrooms offering strong instructional and

emotional support had achievement scores and student–teacher relationships commensurate with their low-risk peers; at-risk students placed in less supportive classrooms had lower achievement and more conflict with teachers.” (p. 949)

Wright, S. P., Horn, S. P., & Sanders, W. L. (1997). Teacher and classroom context effects on student achievement: Implications for teacher evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 11 (1). 57-67.

This research underscores the essential point that teachers are the most important factor that influences student learning. It documents the wide variation in effectiveness among teachers. The authors argue that doing everything possible to improve the skillfulness of teachers is the single most important thing we can do to improve educational outcomes for students.

Their compelling conclusion:

“Effective teachers appear to be effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the level of heterogeneity in their classrooms.” (p. 63)

Why Standards Matter

Premise 2: Effective teaching can be measured and described by clearly articulated standards, based on scales expressed in rubrics.

Standards are the focal points for essential conversations about teaching practices and learning results. When supervisors and teachers operate with shared standards for what good teaching looks and sounds like, they establish common ground for meaningful explorations and purposeful goal setting. Standards not only structure expectations – they raise them.

Busch, L. (2011). *Standards: Recipes for reality*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

This book explores the application of standards to many aspects of human society. It makes the case that we live in a world governed by standards, one in which standards are the unseen force that holds things together and makes modern life possible. Standards serve as exemplars of quality practices and of accurate measures such as weights, lengths, and safety criteria.

“The soldiers who rallied round the king’s standard, the moral character of a member of Parliament, the superb qualities of a diamond, the average cholesterol level in the blood, the tolerance for others with different religious beliefs --- each of these things called a standard is a boundary object. They are places where persons with different histories, values, and desires are able to stabilize a set of practices that may well have different meanings to them.” (p. 25)

Danielson, C. (1996). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching*. Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

The Framework for Teaching 2013 edition free pdf.

<http://www.danielsongroup.org/userfiles/files/downloads/2013EvaluationInstrument.pdf>

Danielson's framework is foundational for the important work of understanding and describing the elements of effective instruction. The framework for teaching articulates validated standards that describe four domains of research-based professional practices: 1) Planning and Preparation, 2) The Classroom Environment, 3) Instruction, and 4) Professional Responsibilities. The power of any framework lies in its use; hence it is a powerful example of a description of standards that, when skillfully applied, influences observation, data collection, the assessing of outcomes and planning for action.

“A framework for professional practice is not unique to education. Indeed, other professions – medicine, accounting, and architecture among many others – have well-established definitions of expertise and procedures for certifying novice and advanced practitioners. Such procedures are the public's guarantee that the members of a profession hold themselves and their colleagues to the highest standards. Similarly, a framework of professional practice for teaching is useful not only to practicing educators but also to the larger community, because it conveys that educators, like other professionals, hold themselves to the highest standards.” (p. 2)

Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). *Getting teacher evaluation right: What really matters for effectiveness and improvement*, New York: Teachers College Press.

In this book, Darling Hammond makes the case for developing a cohesive system for teacher supervision and evaluation. Such a system needs to be driven by clear standards, accurate observations of practice, and timely feedback by supervisors to the teachers they support.

“Support for teacher learning and evaluation needs to be part of an integrated whole that promotes effectiveness during every stage of a teacher's career. Such a system must ensure that teacher evaluation is connected to – not isolated from preparation, and induction programs, daily professional practice, and productive instructional context. At the center of such a system are professional teaching standards that are linked to student learning standards, and assessment, thereby creating a seamless relationship between what teachers do in the classroom and how they are prepared and assessed.” (p. 7)

“Research has found that the frequent, skilled use of standards-based observation with feedback to the teacher is significantly related to student achievement gains, as the process helps teachers improve their practice and effectiveness.” (p. 53)

Reeves, D.B. (2002). *The leader's guide to standards: A blueprint for educational equity and excellence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This volume makes the case for both the need for clearly articulated and objective standards and also for the need for leaders to have the knowledge and skills for applying those standards to supervisory practices.

“The key to understanding the case for standards is to recognize that there are fundamentally only two ways to assess human achievement, whether in the classroom, the executive suite, the performance stage, or the boardroom. Irrespective of the context, we can either compare the performance to other performances we have observed, or we can compare it to an objective standard.” (p. x)

Kane, T. J., Taylor, E. S., Tyler, J. H. and Wooten, A. L. (2011). Evaluating teacher effectiveness. *Education Next*, Summer.

Standards expressed in rubrics can accurately define teaching practice. When applied by trained observers, these scores become the basis for judgments about teacher performance and the launching points for teacher reflection and goal setting.

“We find that evaluations based on well-executed classroom observations do identify effective teachers and teaching practices. Teachers’ scores on the classroom observation components of Cincinnati’s evaluation system reliably predict the achievement gains made by their students in both math and reading. These findings support the idea that teacher evaluation systems need not be based on test scores alone in order to provide useful information about which teachers are most effective in raising student achievement.” (p. 56)

“Scoring individual practices allows for understanding of more fine-grained variations in skill among teachers with similar overall ratings.” (p. 60)

Why Learning-focused Supervision Matters

Premise 3: Skillful supervision, focused by data-based conferencing skills and timely feedback, motivates and sustains teacher learning and growth.

Observing and accurately assessing teaching performance is the foundation for meaningful conversations about a teachers practice. But without well-developed conferencing skills, all the time and effort put in to teacher observations has little value and little influence on teacher thinking, decision-making, and behavioral change. The emerging studies bear out the need for investing in supervisors’ abilities to shape learning-focused conversations with teachers in their schools.

City, E. A., Elmore, R. F., Fiarman, S. E., & Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

The authors of this volume make the case for the importance of teaching practices that are learner focused and the need for supervisors to continually strengthen the instructional core of their school's programs.

“There are only three ways to improve student learning at scale. The first is to increase the level of knowledge and skill that the teacher brings to the instructional process. The second is to increase the level and complexity of the content that students are asked to learn. And the third is to change the role of the student in the instructional process. That's it. If you are not doing one of these three things, you are not improving instruction and learning. Everything else is instrumental. That is, everything that's *not* in the instructional core can only affect student learning and performance by somehow influencing what goes on *inside* the core.” (p. 24)

“What about supervision, evaluation, and strong instructional leadership? Administrators' influence on the quality and effectiveness of classroom instruction is determined *not* by the leadership practices they manifest, but by the way those practices influence the knowledge and skill of teachers, the level of work in classrooms, and level of active learning of students.” (p. 24-25)

Sartain, et al. (2011). Rethinking teacher evaluation in Chicago: Lessons learned from classroom observations, principal and teacher conferences and district implementation. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.

This study looked at the full implementation of a standards-based model of teacher-supervision and evaluation in Chicago. While the majority of teachers expressed satisfaction and trust in the reliability and accuracy of the data, principals expressed a desire for greater skills in providing feedback to teachers in ways that support growth and learning

“Principals and teachers said that conferences were more reflective and objective than in the past and were focused on instructional practice and improvement. However, many principals lack the instructional coaching skills required to have deep discussions about teaching practice.” (p. 2)

Ebmeir, H. (2003, Winter). How supervision influences teacher efficacy and commitment: An investigation of a path model. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*. 18(2), 110-141.

Goddard, R., Hoy, W. & Hoy, A. (2000, Summer). Collective teacher efficacy: Its meaning, measure, and impact on student learning. *American Educational Research Journal*. 37(2), 479-507.

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. & Hoy, W. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research*. 68(2) 202-248.

These three research articles confirm that skillful forms of supervision influence teacher commitment and both personal and collective efficacy. Teacher efficacy is a measure of the degree to which educators believe that they can positively influence student performance. High degrees of both personal and collective teacher efficacy are present when schools “beat the odds” and produce student significant learning gains in challenging settings. Effective instructional leadership matters for both teacher growth and student learning. For supervisors, the ability to structure and facilitate learning-focused conversations lies at the heart of both one-on-one and collective work with teachers.

“Teachers' belief in the importance principals attached to the teachers' instructional activities seemed to be of great value in predicting teacher efficacy and, indirectly, teacher commitment. Teachers' satisfaction and trust in their peers also played an important and independent role in the development of teachers' commitment to teaching and their efficacy beliefs.” (Ebmier, p.1).

Gerald, C. (2012) Ensuring accurate feedback from observations. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

This study makes the case that supervisors must provide both objective, non-inferential data and have the skills for providing effective feedback to teachers based on the these data.

“Recent educational research suggests that objective feedback can be a powerful resource for improving teaching and learning in schools. A study by Eric Taylor and John Tyler found that when mid-career teachers participated in Cincinnati's Teacher Evaluation System, their students scored significantly better on state tests in following years. ‘One reason for such productivity in growth is that the feedback provided in the evaluation spurs employee investments in human capital development,’ the researchers concluded.” (p. 9)

Kluger, A. N., & DeNisi, A. (1996). The effects of feedback interventions on performance: A historical review, a meta-analysis, and a preliminary feedback intervention theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119 (2), 254-284.

This paper is the gold standard for research on the effects of feedback on performance. It supports the need for ongoing relationships between the practitioner and the feedback provider. Offering feedback is a delicate process requiring attention to the mesh of cognitive and affective factors that allow the receiver to take in and act upon the information being provided.

Feedback is most effective when it provides information on correct rather than incorrect responses and when it builds on changes from previous attempts. Productive feedback requires a sharing process that produces a perception of low threat to self-esteem,

presumably because low threat conditions support the receiver's ability to pay attention to the feedback. Internally, we organize goals and perceive related feedback in a hierarchical fashion. Our sense of self, our core identity, is at the top of the hierarchy. Individual skills are at the lower end of the continuum. We tend to resist or ignore feedback that threatens our inner sense of who we are as opposed to feedback that illuminates important details of what we are doing or producing.

This study suggests that there are five basic arguments related to effective feedback:

“(a) Behavior is regulated by comparisons of feedback to goals or standards, (b) goals or standards are organized hierarchically, (c) attention is limited and therefore only feedback-standards gaps that receive attention actively participate in behavior regulation, (d) attention is normally directed to a moderate level of hierarchy, and (e) feedback interventions change the locus of attention and therefore affect behavior.” (p. 259).

Hattie, J. & Yates, G.C.R. (2014). *Visible learning and the science of how we learn*. New York: Routledge.

This book expands on Hattie's 2008 Visible Learning findings by adding knowledge from the field of cognitive science to the earlier meta-analyses of the research on learning. In the chapter on feedback, they emphasize the importance and significant effects of well-constructed, appropriately timed and skillfully delivered feedback.

“Receiving feedback allows the learner to close a critical gap, specifically the gap between current status and a more desirable level of achievement. Feedback is not the same thing as reward or reinforcement, which are terms that refer to motivational factors. Instead, feedback refers to the process of securing information enabling change through adjustment or calibration of efforts in order to bring a person closer to a well-defined goal.” (p. 6)

To Learn More

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