

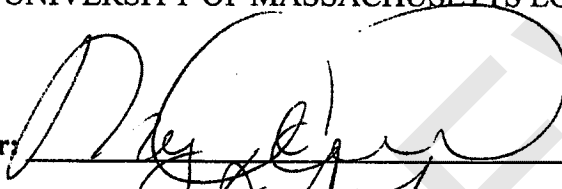
MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL-BASED SPEECH-LANGUAGE
PATHOLOGISTS' EXPERIENCES WITH AND PERCEPTIONS OF
EDUCATOR EVALUATION

BY

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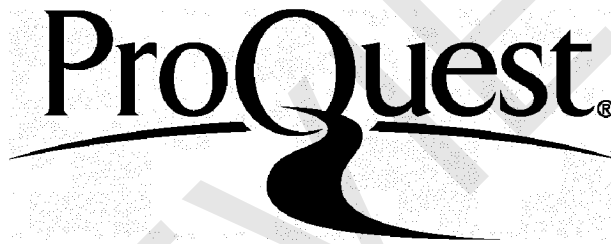
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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLING
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**Dissertation Supervisor: Jill Lohmeier, PhD
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Abstract

Educator evaluation is of significant interest and concern for all members of the national school community. School-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs), share these sentiments with their classroom counterparts. Frequently included in such evaluation systems, it is of concern to the SLP community that research documenting how school-based SLPs understand, navigate, and participate in such systems is limited. The goal of this study was to examine SLPs' experiences with educator evaluation within the context of the Massachusetts educator evaluation system.

Massachusetts school-based SLPs were surveyed to reveal to what extent they understand the Massachusetts educator evaluation system, how their performance evaluation is being conducted, the nature of feedback provided to them through the current system, and to what extent they believe that the educator evaluation system succeeds in identifying their professional development needs. Open-ended survey items were included to improve interpretation of quantitative data and provide insight into directions for future research.

An exploratory factor analysis revealed three strong factors judged to align with three of the four research questions. A fourth and final dependent variable, Understanding, was created to address the research question not readily answered through the factor analysis. One-way multivariate analysis of variance was completed including the three factors revealed through factor analysis. Results indicated that the factor Feedback Impact was significantly impacted by responses to the independent variable

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Primary Evaluator. A significant impact was also revealed between the factor Emotive Impact and independent variable School Community Type. Multiple regression was employed to analyze the dependent variable Understanding. Results indicated a significant relationship between Years Working as a School-based SLP as well as School Community Type and the dependent variable Understanding.

Recommendations for future research include further exploration into the evaluation of all specialized instructional support personnel (SISP). Limited information is available regarding implementation for them, with little to no information surrounding the outcomes, benefits, and professional impact. In addition, further investigation into the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) as an effective tool for educators across Massachusetts is warranted. This study identified inconsistencies across all facets of the MMSEE as implemented for school-based SLPs. This finding calls into question the fidelity of the system, district to district as well as role to role.

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The successful completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of so many different people. I would like to thank my fellow Leadership in Schooling students and the Leadership in Schooling faculty for sharing their wealth of knowledge and passion for education with me. I have been always able to count on whatever support I have needed, whether that was expertise, a critical eye, or a pep talk. My Chair, Dr. Jill Lohmeier, has been a voice of reason and reassurance throughout this process. Without her guidance this dissertation would never have been completed.

My family has been a source of strength and support that I could count on throughout this entire journey. I would like to thank my mother, Kathleen Corcoran, for never allowing me to make excuses and reminding me to never accept anything but my best. I would like to thank my brother, Matt Corcoran, for keeping me grounded and providing a sounding board for my frustrations. I would like to thank my aunt, Diane Fitzpatrick, for being an invaluable resource and a constant voice of support. I would like to thank my aunt, Mary Coleman, for always being there to allow me the time I needed to work, study, or go to class. Lastly, this dissertation could not have been possible without the love and support of my husband, Dave Barboza. Whether he was reading my work, fixing my computer, listening to me vent, or entertaining our daughter, he has always put my ambition and work first.

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In closing, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to two of the most important people in my life. First, my daughter Zsa Zsa. At not even three years old, she is already one of the smartest people I know. She is bright, energetic, and ambitious. I know that she will be able to do anything she sets her mind to and I hope that I will be able to inspire her to pursue her dreams no matter how challenging. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my late father, William "Bill" Corcoran. I know that I would not have pursued this degree had he not kept asking me, "So, what's next?" His vision for me exceeded my own at the time and without his motivation and support I would not have entered the program. I am sad because he will not be able to see me complete this degree in person, however I know that he is watching me. I only hope that he is as proud of me as I am proud to be his daughter.

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PREVIEW

Introduction

A renewed interest in educator evaluation has emerged across the nation. Public demands for improved student outcomes and increased accountability within the public education system have been answered through changes in regulations, policy, and funding at the national level. Such changes have resulted in a number of states taking central roles in the discussion surrounding educator evaluation policy and the development of educator evaluation systems. However, the development of such complex policy and systems is riddled with challenges. For those members of the education community who do not fit the classic definition of a teacher, or whose primary role lies outside of the classroom, such as speech-language pathologists (SLPs), the complexity greatly increases. Even though SLPs are frequently part of high stakes personnel decisions, it is not clear what impact these policies and evaluation systems have on their professional roles or careers (Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010; Tuytens & Devos, 2014).

Of the approximately 134,100 licensed SLPs employed in the United States (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2014a), almost half work in a school setting (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). Nationwide, SLPs have voiced concern about changes occurring in education policy surrounding school-based professional performance evaluation (ASHA, 2014b). While the current Massachusetts educator evaluation model represents a significant change from prior educator evaluation systems that fell short of their promise to assure and support educator quality (Holdheide

et al., 2010; Weisberg et al., 2009), it is unclear to what extent this promise is fulfilled for school-based SLPs. The aim of this research study is to detail Massachusetts school-based SLPs' understanding of and experience with the current evaluation system, as well as to determine to what extent their professional practice is both impacted by and supported through participation in the Massachusetts educator evaluation system.

Problem Background

For over 30 years, accountability and quality of assurance have been recurring themes in the national discussion surrounding public education reform. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) advocated for reforms like lengthening the school year and increasing academic courses. During the 1990s, the focus shifted toward school improvement and increasing academic rigor, as well as emphasis on identifying and defining "what is a quality educator." The 2002 reauthorization of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), renamed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), sought to address the long-standing problem of achievement gaps between groups of students through public accountability at the school, district, and state levels (ESEA, 2001; Holdheide et al., 2010; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 1997). Most recently, Race to the Top, a competitive grant program funded by the U.S. Department of Education, awarded funding to 19 states. These states submitted comprehensive plans focused on four key areas: development of rigorous standards and improved assessments, building and using improved data systems to track student progress, multi-measure performance-based evaluations for all members of the school community, and turning around the lowest-performing schools through effective use of resources and rigorous interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Race to the

Top has placed teacher effectiveness at the heart of current education reform, resulting in renewed emphasis on effective educator evaluation (Holdheide et al., 2010).

Although policy promoting teacher evaluation is intended to ensure students' access to high quality instruction, there is little evidence to suggest that educator evaluation is the path to achieving this (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Truly effective evaluation systems are designed not only to measure educator effectiveness, but to develop and support it as well. Such systems clearly and accurately identify educator strengths and weaknesses, in addition to guiding the educator's professional growth and supporting the use of best professional practices (Danielson, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Goe, Hayes & Holdheide, 2014; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992). Unless accountability measures are embedded in daily professional practice, developed alongside processes to improve educator quality and practice, and rooted in meaningful feedback and professional development (PD), it is unlikely that the goal of improved student outcomes will be achieved (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

Limited research addresses evaluation as it relates to school-based SLPs, specialized instructional support personnel (SISPs), and other caseload educators. This lack of research likely reflects the challenges associated with measuring the effectiveness of such a varied group of professionals (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014), and has resulted in inadequate knowledge, guidance, and support for states and districts as they navigate the complexities of designing and implementing effective evaluation systems that include these unique educators (Jones & Brownell, 2014).

The professional performance evaluation of school-based SLPs reflects the values of the profession and makes important statements about “professional competencies, characteristics, and practices” (Morrison, 2013, p. 314). It is important that the “intelligence, judgment and experience” of SLPs, as integral members of the educational community, are included in the discussion about systems used to evaluate their practice (Giroux, 1985, p. 376).

In response to the rising concern of the speech-language community across the nation, and the increasingly high stakes attached, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has developed the Performance Assessment of Contributions and Effectiveness of Speech-Language Pathologists (PACE). Through the development of this tool, ASHA has indicated that educator evaluation systems may not adequately reflect the role, responsibilities, performance, and contributions of school-based SLPs. ASHA has encouraged all state speech-language associations, as well as individual SLPs, to become actively involved in advocating that PACE be adopted as their local or state performance evaluation tool, as well as for the use of PACE in their district's or state's development of an accountability system. At this time there is no information regarding how many states or districts implement PACE, or its success where it has been adopted.

Given the limited research base exploring the evaluation of SLPs and other caseload educators it is critical that additional research is conducted to not only validate measures and processes, but to assess what impact such measures and processes have on school-based SLP practice (Goe et al., 2014). The current implementation of the Massachusetts evaluation system, designed as multi-faceted system with a focus on PD,

offers a unique opportunity to explore to what extent such a system is applicable to specialized roles such as SLPs. This study explored how Massachusetts school-based SLPs experience this evaluation system as well as the impact participation in the evaluation system has on their clinical practice.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was built upon two primary areas of literature: trends in evaluation of specialized personnel in schools and the primary components of educator evaluation. Evaluation of specialized personnel was studied in order to best reflect to what extent current trends in educator evaluation are meeting the needs of educator communities such as school-based SLPs. Quality assurance, professional development, performance improvement, and feedback were identified as the primary components of professional performance evaluation across disciplines. Investigation of how these components manifested for school-based SLPs indicated to what extent educator evaluation is an accurate reflection and measurement of their roles and responsibilities. The Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) was used as the context for this study.

Evaluation of specialized personnel. School-based SLPs are just one of the many groups of specialized personnel working within our nation's schools. SLPs have the education, professional training, and expertise to work with students across the age spectrum who experience difficulties within the domains of speech and language.

Effective evaluation systems recognize and account for the differences that exist between educator roles. Well-designed systems have mechanisms in place to provide struggling educators with the support they need to best meet the needs of their students as well as to

identify and celebrate those exceptional educators (Weisberg et al., 2009). Truly effective systems also have mechanisms in place to address the complicated issues related to the evaluation of school-based SLPs and other SISP.

Evaluating SISP can be a significant challenge. These professionals work under a variety of conditions, fill unique roles and responsibilities, and serve a diverse student population with equally diverse needs (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). A 2010 nationwide study, conducted by The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality surveyed more than 1,100 state and district special education directors in order to evaluate and improve the evaluation of special education teachers and English language learner (ELL) specialists (Holdheide et al., 2010). Thirty-six state-level special education directors and 1,107 district level administrators participated in the web-based survey. Results revealed that while the same evaluation procedures and instruments tend to be in place for all members of a school community, many administrators judge these to be inappropriate or ineffective measures of special education and ELL specialists' effectiveness (Holdheide et al., 2010). An additional recurring concern regarding SISP evaluation is whether evaluators can effectively recognize specialized instructional or therapy practices; if not, the precision and depth of the evaluation is limited (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014).

Four components of educator evaluation. In 2007, ASHA published an official statement regarding the professional performance evaluation of school-based SLPs. This document identifies four inter-connecting core components of evaluation. These core components work in a reinforcing fashion to monitor, facilitate, support, and strengthen professional practice.

Quality assurance. Quality is paramount to any and all evaluation systems. “The traditional, industrial definition states that quality is an essential measurable aspect of a product or service and is achieved when expectations or requirements are met” (Koslowski, 2006, p. 278). In the context of educator evaluation, quality assurance entails monitoring the competency of the teaching staff and ensuring the quality of education being offered to our students (Danielson, 2001).

Performance improvement. The anticipated outcome of appropriate and responsive educator evaluation systems and PD programs is improved performance among participating educators (Danielson, 2001). It can be assumed that through improved educator practice, student outcomes will likewise improve.

Professional development. In order to facilitate high quality assurance, mechanisms must be in place to support educators. These structures often take the form of PD. Access to appropriate training and resources is important to educator improvement and quality assurance (Kimball, 2002).

Feedback. The historic cornerstone of educator evaluation, feedback continues to be a primary component of successful and effective systems. The provision of meaningful, thoughtful, responsive feedback is often the catalyst to the identification of PD needs and therefore performance improvement (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

Research Questions

This study explored Massachusetts school-based SLPs' understanding of and experience with the MMSEE. This included detailing to what extent these SLPs' practice

was impacted by their participation in the educator evaluation system. Four research questions were the basis for this investigation.

Question 1: What is the Massachusetts school-based SLPs' understanding of the current educator evaluation system? At the initiation of this investigation, all members of the Massachusetts educator community should have been fully participating in the 5-step educator evaluation process. Though not required, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides training workshop modules to help all districts prepare their staff for participation the evaluation process. Developed in partnership with Massachusetts educators, these modules include an orientation followed by four sessions covering rubric, self-assessment, professional goal development, and evidence collection (Massachusetts DESE, 2014a). In their investigation of the implementation of the MMSEE over the 2013-2014 school year, SRI (Comstock, Humphrey & Hsieh, 2014) reported that less than half of school staff indicated a thorough understanding of the five-step cycle. This finding supported further investigation into educator understanding of the evaluation system.

Question 2: How is the performance evaluation of Massachusetts school-based SLPs being conducted? In order to understand how Massachusetts school-based SLPs experience the evaluation system, one must understand how the system is implemented for this population across the state in individual districts and schools. The goal of the current evaluation system is to provide a standardized accountability format (Massachusetts DESE, 2012a); therefore, any variability in implementation must be revealed. Issues including frequency and number of observations, variety of observed roles and responsibilities, and observation settings are of significant concern to school-

based SLPs (Jones & Brownell, 2014; Morrison, 2013). An additional concern is to what extent the professional background of the evaluator affects the evaluation process (Holdheide et al., 2010).

Question 3: What is the nature of feedback provided to the school-based SLP through the evaluation system? Post-observational feedback is vital to the Massachusetts educator evaluation system (Massachusetts DESE, 2014b). The SLPs' perception of its credibility likely increases the chance that they will accept and apply the feedback provided. Reliable, timely, and relevant feedback is a powerful tool for facilitating educator growth and the improvement of educator practice (Kimball, 2002).

Question 4: In what ways, if any, does the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation identify the professional development needs of school-based SLPs? PD is central to the Massachusetts 5-step evaluation cycle. The Massachusetts DESE (2012a) promotes the evaluation system as a catalyst for effectively identifying and meeting the PD needs of educators, schools, and districts. School-based SLPs may present PD needs that are distinct from those of classroom educators.

Methodology

A web-based survey instrument, SurveyMonkey®, was used for the creation and administration of this survey. Survey data were collected over three weeks in the winter of 2016. The entire population of Massachusetts school-SLPs was invited to participate in the survey. The survey explored the issues of feedback, PD, and professional support. Demographic data were collected in order to identify any trends in educational or professional backgrounds as they may relate to SLPs' interaction and experience with the Massachusetts educator evaluation system. The final survey instrument is included in

Appendix A. Relationships among these elements were investigated through the use of non-experimental data analysis techniques available through the data analysis software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Study Implications

In light of the widespread concern regarding the direction that the evaluation of school-based SLPs is taking, the education community needs to develop a clearer understanding of the degree to which current trends align with the evaluation process recommended by the nation's leading professional association of SLPs. The recently redesigned Massachusetts educator evaluation system represents a significant change in the way educator evaluation is envisioned and carried out. During this time of transformation within the Massachusetts educator community, it is important to examine how these changes are being understood by all affected members. This may be of even greater importance to those members belonging to specialized populations and subsets of the community, such as SLPs.

Evaluations by individuals outside the field of speech-language pathology, as well as school-based SLP inclusion in educator evaluation systems, are major concerns within the SLP community (ASHA, 1993, 2007, 2014b). The results of such evaluations are used to make judgments about not only the individual SLP but also the entire SLP community. The Massachusetts DESE describes the current 5-step cycle as being designed with a focus on continuous educator improvement centered on professional growth and development (Massachusetts DESE, 2012a). SLPs should not only be affected by the accountability measures, but also able to reap the intended benefits of improved practice and increased professional support.

Information regarding the evaluation of school-based SLPs, SISPs, and other caseload educators is severely limited (Goe & Holdheide, 2011; Jones & Brownell, 2014; Rowden-Racette, 2012). This study added to the knowledge about this slowly emerging area of research. Due to the rising stakes involved in educator evaluation, it is important that this research be carried out in order to promote appropriate and effective evaluation of school-based SLPs nationwide. This study intended to provide the greater Massachusetts educator community with valuable information regarding the fidelity of the educator evaluation process for school-based SLPs, as well as give that community insight into how a distinct population of educators (SLPs) experiences this evaluation system. This information may in turn have implications for SISPs and other caseload educators. The greater SLP community will receive information about the extent to which participation in educator evaluation affects SLP practice. Members of the Massachusetts SLP community will gain insight into the appropriateness and effectiveness of this educator evaluation system as it relates to their unique role. It was anticipated that the findings of the study would either validate the current system by revealing an effective and meaningful process or provide a basis for advocating for improved and more appropriate measures.

Acronyms

- AAC: Augmentative and alternative communication
- AFTMA: American Federation of Teachers of Massachusetts
- ASHA: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- CCC: Certificate of Clinical Competence
- CMHs: Certification Maintenance Hours

- DESE: (Massachusetts) Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- DDM: District determined measure
- EBP: Evidence-based practice
- ELL: English language learner
- ESEA: Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act
- IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- IEP: Individualized Education Plan
- MMSEE: Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation
- MSHA: Massachusetts Speech, Language, and Hearing Association
- MTA: Massachusetts Teachers Association
- MTEL: Massachusetts Test of Education Licensure
- NCLB: No Child Left Behind
- PACE: Performance Assessment of Contributions and Effectiveness of Speech-Language Pathologists
- PD: Professional development
- RETELL Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners
- SISPs: Specialized instructional support personnel
- SLP: Speech-language pathologist
- SLPCF: Speech-Language Pathology Clinical Fellowship
- VAM: Value-added measure

Review of the Literature

Before investigating how Massachusetts school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) experience educator evaluation, one must have a foundational understanding of speech-language pathology as a professional field, including best practices for school-based SLPs and trends within the profession. This literature review provides this foundation and then builds on it by examining current research related to educator evaluation policy, including the evaluation of specialized instructional support personnel (SISPs) and, more specifically, school-based SLPs. It then describes the specifics of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE), followed by discussion of the four primary components of modern educator evaluation systems. This information was the foundation for the development and execution of this dissertation.

What is a Speech-language Pathologist?

A Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) is a highly-trained professional who is responsible for the identification, evaluation, and treatment of children and adults exhibiting deficits within the areas of speech, language, voice, cognition, and swallowing (American Speech-Language-Hearing [ASHA], 1993, 2000a; Rowden-Racette, 2012; Schraeder, 2007; Vicker, 2010). More than 85,000 SLPs nationwide work along with teachers, administration, paraprofessionals, parents, and other school professionals to deliver appropriate and effective services throughout the school year for students with such difficulties (Brandel & Loeb, 2011). A certified SLP holds the Certificate of Clinical