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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK IN THE SEMINARIES AND INSTITUTES OF RELIGION OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

by

Christopher B. Garner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Educational Leadership

Approved:

Michael K. Freeman, Ph.D. Major Professor	Susan A. Turner, Ph.D. Committee Member
Max L. Longhurst, Ph.D. Committee Member	Courtney D. Stewart, Ph.D. Committee Member
Brian Warnick, Ph.D. Committee Member	Mark R. McLellan, Ph.D. Vice President for Research and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2018

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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Exploration of the Current State of Observation and Feedback in the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

by

Christopher B. Garner, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2018

Major Professor: Michael K. Freeman, Ph.D.
Department: Teacher Education and Leadership

The Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints encourages area and faculty supervisors to regularly observe teachers and provide feedback, but have not provided clearly stated objectives or expectations for observation or feedback. S&I administrators and teachers were interviewed about their experiences with teacher observation in order to determine the purposes of observation and feedback, teacher opinions about current observation and feedback practices, and employee reactions to the possible use of a formal observation instrument.

Data from the interviews were analyzed using a phenomenological methodology, based initially on a framework made up of situational leadership theory, the clinical supervision approach to observation and feedback, and the fundamentals of gospel teaching and learning.

Findings indicate that the purposes of observation and feedback in S&I include

fulfilling the objective of S&I, improving instruction, and identifying problems in the classroom; teachers' experiences with observation and feedback were influenced primarily by their area and faculty supervisors and did not necessarily reflect administrative expectations for teacher observation and feedback; participants would like area and faculty supervisors to receive more and better training in observing teachers and providing feedback; participants reported the most positive experiences with observation and feedback when teachers had greater autonomy to drive the experience, when observations were frequent and formative, when area and faculty supervisors worked together collaboratively, and when feedback was delivered in a kind and sensitive way, limited to one or two suggestions for improvement based on widely accepted standards for teaching, and when feedback was delivered as part of a collaborative post-observation conference; teachers are more likely to apply feedback when they know supervisors will follow up with them; teachers' pedagogical ability, experience, and attitude affects the outcomes of observation and feedback, and may require supervisors to vary their approach; and teachers and administrators are open to the creation and use of an observation instrument as long as it is qualitative, adaptable, standards-based, and helps observers report on student experience as well as teacher performance.

(145 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Exploration of the Current State of Observation and Feedback in the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Christopher B. Garner

While the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints expect supervisors of teachers to observe teachers regularly and provide feedback, they have not provided those supervisors with adequate training materials, or explained how these supervisors are expected to accomplish this.

For this study, three administrators and three teachers were interviewed about their experiences with observation and feedback in S&I. Their responses provided clarification on the purposes of observation and feedback, revealed that a lack of supervisor training has resulted in teachers' experiences with observation and feedback being different from administrator's expectations in key ways, and identified some elements of observation and feedback that teachers and administrators agree are effective. Those elements include teachers' autonomy, collaboration between supervisors, frequent observations designed to help teachers improve (rather than to judge teachers' abilities), and providing feedback in a kind and constructive way, limiting suggestions for improve to one or two things that are based on principles for teaching that are widely-accepted throughout S&I. This study also reports how teachers and administrators might feel about the use of a standard observation form for teacher observation and feedback.

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I am grateful to the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for allowing me to conduct this research and for providing such excellent participants for this study. I'm grateful for the support and encouragement of my colleagues and supervisors who have motivated me through this process, especially Tom Valletta, Casey Olson, and Cam Packer.

I would also like to thank my parents, Brian and Ann Garner, whose encouragement got me started on this journey, and has helped me finish it. I am also grateful for their academic examples, as well as those of my uncle Dean, and my grandfather, David Garner. Seeing those examples, and knowing about their sacrifices for education has paved the way for me to begin and finish this degree.

My wonderful wife, Krista, has been my greatest supporter. Her sacrifices made this possible, and I never could have finished this without her unflagging encouragement. Her love, loyalty, friendship, and companionship, her example of dedication and diligence, and her patience with my lack of dedication and diligence have forever blessed my life, not just during the last 10 years of my higher education, but during the whole of our relationship, which I treasure dearly.

Finally, I thank God and His Son, Jesus Christ, who are responsible for everything

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Christopher B. Garner

CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT iii

PUBLIC ABSTRACT v

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vi

LIST OF FIGURES x

LIST OF DEFINITIONS xi

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Purpose of the Study 3
Research Questions 4
Framework 6
Limitations and Delimitations 17

II. LITERATURE REVIEW 19

Teacher Observation 19
Research on Teacher Observation in Seminaries and Institutes 28

III. METHODOLOGY 37

Phenomenology 38
Data Collection 40
Data Analysis 47
Trustworthiness 48
Contributions 51

IV. RESULTS 53

Participants 53
Themes 55
Textural Description 93
Structural Description 97
Essence of Observation and Feedback in Seminaries and Institutes 98

Page

V. DISCUSSION 100

Research Questions 100
Comparison of Findings with Theory and Research 109
Recommendations for Practice 116
Recommendations for Future Research 118
Conclusion 119

REFERENCES 121

APPENDICES 126

Appendix A: Informed Consent 127
Appendix B: Interview Protocols 130

CURRICULUM VITAE 133

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. The Situational Leadership II model illustrates approaches to teachers depending on teacher commitment and competence 8

2. Major developments in teacher observation, feedback, and determining standards for teaching in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion 29

3. Levels of administrative responsibility in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion 41

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Area directors are S&I supervisors that oversee a group of seminary and/or institute programs.

CES (Church Education System) is the umbrella organization to which S&I belongs. It also includes Church-owned universities and other schools.

Clinical supervision is an observation model that includes pre- and post-observation conferences between teacher and supervisor, that values teacher autonomy, and that sees supervisors as equals who are there to facilitate teachers' self-directed improvement.

Doctrinal mastery is an initiative of S&I designed to help students learn how to acquire spiritual knowledge and master the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ as well as passages in which that doctrine is taught. It was first used in S&I classrooms in 2016.

Formal teacher observation is teacher observation that is structured to adhere to specific objectives in which the supervisor usually uses a form to focus their observation on said objectives.

Formative evaluation in teacher observation is performed during the course of the school year with a goal of providing feedback to teachers for improvement.

Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning are the set of outcomes S&I has identified that will help teachers and students fulfill the Objective of S&I.

Observation instruments are standardized forms used by supervisors while observing teachers to focus their feedback on items germane to the school or educational system's objectives.

The Professional Growth and Accountability form is the form teachers fill out and update throughout a school year that includes their goals for self-improvement and plans for achieving the priorities of S&I.

S&I is the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion – a private primary and secondary religious educational system owned and operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Seminary is the religious education program for high-school-age youths administered by S&I.

Situational leadership theory posits that supervisors should vary their approach to supervision depending on individual differences in their employees.

SOAS (Student Opinions About Seminary) is a student evaluation of their seminary

teacher used as a summative instrument for student teachers in preservice, but also administered in classrooms of full-time teachers by some area directors. These student evaluations replaced the original student evaluations used in S&I, the Student's Evaluation of Seminary (SES).

Summative evaluation in teacher observation typically occurs toward the end of the year and its goal is to provide information to administrators to help them make decisions about teachers and classes.

*Teacher observation i*s the process by which teachers are observed by their supervisors, peers, or researchers as they teach.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a private school system whose stated objective is "to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven" (S&I, 2012, p. 1). S&I accomplishes this objective by teaching "students the gospel of Jesus Christ as found in the scriptures and words of the prophets" and by helping "students fulfill their role in the learning process" (S&I, 2012, pp. 5, 6).

The objectives and methods of teacher observation and feedback in S&I have varied through its history. Teacher observation and feedback in S&I began in the 1960s, initially as a way to determine merit-based pay. When S&I stopping using teacher observation to determine teacher salary, observations continued, but formal teacher evaluation was accomplished primarily through student evaluations of teachers. During the 1980s, in addition to student evaluations of teachers, S&I experimented with self-observation using video-taped classes as well as peer tutors whose major job was to observe teaching, provide feedback, and help teachers improve. In the early 1990s S&I formalized teacher observation and feedback, creating four observation instruments for supervisors to use. This program was not well received by teachers or supervisors. For the past 25 years, teacher observation in S&I has been informal.

Research shows that formal teacher observation and feedback are correlated with

teacher improvement (Nolan, Hawkes, & Francis, 1993; Nsibande & Garraway, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011; Wei & Pecheone, 2010; Wilson & Wineburg, 1993), that high scores on certain observation instruments are correlated with high student achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Howes et al., 2008; MacIsaac & Falconer, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, & Pianta, 2005; Sawada et al., 2002), and that observation tools can help administrators and supervisors identify needed areas of improvement (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008).

Regular teacher observation and feedback are encouraged in S&I. Seminary principals, institute directors, area directors, preservice trainers, coordinators, and even fellow teachers are encouraged to observed teaching and provide feedback. However, S&I does not specifically state the purposes of teacher observation, or suggest specific methods that observers are expected to use. The overall objective of S&I is clearly stated (as previously mentioned), and a list of outcomes that accomplish that objective (known as the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning) are clearly laid out and widely known in S&I. There is some direction in S&I training materials as to how teacher observation and feedback are to be done, but they do not specify the extent to which supervisors are expected to look for the overall objective of religious education or the fundamentals, or whether there are additional things observers are expected to look for. Also absent from S&I materials is direction for observers about whether their observations are to be more formative or summative, or whether different kinds of supervisors have different expectations for their observations. There is also not specific direction about how or to what extent a supervisor is expected to deliver feedback based on their observations, or whether giving feedback is to differ based on who is being

observed. S&I also does not utilize a formal teaching observation instrument, such as those used in school districts across the country. This lack of focus has lead observation of full-time teachers in S&I to be largely a formality in the past, often resulting in very little feedback to help teachers improve (Boren, 1984).

Observation instruments used throughout public school districts are based on objectives and on frameworks for teaching and learning that do not apply well to religious education. Any observation instrument used in S&I would have to be uniquely tailored to its objective and to what S&I has determined constitutes effective teaching. Such an observation instrument could be used to present feedback in a framework of teaching and learning agreed upon as effective by S&I teachers and administrators, a practice that Kimball (2002) found makes a teacher significantly more likely to apply the feedback they receive.

There is formal evaluation in S&I, but the formal aspects of that evaluation do not include observation. For formal evaluation, supervisors and teachers use a form called the Professional Growth and Accountability form. Teachers record their professional goals and report attendance and completion statistics on the form. Supervisors have three conversations per year with teachers about their performance using this form as an outline for discussion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify a set of objectives for teacher observation and feedback in S&I, to explore administrator expectations and faculty perceptions of teacher observation and feedback, and to discover whether the use of a formal

observation instrument in S&I could prove effective. This study uses qualitative methods (interviews with S&I teachers and supervisors) to determine these purposes.

Research Questions

Prospective teachers who wish to work for S&I are required to complete the seminary preservice program, which includes classes, a series of evaluations, and usually a full year of student teaching which includes frequent and thorough teacher observation and feedback. Observation and feedback in the S&I preservice program helps administrators decide which teachers to hire. As a result of the preservice program, nearly every teacher in S&I is familiar with regular and formal teacher observation and feedback. But all of that observation and feedback can nearly disappear after teachers are hired to teach full-time, depending on the observation practices of area directors, seminary principals, and institute directors. Materials provided by S&I do not give supervisors of S&I full-time teachers a clear purpose for their observations or feedback, other than a general goal of helping teachers accomplish the Objective of S&I and the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning.

This leads to my first research question: what are the purposes or objectives of teacher observation and feedback in S&I? There are many related questions, which if answered, could focus teacher observation and feedback in S&I: are the objectives of observation and feedback in S&I different depending on who is observing and who is being observed? Is a seminary principal, for example, expected to have a different goal when observing a teacher on his or her faculty than a coordinator is expected to have when observing volunteer teachers? Do S&I administrators expect observations be

formative or summative? How much feedback are supervisors expected to provide, and on what criteria are they to base that feedback? How might a teacher's experience or ability affect the amount or substance of a supervisor's feedback? This study sought to identify a clear objective for teacher observation and feedback for S&I classrooms, which could help clarify the answers to these and many other questions about teacher observation in S&I.

My second research question relates to those being observed: What expectations do S&I administrators have for teacher observation and feedback, and how do teachers in S&I perceive the process of teacher observation and feedback? Some related questions include: what do teachers believe the purpose of observation to be? How do they feel about being observed and being given feedback? To what extent do teachers' experiences with observation and feedback align with administrators' expectations? Are there specific observation practices that teachers generally prefer over others? Do teachers' perceptions of observation differ based on their amount of experience?

A third research question begins to explore the possibility of more formal observation and feedback in S&I: How would S&I supervisors and teachers feel about the creation and use of a formal observation instrument during teacher observations? The actual creation of such an instrument is beyond the scope of this study, but an exploration of the reactions of S&I personnel to the possible use of a formal observation instrument could lay some groundwork for future research geared toward the creation and testing of such an instrument.

There are many different observation instruments in use by public school districts, and they vary by theoretical framework and by the goals of teaching and supervision of

the various school districts that use them. However, an instrument used by a public school district would likely not work well in an S&I classroom because the methods and objectives of each educational institution differ. Gitomer et al. (2014) wrote,

> For a framework and language to have common meaning among teachers, principals, and administrators within a district, a protocol's descriptions of teaching, definitions of terms, and distinctions across levels of quality need to be understood by all participants the same way. (p. 4)

Al-Shammari and Yawkey (2008) found that observation instruments are most effective when they are tailored to the goals and objectives of the organization in which they are used. If S&I were to use a formal observation instrument, they would need one that is unique to S&I's objectives and goals.

Framework

My theoretical and conceptual framework that formed the starting point for data organization and analysis is made up of the Situational Leadership Theory, a set of teaching outcomes used by S&I called The Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning, and the Clinical Supervision approach to teacher observation and feedback. Some of the themes and categories that emerged from the coded data aligned with major principles and elements of this framework. Other themes and categories also emerged that expanded upon it. Each element of this framework is a good fit for S&I because it was either developed by S&I (in the case the fundamentals) or because the foundational principles of the theory or approach align well with the goals and methods currently in use in S&I.

Situational Leadership Theory

Several studies have found that elements of teacher observation and feedback that are effective in helping some teachers improve are ineffective with other teachers. For example, some teachers thrive when they are able to direct their own improvement efforts through reflection and goal-setting. Other teachers do not have a firm enough mastery of their field of study, or of pedagogy, to be able to direct their own improvement effectively (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Nsibande & Garraway, 2011).

A situational approach to leadership takes individual differences into account. Leaders are most effective when they change their behaviors to match the needs of their employees (Northouse, 2010). In the case of education, the supervisor's approach to observation and feedback is most effective if it is determined in part by the teacher's competence and commitment.

Situational leadership theory was developed by Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard. Their original model explained leadership approaches based on an employee's ability and willingness to change or improve (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi (1985) revised and updated that model, explaining leadership approaches based on an employee's competence and commitment, calling the model Situational Leadership II. This model is shown in Figure 1.

Applied to teaching, the Situational Leadership II model posits that teachers who have low competence but high commitment requires a more directive leadership approach. This means that supervisors "provide specific instructions and closely supervise task accomplishment" (Blanchard et al., 1985, p. 30).

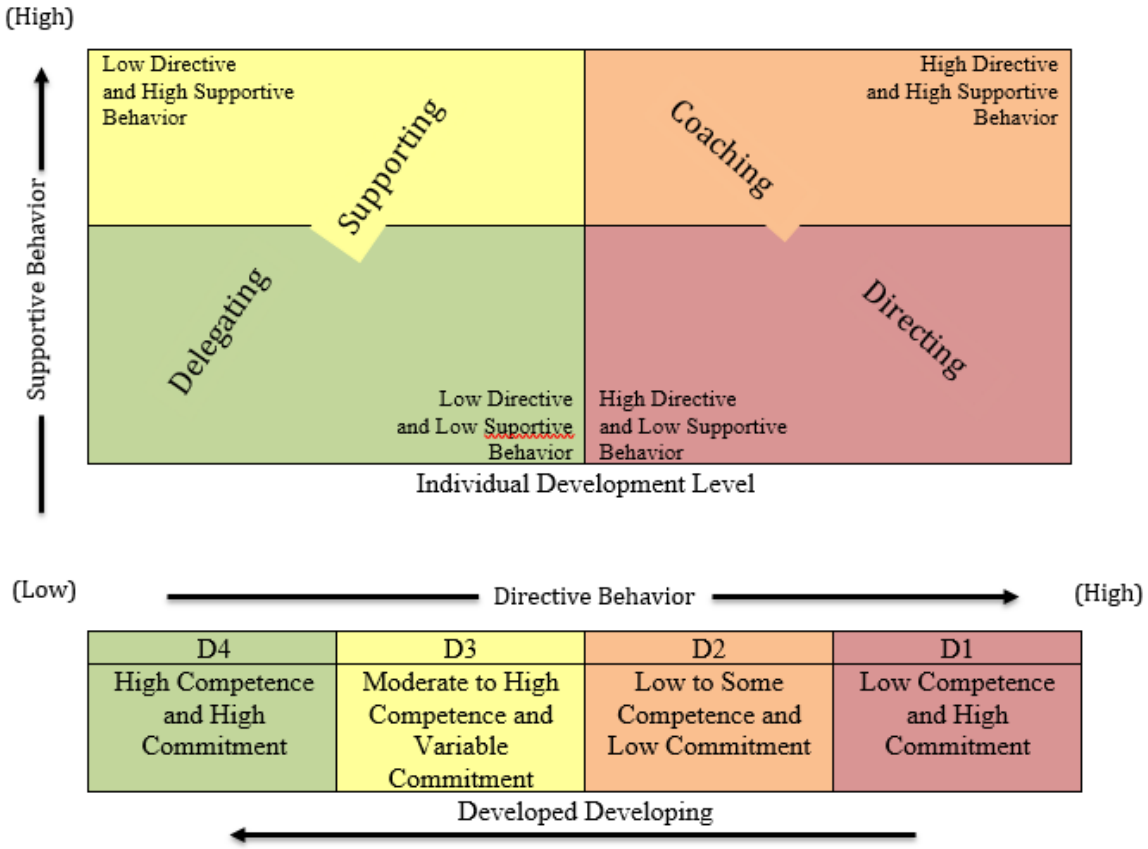

Figure 1. The Situational Leadership II model illustrates approaches to teachers depending on teacher commitment and competence.

A teacher who has low to some competence but low commitment does best with a supervisor who utilizes a coaching style of leadership. As with a directive approach, coaching includes directive leadership and closely monitoring task accomplishment, but also requires a supervisor to "sell" a teacher on a suggestion, explaining decisions, and asking the teacher for suggestions as well.

A teacher who exhibits moderate to high competence and variable commitment does best with a supporting leadership style. This is a more collaborative process in which a supervisor makes decisions along with the teacher, and then supports the

teacher's efforts to improve.

A teacher who has both high competence and high commitment does not need much help from a supervisor, so the supervisor can delegate the teacher's improvement efforts to the teacher him or herself. These teachers may only need simple questions from a supervisor in order to identify what they can do to improve their teaching. Self-reflection is typically sufficient for them to set meaningful goals that can help them improve.

Newer teachers and less effective teachers sometimes require and even prefer more directive feedback (Glickman et al., 2010; Kimball, 2002), so the emphasis on teacher autonomy and self-driven improvement in clinical supervision will not be the best fit for every teacher. If the objectives of observation and feedback in S&I require a situational approach, then any observation system or instrument would need to account for situations that require more direct feedback, as well as situations where a supervisor can delegate much of a teacher's improvement to the teacher themselves.

Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning

S&I has defined a set of outcomes that identify effective teaching, called the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning. These fundamentals grew out of what was initially called the "current teaching emphasis" which was introduced to S&I in 2003 (Smith, 2015). According to Smith, several apostles of the Church charged S&I with deepening conversion in 2000 and 2001. Then in 2002, the Church "raised the bar" on missionary work and began teaching missionaries to teach differently than they had before: from their own knowledge of the scriptures rather than from pre-memorized

scripts. Administrators in the missionary department came to administrators in S&I and asked how the seminary program could help prepare missionaries to teach in this new way. The "current teaching emphasis" was S&I's answer to this charge, as well as the charge to deepen conversion in seminary students (Smith, 2015). That teaching emphasis underwent two more iterations before it became "the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning" in 2012 (Smith, 2015). These fundamentals are widely understood by employees of S&I, and would surely be a starting point for clarifying the specific purposes of teacher observation in S&I.

The seven Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning can be organized into four broader categories: spiritual teaching and learning, positive environment, scriptural study and understanding, and doctrinal engagement.

Spiritual teaching and learning. The first Fundamental of teaching and learning in S&I, which both teachers and students are expected to experience, is teaching and learning by the Spirit. Latter-day Saint doctrine declares that the Holy Ghost—also commonly called the Spirit—is able to help people know "the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:5; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [LDS], 1981a). Teachers and students are to be inspired by the Spirit as to what they say in class, and both should be open to being taught by the Spirit—which Mormons believe takes place within the mind and heart of an individual (Doctrine and Covenants [D&C] 8:2-3; LDS, 1981b). This kind of teaching and learning is essential in S&I: "Only through teaching and learning by the Spirit will students come to understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ in such a way that they may qualify for eternal life" (S&I, 2012, p. 10). If teaching and learning the gospel happen some other way than by the Spirit, it is "not of

God" (D&C 50:18).

Measuring this kind of teaching and learning by observing a classroom can be difficult, but there are indicators that it is taking place. Whether students are increasing in love for Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the scriptures can be observed, to a degree, by their attitude and engagement level in class, as well as by their comments. Other things that can indicate that learning by the Spirit is taking place include students' understanding of the principles being taught, students' "inspiration to act" on those principles, the unity of the class, the confidence that the students have in the truths they are being taught, as well as feelings of peace, gentleness, or faith in the class (S&I, 2012, p. 12). Some of these indicators could be observed by a supervisor and reported on an instrument.

Positive environment. This second criterion examines three elements of the classroom environment. In S&I classrooms, teachers and students are expected to "cultivate a learning environment of love, respect and purpose" (S&I, 2012, p. 13).

Love and respect. Seminary and Institute teachers and students are taught that loving God is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36–37; The Holy Bible, 1979). Teachers and students must also love and respect one another: "When students know they are loved and respected by their teacher and other students, they are more likely to come to class ready to learn" (S&I, 2012, p. 14). Teachers and students are also encouraged to love and respect the word of God, which Latter-day Saints believe is found in the scriptures and in the words of modern day prophets.

Purpose. When teachers and students share a sense of purpose, class is more productive and meaningful. Teachers can cultivate an atmosphere of purpose by expecting students to fulfill their role as learners, being energetic and passionate about

the scriptures, preparing uplifting lessons, having all the materials they need prepared in advance, not wasting time or starting late, and by establishing regular routines that encourage student participation (S&I, 2012).

Scriptural study and understanding. The scriptures are the primary curriculum for S&I. The books accepted as scripture by the LDS are *The Holy Bible*, *The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants,* and the *Pearl of Great Price*. Seminary students are encouraged and expected to study the scriptures on their own every day. They are also expected to study whichever book of scripture is being studied in seminary in any given school year. Teachers are to "encourage each student to set aside time every day for personal scripture study, help students be accountable for their daily study, and give students regular opportunities in class to share with each other some of the things they are learning and feeling in their personal scripture study" (S&I, 2012, p. 20).

Another major goal in S&I related to scripture study is that teachers and students understand the context and content of the scriptures they are studying. Teachers are to help students understand the historical, cultural, and geographic information that is necessary for students to understand what they read. Teachers are also expected to help students understand the story line, the meaning of difficult words and phrases, and the symbolism in the chapters they study. Teachers are also to help students learn how to identify context and understand content on their own during their personal study (S&I, 2012).

Doctrinal engagement. Three of the fundamentals of gospel teaching and learning are intended to engage students in the study of doctrine and principles. A doctrine is defined by S&I as "a fundamental, unchanging truth of the gospel of Jesus

Christ" (S&I, 2012, p. 26). A principle is "an enduring truth or rule individuals can adopt to guide them in making decisions" (S&I, 2012, p. 26). The fundamentals associated with doctrine and principles are: (1) identify, understand, feel the truth and importance of, and apply gospel doctrines and principles; (2) explain, share, and testify of gospel doctrines and principles; and (3) develop doctrinal mastery.

***Identify, understand, feel, and apply*.** Seminary and institute teachers are taught that the doctrines and principles are "the substance of and the purpose for" the scriptures (S&I, 2012, p. 26). Once students understand the context and content of the scriptures they are ready to identify the doctrine and principles found therein. If they understand how those principles apply to modern situations, and if they can see evidence of the truth of those doctrines and principles from their own life experiences, they will feel the truth and the importance of them. Students will then have a greater desire to apply those principles more consciously in their own lives in the future.

Explain, share, and testify. The goal of this fundamental is that both students and teachers explain doctrine and principles, share insights and experiences, and testify of what they have learned about those doctrines and principles for themselves. If students, and not just their teachers, are actively engaged in this fundamental of gospel teaching and learning then the discussion in class will be more engaging and relevant, with students doing the teaching as well.

Develop doctrinal mastery. Introduced in 2016, the doctrinal mastery initiative of S&I is designed to help students learn and apply "divine principles for acquiring spiritual knowledge," and master "the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the scripture passages in which that doctrine is taught" (S&I, 2016, p. 1). S&I teachers help students

achieve those outcomes by helping them develop a deeper understanding of nine doctrinal topics, which include the Atonement of Jesus Christ, prophets and revelation, ordinances and covenants, and marriage and family, among others. In each course of seminary (*Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*) there are 25 doctrinal mastery scripture passages. These passages are designed to help students learn the doctrines from the nine doctrinal topics.

The Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning have already been identified by S&I as practices and outcomes that will help accomplish the objective of religious education in S&I, therefore they were a logical inclusion in a framework that would help me to analyze data collected for a study about teacher observation and feedback. Interviews with S&I supervisors and teachers confirmed that the fundamentals make up a major part of the standards on which feedback should be based, as reported in Chapter IV. The fundamentals are generally accepted as measures of effective teaching by both teachers and administrators in S&I, and feedback that is based on these fundamentals is seen as pertinent and helpful by both teachers and supervisors, and provides an opportunity for supervisors to give feedback in a language that both they and their teachers already fluently speak.

Clinical Supervision

Elements of the clinical supervision approach to teacher observation were incorporated into the formal observation program used by S&I in the early 1990s (Howell, 1995; Lunt, 1995). It was, therefore, another natural starting point to organizing the data gathered from interviews with S&I supervisors and teachers. The clinical

supervision model was first developed by Morris L. Cogan, Robert Goldhammer, and Robert Anderson in the 1950s while they were studying more effective ways of supervising their fifth-year interns at Harvard. At the time, the nation was undergoing a shift from an inspection paradigm of teacher observation and feedback to a more collaborative paradigm (Sullivan, 1980).

Clinical Supervision is based on several key assumptions: teaching is a behavior, and therefore can be observed and influenced in order to benefit students' learning (Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, Anderson & Krajewski, 1969); observational feedback is most effective when it is formative rather than summative (Glickman et al., 2010), and based on the teacher's concerns rather than the supervisor's checklist (Sullivan, 1980); supervisors are more effective in helping teachers improve when they work alongside their teachers as colleagues, rather than being above them (Sullivan, 1980); teacher improvement is more likely when teachers are allowed to initiate and drive their own improvement (Sullivan, 1980).

Researchers of clinical supervision have differed on the specifics of teacher observation and feedback. Cogan (1973) proposed eight steps of observation and feedback. Goldhammer proposed five. Though clinical supervision researchers differ as to the specific number of steps, they generally organize the process into three major phases: pre-observation, observation, and post-observation.

Pre-observation. Cogan (1973) encouraged supervisors to do several things before ever observing a teacher: explain clinical supervision to them, establish a relationship with them, plan a lesson or unit of lessons together, and plan the objectives and processes for the observation. Goldhammer et al. (1969) found that these practices

reduce teacher anxiety during the observation. Goldhammer encouraged supervisors to have what he called a pre-observation conference, during which all of these things could take place. Cogan never called his pre-observation steps a conference. He saw them as distinct steps in a process he referred to as "planning with the teacher."

Observation. Clinical supervision does not prescribe one method for observing teachers. Goldhammer et al. (1969) suggested making an audio recording of the class that the supervisor could then review, or taking descriptive notes on what was happening in class. Zepeda (2002) used portfolios to assist in observation that could then be used for reflective dialogue and assist in setting goals during post-observation. Whatever method of observation supervisors use, they generally record descriptions of what they observe without judgment.

Post-observation. Cogan (1973) proposed that after the class is over, both the teacher and supervisor individually analyze what happened during the class. The supervisor plans the place and time for a post-observation conference with the teacher, and then prepares a strategy for the conference. During the conference the teacher and supervisor try to understand together what happened during the class. They decide together on changes to make. Then the supervisor plans for future clinical supervision with that teacher. Goldhammer et al. (1969) also called for a post-conference analysis in which a supervisor would analyze his or her own performance and set goals for working better with the teacher in the future. Some researchers suggest that teachers also provide feedback to supervisors during the post-observation conference to assist them in setting goals for improvement.

Researchers have found that teachers and supervisors prefer clinical supervision

to traditional supervision (Reavis, 1978, Sullivan, 1980). While teachers generally like the procedures of clinical supervision, they like the assumptions behind it even more, and administrators generally prefer clinical supervision to an even greater degree than teachers (Reavis, 1978).

Several studies have found that teachers improve through clinical supervision to a greater degree than through traditional supervision, or through no supervision at all. Reavis (1978) found that teachers were more likely to apply teaching behaviors covered in a seminar when clinical supervision was used to follow up. Farhat (2016) found that clinical supervision helped teachers improve their classroom management skills. Nolan et al. (1993) found that clinical supervision can precipitate teacher improvement in a powerful way "under certain conditions" (p. 54), those conditions being a collegial relationship between teacher and supervisor, teachers controlling what was discussed, continuity over time, descriptive feedback, and teacher reflection.

Interviews with S&I supervisors and teachers revealed that they generally agreed with the assumptions of the Clinical Supervision approach, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters IV and V.

Limitations and Delimitations

I used data collected from interviews to create a list of objectives for teacher observation in S&I, as well as to reveal administrator expectations and teacher perceptions of current observation practices. I also collected data on how S&I personnel feel about the possible use of a formal observation instrument in S&I classrooms.

I did not create a teacher observation instrument as a part of this study. My

research did not measure student outcomes, nor teacher improvement. Additional research would be required to create and validate an observation measure or to show any correlation between using the observation measure and teacher improvement, or student academic achievement.

My research was restricted to three seminary or institute teachers and three supervisors who work in Salt Lake and Davis counties in Utah. Because of the small sample size, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to S&I as a whole. Future research would be needed to determine whether the results of this study are replicable. The findings of this study are also not generalizable to public school classrooms, as methods and objectives in those classrooms differ substantially from those of S&I.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will provide an overview of current literature on the topic of teacher observation in order to set the stage for the current study. I have organized this literature review into two major sections. First, I will review pertinent literature about formal teacher observation in public schools. Second, I will review literature about teacher observation in S&I.

Teacher Observation

Some researchers have been unable to find a correlation between teacher observation and teacher improvement (see Kimball, 2002; VanTassel-Baska, Quek, & Feng, 2007). Other researchers have shown a correlation (Nolan et al., 1993; Nsibande & Garraway, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011; Wei & Pecheone, 2010; Wilson & Wineburg, 1993). Tuyten and Devos (2011), for example, found that "teachers do undertake professional learning activities after receiving feedback" from observations (p. 896). They acknowledged that previous studies had found no correlation between observation and teacher change, but rather than saying that those findings were incorrect, the authors expressed hope that their study was demonstrating a shift in the status quo.

Most researchers who have found a correlation between teacher observation and teacher improvement identified specific practices in their studies that were unaddressed in previous studies that failed to find a correlation. One such study was conducted by Nolan et al. (1993), who found that clinical supervision can precipitate teacher

improvement in a powerful way “under certain conditions” (p. 54). This suggests that observation alone must not be the variable that makes a difference, but the way an observation is conducted. Most of the characteristics of impactful teacher observation identified by researchers can be summarized in three overarching categories: supervisor credibility, teacher autonomy, and feedback. I will review common findings in the literature having to do with each of these categories and then summarize some other characteristics researchers have found to be effective.

Supervisor Credibility

Kimball (2002) interviewed 55 teachers and 18 evaluators in three school districts in different parts of the U.S. Each of the districts had begun a teacher observation system that included a teacher-developed professional development plan, involved supervisor or peer observations, and included teacher evaluation conferences. Kimball found that feedback from supervisors alone is not correlated with teacher improvement, but that there was a correlation between feedback and teacher improvement if the teachers perceived their supervisors as credible. Teachers perceived their supervisors as credible when the supervisors were experienced educators, when they had demonstrated content or pedagogical mastery, or when they gave feedback that was in line with the goals and standards being emphasized by the school or district. Kimball also found that this last practice, of giving objectives-based feedback, is often enough to overcome a supervisor’s lack of experience in the eyes of the teachers they are observing.

Nolan et al. (1993) studied the impact of clinical supervision in six case studies. Each case study examined the way clinical supervision unfolded throughout a school-

year between a teacher and supervisor(s). The researchers found that a collegial relationship was one of five common factors between the six case studies that facilitated teacher improvement. They also found that for supervisor and teacher to have a collegial relationship, they each needed to respect and trust one another.

It should be noted that while a teachers' perception of supervisors makes a difference in the likelihood that teachers will change their performance based on observation, Kimball (2002) also found that if a supervisor gives feedback appropriately, teachers will often overlook their negative perceptions of the supervisor.

Feedback

Not all feedback is useful, much of it is never applied by teachers, some of it is more harmful than helpful, but when feedback is given in the right way, it can facilitate teacher change (Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Researchers have found that feedback is more likely to help teachers improve if it is carefully given, formative rather than summative, descriptive rather than interpretive, based on predetermined objectives, positive (or preceded by positive feedback), and situationally appropriate.

Careful feedback. Observers can give critical feedback carelessly or carefully (Le & Vasquez, 2011). Careful feedback includes a sensitivity to the feelings of a teacher who may be offended by criticism. Le and Vasquez found that teachers viewed critical feedback more favorably when observers consciously tried to soften their criticism. Le and Vasquez also found that observers are able to help teachers discover their own mistakes by asking carefully worded questions, and that teachers are more likely to make positive changes when answering such questions than when the same information is

given as criticism from the observer.

Formative feedback. Supervisors can observe teachers with a goal of providing formative or summative feedback. Formative feedback is meant to help a teacher improve, and so is given toward the beginning and/or during the middle of the school year. It includes suggestions for improvement or observations of things that might be improved. Summative feedback is typically given at the end of the year. It is meant to be a judgment on a teacher's performance, and can be used to make hiring, firing, or placement decisions. Both types of feedback serve distinct purposes, and while summative evaluation may be needed for making employment decisions, it "does not lead to instruction improvement for most teachers" (Glickman et al., 2010, p. 278). McGreal (1982) found that teachers view summative evaluation negatively and fear the results. Supervisors who provide formative feedback, however, will build trust with teachers and create a more collegial relationship (Glickman et al., 2010).

Many schools and school districts claim to provide formative and summative feedback together through their teacher observation systems, but those schools often prioritize the summative feedback above the formative (Glickman et al., 2010). Glickman et al. argued that formative and summative observation systems should be kept separate, with clearly delineated objectives.

Descriptive feedback. Supervisors give descriptive feedback when they describe to a teacher what they observed without assigned meaning to it. If a supervisor ascribes some meaning to something they observed, or if they judge something that happened in class as good or bad, their feedback is interpretive. Glickman et al. (2010) wrote about some of the reasons for supervisors to give descriptive rather than interpretive feedback:

> Sharing the description of events is the forerunner of professional improvement. Interpretation leads to resistance. When both parties can agree on what events occurred, they are more likely to agree on what needs to be changed....
>
> ...Using description first when talking to a teacher about his or her classroom creates an instructional dialogue. Providing interpretations and evaluative statements first ushers in defensiveness, combativeness, or resentment in the teacher and stifles discussion. (p. 237)

Nolan et al. (1993) found that descriptive supervisor feedback was one of the five common factors correlated with teacher observation that leads to change. Each of the supervisors they studied provided descriptions of things that happened in class that were related to the teachers' areas of concern. They shared their observations with the teacher before they had a post-observation conference, so that the teacher could be prepared to discuss interpretations of the data. The researchers also found that by sharing this descriptive feedback prior to the post-observation conference, supervisors created a stronger collegial relationship with the teachers, because teachers came to the post-observation conference equally prepared.

Objectives-based feedback. Studies have shown that teachers find their supervisors' feedback more credible when it is based on objectives that are commonly held by teachers and administrators in a school or district (Kimball, 2002; VanTassal-Baska et al., 2007). Kimball also found that when feedback is based on school- or district-wide objectives or standards, teachers are more likely to apply the feedback.

This applies to observation instruments that reflect the goals of a school or district. Kimball (2002) found that teachers are more likely to apply feedback based on the criteria evaluated by an observation instrument than feedback or suggestions from a supervisor that are divorced from criteria on an instrument, regardless of how specific

that feedback is.

Kimball (2002) also found that even when supervisors are less experienced than those they are observing (which usually makes teachers significantly less likely to apply feedback from an observation), if supervisors will give feedback based on the objectives of the school or district in which they are supervising, teachers are more likely to apply feedback.

Positive feedback. Several recent studies have examined the effect of positive feedback on teacher attitudes about observation and feedback. Positive feedback is generally given in the form of praise for things the teacher did well. Kurtoglu-Hooton (2016) found that when young teachers are given positive feedback, it may facilitate their improvement. Le and Vasquez (2011) found that new teachers were able to improve more quickly when given positive feedback if the observer explained why something they did in the lesson worked well. Le and Vasquez also found that if observers' first post-observation feedback was positive, that teachers were more likely to view critical feedback favorably.

Situational feedback. While researchers have generally agreed that descriptive feedback is more strongly correlated to teacher improvement than interpretive feedback, that is not true for all teachers. Newer teachers and less effective teachers sometimes require and even prefer more directive feedback (Glickman et al., 2010; Kimball, 2002). Researchers have found that teachers must have some mastery over their field of study, and of pedagogy in general, in order to be able to direct their own improvement effectively (Glickman et al., 2010; Nsibande & Garraway, 2011).

While providing feedback in the ways just mentioned does increase the likelihood

that a teacher will apply it, research has also shown that the way a teacher perceives critical feedback is related to how helpful they find the feedback (Reinholz, 2017). For example, Reinholz found that some teachers tend to view nearly all critical feedback as "mean." Teachers with a negative view of any critical feedback tend to be skeptical of all critical feedback, regardless of how well the feedback is given. And instructors who generally view critical feedback as supportive are more likely to find it useful.

Teacher Autonomy

Research shows that when teachers have greater autonomy during the evaluation process, they are more likely to improve (Glickman et al., 2010; Kimball, 2002; Nolan et al., 1993). The clinical supervision model prioritizes teacher autonomy throughout the observation process (Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1980). Two key methods researchers have found to ensure that teachers have greater autonomy during the evaluation process are pre-observation conferences, and self-reflection.

Pre-observation conferences. Pre-observation conferences are a necessary step in giving teachers the autonomy they need during the observation process (Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer et al., 1980). Some supervisors favor surprise observations because they feel that it gives them a better idea of the average day in a teacher's class if that teacher does not know they are coming to observe. This reduces a teacher's autonomy in the observation process, however, and VanTassel-Baska et al. (2007) found that surprise observations make teachers feel threatened. Teachers feel less antagonistic toward supervisors that engage with teachers in a pre-observation conference. Even when teachers know that an observer is coming, if there is no discussion before the observation,

teachers have no say in the objectives of the observation.

Nolan et al. (1993) found that teacher control over what is being observed and later discussed makes a significant difference in whether clinical supervision correlates with teacher change. If teachers identify the areas in which they feel they need improvement, then supervisors can focus their observations on those areas, providing descriptive feedback that will help the teachers see where they can improve. A pre-observation conference gives teachers the opportunity to direct their own improvement (Kimball, 2002), and puts teacher and supervisor on equal footing from the beginning of the observation process (Glickman et al., 2010).

Self-reflection. Some of the researchers that have found no correlation between teacher improvement and observation and feedback alone, have also found that when teacher self-reflection is added to the process, there is significant teacher improvement (Kimball, 2002; Nsibande & Garraway, 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). While self-reflection is not a major component of the clinical supervision model, Nolan et al. (1993) found that teacher self-reflection makes a significant difference in whether clinical supervision correlates with teacher improvement.

Teachers can engage in self-reflection after observers have provided descriptive feedback (Glickman et al., 2010). This is especially true of experienced and capable teachers, who are more likely to be able to identify their own weaknesses and decide on a way to improve them (Glickman et al., 2010).

The benefits of self-reflection on teacher improvement do not extend to all teachers, however. Teachers with less pedagogical or content expertise are less able to effectively use self-reflection because they may simply conclude that they did everything

right (Glickman et al., 2010; Nsibande & Garraway, 2011). This finding supports a Situational Leadership Theory approach to observation methods. Supervisors must decide when a teacher would benefit from self-reflection and when they would benefit from a more directive approach.

After teachers have engaged in self-reflection, they are better able to set goals for improvement (Glickman et al., 2010). Tuytens and Devos (2011) found that supervisors who observed teachers, provided feedback, and also assisted them in setting goals were perceived as significantly more helpful by their teachers, and that those teachers were significantly more likely to develop their professional talents and abilities.

Other Successful Methods

Other practices that have been shown to make feedback more likely to be applied include frequent observation and feedback (Protheroe, 2002), consistency in applying an observation program and protocol (Nolan et al., 1993), giving teachers opportunities to apply feedback (Kimball, 2002), sharing feedback soon after the observation (VanTassel-Baska, 2012), and following up on feedback within a certain amount of time (Tuytens & Devos, 2011). The following are several examples of additional methods of observation and feedback that have been the subject of recent studies:

Peer tutoring. One type of observation and feedback that has been the subject of recent studies is peer tutoring. There are many variations on this practice, but in general it involves one or more peers observing a colleague either with or without a supervisor or trainer and then providing feedback. Research has shown that teachers are more reflective about their own teaching after observing their peers (Reinholz, 2017). Teachers also

reported that it was easier for them to see the classroom experience from the students' perspective after observing their fellow teachers (Reinholz, 2017). Copland (2010) found that there can be tension between peers when feedback is provided if the peers are not sufficiently prepared as to how to give and take critical feedback, and recommended that before any peer tutoring begins, that participating peers receive some training in order to make the observation and feedback more effective.

Microteaching. Microteaching is when an instructor is observed teaching a mini-lesson and then receives feedback. Frequently the "students" being taught are actually peers, who then participate in giving feedback. This practice has been effective for groups of student teachers (Eksi, 2012). Eksi studied a group of 24 student teachers who participated in a series of microteaching experiences in a class. One of them would teach a brief lesson, the group would debrief the lesson and provide feedback, and then the teacher was given a short time to reflect and then re-teach the same lesson, incorporating the feedback. These group settings can make peer feedback more difficult to give. Eksi found that peers would sometimes not give feedback because they did not want to offend their fellow student teacher, or cause him or her to lose face. Other times, peers did not give feedback because of their lack of pedagogical knowledge—they did not know enough about teaching to know how to provide feedback. Eksi also found that these student teachers preferred to have an observation instrument to use during their observations that could guide their feedback.

Research on Teacher Observation in Seminaries and Institutes

The S&I program has a long and varied history of teacher observation and

feedback (see Figure 2) and a number of researchers have studied observation and feedback within S&I over the years.

The earliest formal observation that occurred in S&I started in 1955. At the time, S&I was experimenting with merit-based pay. Teachers were observed by a supervisor who would provide summative feedback once each year. Based on the data the supervisors collected, teachers were assigned one of three classifications. Failing teachers were assigned a probationary status, most teachers were assigned a "Fine Contributing Teacher" status, and ideally, the best 10% of teachers were assigned an "Exceptional Teacher" rating. Those teachers designated as "Fine Contributing Teachers" were given an annual raise that was proportional to national inflation. The exceptional teachers were given an additional raise on top of the standard cost of living increase. This system of observation and merit-pay ended in 1969 because the administrators of S&I realized that

1955–1969	Formal observations to determine merit-based pay
1968–1991	Student's Evaluation of Seminary (SES)
1981–1992	Teaching Support Consultant (TSC) program
1983	Self-assessment pilot program
1991-1995	*CES Employee Evaluation Handbook*
2003	Introduction of the "Current Teaching Emphasis"
2008–2015	Paul V. Johnson served as commissioner of CES, created a culture of "kind and candid feedback"
2012	*Gospel Teaching and Learning Handbook*

Figure 2. Major developments in teacher observation, feedback, and determining standards for teaching in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion.

some supervisors were more quick to rate their teachers as exceptional than other supervisors (Elzey, 1998; Howell, 1995).

The formal observations of the 1960s were replaced with a system of student evaluations, one for student teachers called the Preservice Teacher Evaluation (PTE) and one for full-time teachers called the Student's Evaluation of Seminary (SES). The SES was developed by J. Alden Richins and first published in 1968 as a 35-item questionnaire. Richens (1973) then tested the validity of the SES in 256 seminary classrooms and found it to be a reliable measure of student feelings, but not of teacher effectiveness. Some incarnation of the SES continued to be used through the 1970s and 80s. Sudweeks (1979) tested the SES again and found that it was only an effective measure of how well students liked their teachers. Despite these findings, the SES continued to be used as a summative evaluation for student teachers and a formative assessment for full-time teachers until 1991. A newer incarnation of the SES was adopted for summative evaluation of student teachers after that point and was used system-wide as recently as 2005.

Around 1980, S&I adopted a new teacher observation system that adapted the INSTROTEACH evaluation system created by researchers from the University of Arizona for use in religious classrooms administered by the United Presbyterian Church. S&I administrators liked the system because it was designed specifically for use in classrooms of religious instruction and "was developed specifically to determine religious teacher competencies" (Boren, 1984, p. 8). Seminaries and Institutes adapted the observation instrument to include six roles in which religious instructors are expected to achieve competency: director of learning, guide and counselor, mediator and interpreter

of the gospel, link with the community, participant in the Church's teaching ministry, and coordinator with ecclesiastical leaders. Each of the roles was subdivided and teachers were ranked on each subcategory. Seminaries and Institutes also developed workshops to help teachers and supervisors identify competent teaching. Observers were trained to hold pre-observation conferences, classroom observations, and a post-observation conference (Boren, 1984). However actively this observation system was pursued initially, by the time Phil Boren studied teacher observation in S&I a few years later, supervisors were only visiting their teachers' classrooms once a year, and the observations and feedback provided were ineffective in helping teachers improve (Boren, 1984).

In 1981, S&I started a new observation and feedback program to improve teaching, called the Teaching Support Consultant (TSC) program. This was a formative evaluation program that complimented the INSTROTEACH system's summative observations. Area directors chose one teacher in their area to act as a TSC, whose job it was to observe and provide feedback to their peers. Their observations had no bearing on hiring, firing, or promotions. Their sole aim was to improve teaching. Area directors were instructed to select someone they perceived as an excellent teacher for the position, and who was well-liked by their peers (Tippets, 1984). Tippets studied the TSC program and found that while teachers did not like having a TSC who was not an excellent teacher, a TSC's personal skills were more important to teachers than their pedagogical expertise. Tippets found that most area directors chose TSCs that were well-liked, and who were good listeners, sensitive, diplomatic, honest, committed, and loyal, and that the program had a positive influence on instruction in seminaries and institutes. The TSC program was discontinued in 1992 in order that seminary principals and institute directors could take

"a more active role in improving teaching" (LDS, 2015).

In 1983, CES piloted another new observation program, this time completely focused on self-assessment. Teachers were video-taped during class and were trained to use an evaluative questionnaire while watching the tapes. They then set goals to improve. Boren (1984) found that 90% of the teachers who participated in the pilot study saw improvements in their teaching, but the assessment process was so time-consuming and complicated that S&I administrators ended the program.

Boren (1984) studied the INSTROTEACH system, the TSC program, the self-assessment pilot program, and the SES instrument being used at the time, and concluded that "we do not adequately administer teacher evaluation techniques in the [Church Education System]" (p. 71). Boren noted that teacher observation and feedback was applied very formally during the vetting and hiring process of student teachers, but that after a teacher was hired, there was "little evaluation of teacher performance" happening in the classroom (p. 72), despite all the programs and instruments that S&I had at the time. He proposed an "eclectic" or "broad-based approach" to teacher observation, "involving administrative evaluation, teacher self-evaluation, collegial evaluation and student evaluation" (p. 21). Boren recommended clinical supervision for new teachers with "intensive feedback," but "cooperative professional development for experienced teachers, a collegial process in which small groups of teachers agree to work together for professional growth" (Boren, 1984, p. 74).

In 1991, S&I published the *CES Employee Evaluation Handbook*, which was the most formal and comprehensive teacher observation system ever used in S&I (Lunt, 1995). While not exactly what Boren (1984) had proposed, the new evaluation system

was eclectic, containing observation measures for use by supervisors, students, and teachers, both for self-assessment purposes and for providing feedback to supervisors after an observation (Lunt, 1995). The four instruments found in the handbook were the Supervisor's Appraisal of Teachers, Student Feedback to Teacher, Feedback to Administrator, and Self-Assessment Instrument. Seminary principals and institute directors were to observe each teacher using the Supervisor's Appraisal at least annually. Students filled out the Student Feedback to Teacher instrument annually.

Importantly, for the purposes of this study, *The CES Employee Evaluation Handbook* identified three purposes of teacher observation in CES: to encourage personal and profession growth (by clarifying performance standards and expectations, improving performance through feedback, and reinforcing S&I values), to provide administrators and employees with information that could be used in placement and promotional decisions, and to provide records of performance (as required by law to protect the employee and employer) (Lunt, 1995).

Lunt (1995) tested the validity of each of the evaluation instruments in the *CES Employee Evaluation Handbook* (CES, 1991). He found that the instruments were reliable, but he also found that "supervisors, teachers, and employees have unsettled feelings regarding the use of the CES Employee Evaluation instruments as tools for measuring and improving teacher and administrator performance" (p. 147). Eventually, administrators ended the program because they were concerned about its lack of effectiveness and utility (Howell, 1995).

After the Evaluation Handbook was no longer in use, there was not a consensus in S&I as to what the objectives of teacher observation were, or what standards or

expectations there were to define effective teaching (Howell, 1995). Howell concluded that the major reasons for teacher observation in seminaries in 1995 was twofold. First, to encourage the personal and professional growth of the teachers (by clarifying standards and expectations, providing uplifting feedback, and reinforcing S&I values), and second, to provide administrators and employees with information that could determine placement decisions and career planning. In interviews with teachers, Howell found that teachers were getting mixed messages from evaluations. At in-service trainings they would read the words of Church leaders telling them to teach the truth regardless of its popularity, but then placement and hiring decisions were based in part on a student evaluation (the SES) that was largely a measure of popularity. Howell also learned that teachers were threatened by observation, preferring informal evaluation by peers who knew them well.

Seminaries and Institutes then published *Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders* (CES, 1994). It stated a clear objective and mission for seminary teachers and administrators, established core values, and defined effective teaching using what the manual called "the principles of edification" (pp. 2-3). Elzey (1998) found that 98% of all CES teachers believed that the principles of edification governed their teaching, but more than 70% of them reported that they thought only "occasionally or rarely" about those principles while teaching.

In 2003, in an effort to help seminary students be better prepared to be full-time missionaries, S&I adopted what it called, "The Current Teaching Emphasis." It "marked a significant step in clarifying expectations and refining the standards of success for S&I" (Smith, 2015, p. 6). It identified five areas for teachers and administrators to prioritize in

their work. At the time that the Teaching Emphasis was introduced, it marked a shift in seminary teaching toward greater student participation, and more explaining, sharing, and testifying by students. It was also an attempt to help get the gospel from students' heads to their hearts (Smith, 2015).

In August of 2005, the word "current" was dropped from the Teaching Emphasis, and in 2009, it became the Teaching and Learning Emphasis. This iteration of the emphasis was more concisely worded, using less than a quarter the number of words as the original (Smith, 2015). In 2012, *The Gospel Teaching and Learning Handbook* replaced the previous handbook for S&I employees. That is when the Teaching and Learning Emphasis became The Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning, discussed in detail in Chapter I. These seven fundamentals were clearly identified as the desired "principles, practices, and outcomes" of teaching and learning in S&I (S&I, 2012, p. 34).

While the latest handbook clearly defines effective teaching in S&I, it says little about teacher observation. The handbook encourages teachers to observe one another as they strive to improve their own teaching. It also encourages teachers to participate in observation as part of in-service training (S&I, 2012). The most specific official statements from S&I on teacher observation come from an administrative manual called *Administering Appropriately: A Handbook for CES Leaders and Teachers* (CES, 2003), but even these excerpts are not specific:

> An individual's supervisor or colleagues should be invited to observe an individual's teaching or leading to provide feedback and encouragement. Students' observation should also be solicited in various ways. Teachers and leaders should also plan to observe others, enabling them to learn and acquire necessary knowledge and skills relevant to their assignments....

> ...An individual's supervisor, peers, and students should be invited to provide feedback through formal assessment instruments. (CES, 2003, p. 16)

Although this excerpt mentions that supervisors, peers, and students should provide feedback via "formal assessment instruments," it is important to note that no such instruments are provided or in general use for classroom observation in S&I at this time.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to identify the objectives of teacher observation in S&I, discover administrator expectations and teacher perceptions about current observation and feedback practices in S&I, and reveal teacher and supervisor feelings about the possible use of an observation instrument in S&I classrooms. In order to accomplish those purposes, I used a phenomenological methodology, collecting data from a series of interviews with S&I supervisors and teachers about their experiences with teacher observation and feedback in S&I.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) wrote: "Some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experiences with a phenomenon.... [Q]ualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods" (p. 19). Qualitative research can also provide "detailed understanding" of an issue that "can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40).

Qualitative methods provided an ideal way to study teachers' and administrators' experiences with the phenomenon of teacher observation and feedback in S&I. The study of phenomena through the views of those who have experienced them is called phenomenology, and it provided a good fit for my research because it allows for studying multiple individuals' experiences with the same phenomenon.

Phenomenology

In phenomenological research, a researcher collects data from a variety of persons who have experienced the phenomenon in question and analyzes the data to create a composite description of the phenomenon that captures its "universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Teacher observation in S&I classrooms is a phenomenon experienced by all teachers and administrators, to one extent or another.

Phenomenology is largely based on the writings of Edmund Husserl, the German mathematician, as well as others who developed his ideas, including Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 2007). A brief introduction to the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology as well as the two major types of phenomenology follows.

Philosophical Ideas

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is based on several philosophical ideas: a return to philosophy as a means of seeking wisdom, identifying one's own presuppositions about a phenomenon (something Husserl called "epoche" and which Moustakas referred to as "bracketing"), the "intentionality of consciousness," and "refusal of the subject-object dichotomy" (Creswel, 2007, pp. 58-59). An in-depth discussion of each of these philosophical ideas is not necessary for the purposes of this study, with the exception of the idea of epoche.

Phenomenological researchers practice a methodological technique called "bracketing" in which a researcher catalogues his or her own assumptions and experiences with the phenomenon in question prior to interviewing participants. Some

phenomenologists then try to set aside all of what they have bracketed out and not allow it to influence their research. Other researchers (e.g., Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017) believe that it is impossible to set aside "one's knowledge, presuppositions, and biases about the phenomenon" (p. 130), and argue that the purpose of bracketing, rather than creating objectivity, is to help researchers to be aware of their assumptions and expectations. This awareness can help researchers not to "ask questions that lead participants to focus on aspects of the phenomenon that the researcher deems important rather than what stands out in participants' perceptions" (Sohn et al., 2017, p. 130). My positionality and biases are clarified at the end of this chapter.

Types of Phenomenology

There are two types of phenomenology: hermeneutical and transcendental (also called empirical or psychological; Creswell, 2007). Hermeneutical phenomenology views a phenomenon through lived experience, interpreting that phenomenon through the "texts" of life. In this kind of phenomenology, the researcher is viewed as an interpreter of others' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

My research utilized transcendental phenomenology, also known as empirical or psychological phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes a description of the experiences of the participants, rather than the interpretation of their experiences. The researcher attempts to "bracket" out their own experiences with the phenomenon, allowing their conclusions to be drawn as much as possible by the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This way, the researcher "transcends" their own views and examines the phenomenon "freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

In transcendental phenomenological research, the researcher identifies a phenomenon to study, brackets out their own experience, gathers data from multiple participants who have experienced the phenomenon, analyzes the data by concentrating it to pertinent statements, and then organizes those statements into larger themes (Creswell, 2007). After that, the researcher develops a textural description and a structural description of the participants' experiences (which describes both what they experienced and how, respectively) and combines those descriptions into an overarching idea that captures the essence of the experience.

Data Collection

Phenomenological data are usually collected through interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. The interviews are typically thorough, using open-ended questions, and participants may be interviewed multiple times. Other forms of data collection might include observations, journals, and art (Creswell, 2007). The data for this study were collected via interviews. Participants for interviews were selected purposively, to ensure that participants had the necessary experience with a phenomenon.

Participants

Participants for interviews in phenomenological research are expected to be "fertile exemplars of the experience for study...from which the researcher can substantially learn about the experience" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). Participants interviewed for the current study were comprised of three individuals who have had

extensive experience observing S&I teachers, and three teachers in S&I who have had recent experiences being observed.

Figure 3 illustrates how S&I is organized. There is an administrator who answers directly to the general authorities of the Church. An associate administrator works directly with the administrator, and five (currently, though there have been four until recently) assistant administrators oversee specific geographic regions in the world. These seven individuals work together to make decisions and oversee the administration of S&I throughout the world.

Each assistant administrator is assigned to oversee multiple areas in S&I, and the area directors over those areas report directly to their assigned assistant administrator. Some areas also have an assistant area director.

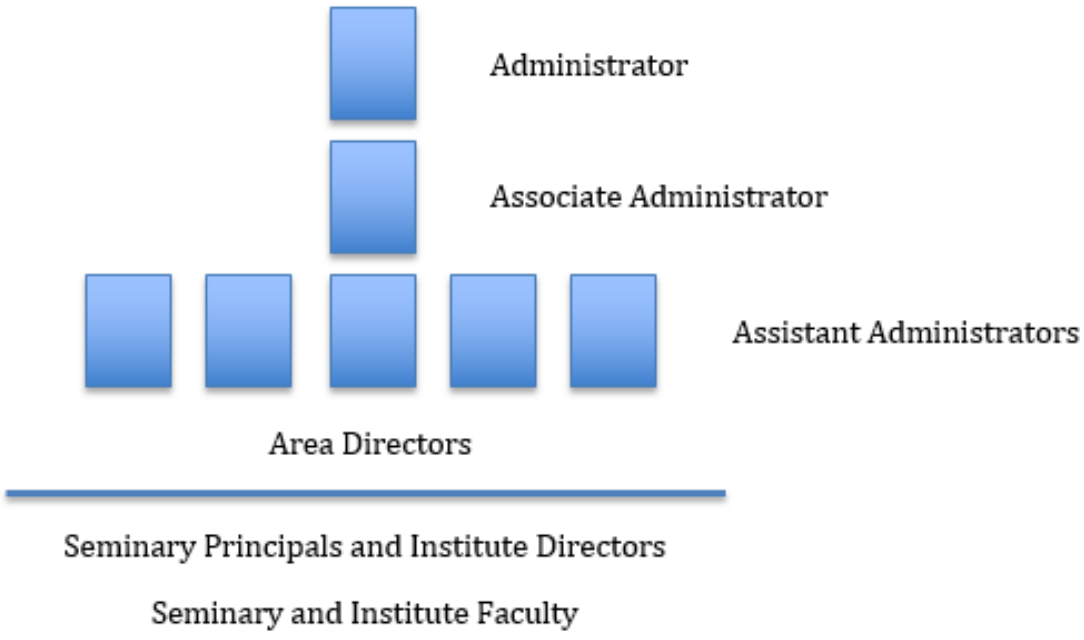

Figure 3. Levels of administrative responsibility in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion.

The horizontal line in Figure 3 denotes a division between S&I employees whose responsibilities are entirely administrative, and those who are teaching in the classroom. Notice that seminary principals and institute directors appear below that line. That is because, unlike public schools, local administrators in S&I teach multiple classes themselves, in addition to their administrative responsibilities. Each seminary and institute also has an assistant principle or associate institute director, who also teach classes, and who assist the principal or institute director with their administrative responsibilities.

For this study, I wanted three participants who have administrative responsibilities above the line in Figure 3, and three participants with professional responsibilities below that line.

For the three administrative participants, I wanted to interview three of the seven administrators at the top of S&I. These administrators experience-rich in the phenomenon of teacher observation and feedback, because they have each been teachers in S&I and have held a variety of other positions in S&I that required them to observe other teachers. Between them they have been coordinators, seminary principals, institute directors, preservice trainers, and area directors.

Because of their role in S&I setting policy, ideally, I wanted all three of the administrative participants to come from this group. They have heavy workloads, however, and are frequently out of their offices travelling out of the country to help administer S&I programs. I selected three administrators based on their experience and was prepared to request the participation of the other administrators, or ask them about area directors they felt would make good participants in this research if they had been

unavailable. This follows the phenomenological methods laid out by Polkinghorn (2005). Area directors would also have made good participants because they supervise multiple seminary and institute faculties in a large area and are personally responsible to regularly observe all the full-time teachers in their area. Contact further potential participants proved unnecessary, however, as the initial three administrators I approached about participating all made themselves available.

In finding teacher participants for this study I was limited by the Utah State University IRB, who directed me to contact area directors in order to find teachers to participate. My goal in selecting teacher participants was to find three teachers with varying experience with teacher observation and feedback in S&I. I wanted them to come from three different areas in S&I, because an area director could have significant influence in how teacher observation and feedback are conducted in an area.

I chose three area directors to contact that oversee areas in Salt Lake and Davis counties in Utah. These three areas had area directors with varying experience. Area directors do not work for a standard length of time, but typically do not serve in that capacity for longer than about six years. The first area director I contacted had been working as an area director for just one year. The second had been an area director for about three years, and the third had been an area director for longer than five years.

In order to find three teacher participants with varying experience with observation and feedback, I wanted to interview one teacher who has been teaching for less than 10 years, another teacher who had been teaching for 10 to 20 years, and another teacher who has been teaching for more than 20 years.

Because I could not select teachers specifically, I asked the first area director if he

could suggest a participant for the study who had over 20 years of experience in S&I, the second area director for participant who had been teaching for 10 to 20 years, and the third for a participant who had fewer than 10 years of experience. The area directors contacted the teachers, obtained their consent to talk with me about the study, and then I was put in contact with each of the teachers, who formally consented to participate in the research.

When initially requesting participants of the area directors, I let them know that participants could also be local administrators (principals or institute directors), since these employees are also teachers and should also be observed regularly by their area directors. I also thought that it would be useful to have insight from local supervisors who also observed other teachers regularly.

Each participant signed an Informed Consent Form approved for this study by the Institutional Review Board of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies for Utah State University. This form is included in the Appendix A.

Interviews

In accordance with phenomenological methodology, I conducted semistructured and open-format interviews, and followed up with participants as needed (see Creswell, 2007). In accordance with the suggestions of Sohn et al. (2017), I ensured that participants knew that their responses would be anonymous.

The interviews included questions about participants' experiences with teacher observation in S&I, as well as the contexts or situations that typically influenced or affected their experiences, and other open-ended questions designed to "elicit

unconstrained descriptions of participants' lived experience" (Sohn et al., 2017, p. 129). The interview protocol for administrators included questions about the purposes of observation and feedback, and both administrators and teachers were asked about formal observation instruments, which helped to answer my research questions.

Before interviewing any participants, I conducted a pilot interview and refined the protocols according to the results of the pilot interview. Data from the pilot interview were not included in the results of this study. Interview protocols are included in Appendix B of this proposal.

During my initial contact with each participant, I explained my research and obtain their unofficial consent to participate. I then scheduled a time and place for the interview that was most convenient for them. Interviews took place in person, face to face. Four participants wanted to meet in their offices, and two wanted to meet in my office, all during regular work hours.

I made it clear to all participants that I was not interviewing them as a function of my S&I position as a curriculum writer, but as a graduate student. My position does not give me any authority or sway over teachers, but in case they did not realize that, I wanted to make sure they understand that I had no professional authority over them and that their participation was completely voluntary and their responses anonymous. Participants were emailed a copy of the informed consent form and all had printed and signed a copy that they gave to me at the outset of the interview.

Interview length was less than an hour for every interview but one. Teacher B's initial interview lasted 69 minutes. I began each interview by explaining the interview process and reiterating some of the major points of the informed consent form to ensure

that participants understood it.

I used the protocols as a general guide for the interview, but responses by participants prompted additional questions not found on the protocols. Each interview was different, and in order to collect the most comprehensive descriptions of their experiences, I needed to be flexible in which questions were asked, in what order they were asked, and as to when I deviated from the preconceived protocol in order to capture participants' lived experiences.

I recorded each interview on two devices in case one malfunctioned and took additional notes that I used during the interview on which to base follow-up questions, as well as to make note of nonverbal cues.

I contacted three of the participants to follow up on their previous responses. My goal was to reach data saturation during the interview and analysis phases of this study, when conversations began to repeat themselves and no new coding categories emerged (see Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

I transcribed each interview and stored the transcripts on my computer and another password-protected digital source. The digital recording devices I use to record the interviews were also password-protected. To further protect participants' anonymity, the names of the transcription and audio recording files did not include any identifying information about the participants. In Chapters IV and V, participants are referred to as Administrator A, Administrator B, Teacher A, Teacher B, etc., rather than by name.

After each interview was transcribed, I provided each participant with a copy of the transcript and the opportunity to review it and correct or clarify anything they felt was unclear or mistaken.

Data Analysis

The first step in analyzing the data from the interviews was to transcribe them. Once transcribed, I coded the data in the interviews, first by reading each interview carefully looking for "significant statements" which Creswell (2007) defined as "sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (p. 61). This is a process that Moustakas (1994) calls *horizontalization*.

I then organized these significant statements into overarching themes, or "clusters of meaning" (Creswell, 2007), a process called *thematization* (Sohn et al, 2017). Initially the themes were informed by the framework presented in Chapter I, but as I organized the significant statements, new themes emerged from the data that were not necessarily associated with that framework. These themes represent common threads in the participants' experiences. Not every theme was a part of every participant's experience, but they were found in most of the participant's experiences, following analysis procedures suggested by Sohn et al.

These statements and themes were then used to create textural and structural descriptions of what the participants experienced. From these descriptions I wrote a composite description that "presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure" (Creswell, 2007, p. 62) that represents the common experience of all of the participants.

These themes and descriptions are presented in Chapter IV. A discussion and interpretation of the results, as well as suggestions for practice and future research, are presented in Chapter V. My interpretation of the meaning of the data is only one

interpretation of it and does not "exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 31) that might be had.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the amount of rigor in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In quantitative methodology, rigor is usually measured in terms of validity (both internal and external), reliability, or objectivity.

Creswell (2003) suggested eight procedures that are often used in qualitative research to verify trustworthiness: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation (multiple data-collection methods, sources, investigators, etc.), peer review and debriefing, negative case analysis (searching out evidence to the contrary of your findings), clarification of researcher bias, member checking (sharing interview transcripts, analysis, or findings with research participants), rich description, and external audit.

I was as engaged and persistently observant as the timeline for my research allowed, and my work was reviewed and audited by members of my doctoral committee. Additionally, I submitted my work to a peer for review and auditing. As I found data that contradicted my findings, I included it in the results and discussion chapters as examples of negative case analysis. I also attempted to write in a way that invites "the reader to enter the research context" (Creswell, 2003, p. 38), providing rich description.

I used three of Creswell's eight procedures more specifically to establish greater trustworthiness in my research: triangulation, member checking, and clarification of

researcher bias.

Triangulation

I interviewed three supervisors and three teachers. Participants' experiences with teacher observation and feedback differed, as did their years of experience in S&I and their feelings toward current and past S&I observation and feedback processes. This variety of sources helped me to draw conclusions that apply to a wider variety of S&I employees, as well as establishing credibility.

Member Checking

At various stages of the research I used member checking to ensure that I correctly interpreted participants' experiences. I shared transcribed interviews with those whom I interviewed, allowing them to correct anything they felt they were not able to communicate clearly.

Positionality

I have worked for S&I since June of 2006. The first ten years of that time I worked as a seminary teacher and principal, as well as a coordinator of several local volunteer teachers. In June of 2016 I was transferred to the Church Office in Salt Lake City to help write seminary curriculum. I have been told that after several years of writing curriculum I will be assigned to teach again.

I have some experience with teacher observation in S&I, both being observed, and observing other teachers. As a student teacher I was observed every two to four weeks over a period of 19 months by preservice trainers, area directors, and principals. I feel

that the feedback I obtained from their observations was invaluable in improving my teaching.

After first being hired to teach full time, I was only observed about once per year, and my first area director gave me very little feedback. I did not feel that the feedback I obtained from these observations significantly improved my teaching. Several years later, a new area director established a culture of teacher observation in our area, and we were encouraged to get out and observe other teachers at least twice per year. We were permitted to get substitutes for our own classes in order to observe other teachers. My area director or his assistant would observe me two or three times per year, and I was observed by my at least one of my peers once or twice a year during that time, also. Observation was a regular part of our monthly inservice meetings, as well. Along with regular observation, our area director focused very strongly on the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning, and on giving real and helpful feedback after observations. I feel that the culture of observation and feedback that my area director introduced to our area had a positive impact on my teaching.

As a coordinator I also oversaw a few local volunteer teachers during my first 10 years of employment. It was my job to train them, observe them regularly (ideally, once a month, though I was frequently unable to observe them so often), and provide feedback.

Because of my experiences with teacher observation and feedback, I am of the opinion that there is a way to do it that will help teachers improve, as long as they are open to feedback.

In my doctoral studies I was introduced to formal teacher observation instruments. I was intrigued to learn that these were commonplace in public schools, and I began to

wonder why teacher observation was not more formal in S&I, and what formal observation in seminary classrooms might look like. In an effort to learn the answers to these questions, I wanted to be aware of my own biases toward teacher observation and feedback, and to do my best to set them aside in an attempt to let the data I gather from others' experiences speak for itself.

My research paradigm is one of social constructivism. Social constructivists seek to understand the world through the viewpoint of those they research (Creswell, 2007). I intend for my research to rely as much as possible on participants' experiences with teacher observation. My research and interview questions begin broadly, so as to allow the participants to construct the meaning of teacher observation within the specific context of S&I classrooms.

Contributions

This study helps to better determine the objectives of teacher observation in S&I, based on data collected from experience-rich S&I employees. It also highlights formal teacher observation in a way that has not been done in S&I in a quarter century. Research from this study may have an impact on S&I policy and practice.

Findings from this study could be used to create and then test an observation instrument tailored specifically to S&I classrooms. This instrument could be used as a point from which to begin further research and eventually a version of it could be used in S&I classrooms widely.

This research could influence every supervising employee and teacher (full-time or volunteer), which would include thousands each year. It could benefit all S&I

employees, since virtually every employee of S&I is either expected to observe teachers or to be observed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, I will introduce the participants of the study, report their experiences with teacher observation and feedback in S&I (organized by major themes common to their experiences), and present textural and structural descriptions as well as a description of the essence of the phenomenon of teacher observation and feedback in S&I.

Participants

There were six participants in this study. All of them were full-time teachers or administrators of S&I who work in Salt Lake or Davis County, Utah. Any information gathered from interviews that might divulge the identity of a participant has been withheld. Any names mentioned during interviews have been changed. Rather than using participants' names, they will be referred to as Administrator A, Administrator B, Administrator C, Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C.

Participants for this study were purposively selected. Administrators were chosen based on their experience with teacher observation and feedback. Teachers were selected from different areas and with different levels of experience to try to capture a wider variety of experiences with observation and feedback.

Administrators

S&I has an administrator, an associate administrator, and five assistant administrators. These seven employees administer all of the seminaries and institutes of

the LDS Church throughout the world. The administrator of S&I works directly under the Commissioner of Church Education, a rotating assignment held by one of the Church's general authority seventies. Administrators A, B, and C are three of the six employees who held these administrative positions in S&I at the time of this research.

Administrator A has worked for S&I for over 25 years and has held a variety of teaching and administrative positions in S&I, including seminary teacher, seminary principal, and area director.

Administrator B has also worked for S&I for over 25 years and has been a seminary teacher, institute teacher, coordinator, and preservice trainer.

Administrator C has worked for S&I for over 30 years and has served as a seminary teacher, coordinator, institute teacher, institute director, and area director.

Teachers

The teachers who participated in this study belonged to different S&I areas in Salt Lake or Davis County, Utah. Each was suggested by their area director for participation in this study based on their years of experience. Although I did not specify that they needed to have any administrative responsibilities currently, each of these teachers currently has administrative responsibilities in addition to their teaching responsibilities. That means that they are regularly observed as teachers and also regularly observe other teachers. Local administrators in S&I (seminary principals and institute directors) are also teachers, and all of them teach multiple classes, unlike public school administrators whose jobs are entirely administrative.

Teacher A has worked in S&I for over 20 years. He is currently an institute

teacher and associate institute director. He has also been a seminary teacher, member of the BYU religion faculty, and curriculum writer.

Teacher B has worked for S&I for 17 years. He is currently a seminary teacher and seminary principal and has also been an assistant principal.

Teacher C has worked for S&I for fewer than 6 years. He is currently an assistant principal and seminary teacher.

Themes

After analyzing interviews with the participants, I identified and categorized "significant statements" (Creswell, 2007) by theme. The framework introduced in Chapter I initially informed the development of these themes, though data gathered from the research expanded beyond that framework.

I have identified six themes that are common to the experience of S&I employees with teacher observation and feedback, and I have organized a presentation of the data collected in this research according to these themes. The themes are change over time, successful strategies, purposes of observation, individualized approach, supervisor training, and observation instruments.

I will provide a discussion of how these findings answered the research questions, a comparison of these findings with existing research, and recommendations for practice and future research in Chapter V.

Change Over Time

All three administrators, as well as Teacher A, reported that their experiences with

teacher observation and feedback in S&I have changed dramatically over the last 20 years.

Speaking of the changes he had seen over the course of his career of more than 25 years, Administrator A said,

> I will say that when I first started, [teacher observation and feedback in S&I] did not exist, period. Principals did not watch teachers. There was no feedback. Now, I don't know if this is true for the system at large, but at least the faculty and the area that I was part of, it just didn't exist. Teachers did not observe each other, period.... If somebody came in to watch you, you felt like you were in trouble. It had to have been that you did something wrong that they would have even showed up, you know? It just didn't seem to exist.

Administrator C reported that he could count on one hand the number of times he was observed by his area director during his first 20 years of employment.

Administrator B described what his experience was like at the beginning of his career:

> We had area directors who were told by teachers they weren't welcome in their classroom and no one was to give them feedback.... It was very confrontational, somewhat combative.... And we didn't have an expectation of principals and institute directors being in classes often, and so teachers kind of closed their door and didn't get a lot of feedback.

Teacher A, who has been teaching for more than 20 years, also said that there wasn't much observation early on in his career: "Very few people observed teaching of S&I employees in the 1980s and early 1990s." He did report that Teacher Support Consultants (TSCs), whose entire job was to observe and provide feedback, were available at that time but that they would only come if you asked for them. His first area director was in charge of close to 190 teachers:

> We were massive. So how were [the area director and his assistant] going to get through everything? And there were years that they just came by for five minutes.... They would...come in the classroom. He'd look around; he'd stay for

> 5, 10 minutes; and then he'd give me a thumbs-up. Or he'd say, "Hey, I love that they're in the scriptures," and then he'd be out the door. And that was my observation for the year...and I don't fault him.

Even though Teacher B has taught for fewer than 20 years, he has also noticed an increase in observation and feedback over his career. Although he was observed by his area director yearly in his first assignment, he wasn't really observed by his principal in his first six years as a full-time teacher (from 2001 to 2007):

> [I was] rarely if ever observed by the principal there for my six first years.... [I] had a mentor, but I mean he was busy teaching a full load like I was, so he never really observed, and I didn't observe much, to be honest, myself.

He then said that he does not remember receiving any feedback during his second assignment, which lasted a year, and that during his next assignment, which also only lasted a year, he was "never observed."

Administrator C reported that "for the good, the culture has changed" now. Administrator B said that "it's night-and-day different. When I go to buildings now and go watch teachers, they quickly say, 'What feedback do you have for me? How can I be better?'" He credits that change to the influence of Elder Paul V. Johnson, who was Commissioner of Church Education from 2008 until 2015. He said that Elder Johnson wanted to "create a culture of kind and candid feedback.... And that culture has really changed because of Elder Johnson."

Successful Strategies

As a part of relating their experiences with teacher observation and feedback, teachers and administrators identified a number of elements that have made observation and feedback a better experience, and more useful for them. The most commonly

discussed elements of successful observation and feedback that they discussed were teacher autonomy, collaboration between area directors and principals, frequent and formative observation, effective feedback, and following up on feedback.

Teacher autonomy. Teachers and administrators reported that observation and feedback work best when teachers are given greater autonomy to direct the process. Administrator A said that teacher observation and feedback will lead to teacher improvement "if it's driven by the individual.... If it's driven by an observer, then the takeaway for me isn't the same."

Administrator C agreed that observation and feedback is not effective at creating teacher change when driven by the observer:

> How do you help every teacher identify what's going to take [him or her] from a seven to an eight or a nine?... I don't think that it's me sitting in the back of the classroom a couple times a year telling them that.... The only thing that's going to get sustained motivation to change has to come from within. So I don't know that me sitting in the back as the supervisor, the appointed boss, saying to you, you know, "You're not making it, and it's this, this, this, and this," is going to necessarily put it in [his or her] heart.

Administrator A also said that observation and feedback work best when instigated by the teacher as a part of their own improvement efforts. In support of this idea, he quoted a line from the *Administering Appropriately* (CEC, 2003) handbook: "Seeking help from others and reporting to leaders are essential in personal development. Because the primary responsibility for personal development rests with the individual, leaders and teachers should routinely assess their own progress" (p. 16). He went on to say,

> I would hope the teacher who invited the observation in the first place, invited the feedback, would also seek for the observer to observe certain things. I think far more is accomplished if a teacher says, "Come and see me and look for the

> following things. Take note of how I ask questions. Identify how I manage classroom behavior. Help me pace better."

Administrator B agreed that teachers should generally determine what an observer looks for:

> A teacher has probably got some goals. They're trying to work on some things, and a principal should know those things and be there to observe and maybe a little specific, you know?... "I know you're working on asking good questions, so when I come...and watch for that, we're going to talk about how you're doing and we're going to use the handbook as the standard, and let's work together."

He also hoped that principals and institute directors would observe their teachers with the attitude of "I'm here to assist you and your goals."

One way that observers can work with teachers on their goals is to use those teachers' professional growth plans. Professional growth plans are a list of goals teachers create each year based on specific system priorities for that year, and their immediate supervisor is supposed to discuss those goals with them multiple times each school year. Administrator C said that there can be a disconnect between a teacher's professional growth plan and his or her observations and feedback:

> We haven't yet, I don't think, across the system, integrated somebody's personal goals with our performance growth forms and with observations so that it's all one and not these two different things we do or three different things we do. I set some goals over here. You come and observe me, make comments about this, [but] it has nothing to do with what I'm trying to work on. Somehow we've got to do better that way.

While administrators hoped that observers would allow teachers to drive observation and feedback, that hasn't always been the reality for the teacher participants in this study. Teacher A said that his previous area director never asked about his own goals or what he would like the area director to observe. Instead, the area director always

followed up on his own recommendations from the previous visit. As a result, he said that teachers' entire focus during an observation was to try to demonstrate whatever feedback they received in their last observation:

> So now it's helpful for men who are being observed, and women, to write down what [the observer] said or at least record it somewhere so that when you come back the next time, you can say, "Last time you said you wanted me to slow down and have students write on the board, because they need to be developing the doctrines and principles a little bit better and you wanted them to write it out…." And so...you'd better write it down now, because...in a year or in six months when he shows back up, that's what he'll be looking for.

Teacher B said that initially his area director always chose what to look for during an observation, and that it was initially always one of the fundamentals of gospel teaching and learning. But when the area director felt like the teachers in the area were sufficiently trained on those, he began to discuss their professional growth plans with them and ask what they were working on:

> So he'd come in often and say, after that, "What do you want me to look for?" And if you're struggling with the understand or creating feeling or the application, whatever it might be, [you] would say, "Well, would you look at my understanding questions that help create relevance?"...And that's all he'd give feedback on. But that's after he had already really, really super trained people that now they could self-identify.

Teacher B also reported the effect that observer-driven observation had on teachers in the area:

> The area director, when he'd come in...people danced his dance. They knew he was there and he was looking for a certain methodology and you would dance to that for him. And I think a lot of guys and even myself once or twice, "Oh, Brother Smith's in here? Boy, let's take a look at this lesson again!"...He did such a good job training that we knew what he was looking for.... With Brother Smith and the stress that he wanted, that followed in a certain way, you found yourself really trying to—especially when he was in there—use the verbiage...that he would understand and know and make sure that you were hitting all those points.... He was in there really trying to observe and look for. And...a guy could do that.

Teacher C reported that both he and his observers have collaboratively determined what his observers would look for during an observation: "I think it's been almost a symbiotic relationship where you've done it together in most cases." But he reported that, as an assistant principal, he has not been given the flexibility to allow teachers he observes to determine what he looks for. His area director has told him what he is to look for in his observations.

Teacher A suggested that teachers could self-direct an observation and feedback experience by inviting their colleagues to observe them and provide feedback:

> What if you were teaching...and I was teaching...and we were coming up on one of the sensitive [lessons]—Mountain Meadows Massacre, or race and the priesthood, or plural marriage—and I said to you, "I want you to come and see me, and this is what I want you to do, and would you come and see me and make sure that I'm answering this in a doctrinal mastery content kind of way?" Then you come in, and then we compare notes.... Those kind of observations and sharings I've found to be even more helpful in some ways because now you're coming with an objective.... And then you share with me how you handled it and then we share student responses and how we would deal with that. Now *that's* getting you ready for teaching, and that's improving teaching in a lot of ways, because it's self-directed. I know I need help in this area. I know you've done well in that area. I know we've both taught that same lesson a couple of times at least in the last two or three years. Now come and let's discuss. That's my favorite feedback, actually—from a colleague usually, who comes in when I say, "Come in and look for this."

Collaboration between area directors and faculty supervisors. Administrator A thought that when an area director and principal or institute director observe together, their feedback carries more weight with the teacher. He said that when an area director brings a principal or institute director along, "That would be, in my mind, the most successful means for observation."

Administrator C pointed out that if two supervisors do not observe and provide

feedback together, they might give contradictory feedback. He then said,

> I think an area director ought to go in, but I think he ought to go in having talked to a principal or an institute director: 'Is there something we're working on?'...if you're not the immediate supervisor, you better make sure you're lined up.

Administrator B hoped that area directors would not try to bypass the principal or institute director as the inservice leader, and that area directors would take principals and institute directors with them when observing teachers on their faculties.

Teacher A has never had an area director who observed along with a seminary principal or institute director during his career of over 20 years.

Teacher B reported that his last area director would observe along with the principal "more often than not." His current area director has only asked him (the principal) to accompany him on one observation, about a year ago. When asked whether he preferred his previous area director's approach to going with principals or the current area director's approach, he said that he preferred to go with an area director when that area director observes teachers on his faculty:

> Oh, I like to go together. Yeah. I think it's awesome.... I know the [teacher]. I know the class most likely, too. I know if it's...a hard go in there. If there's some tough kids, I can say, "Hey, this is one of the tougher kids. I know you see that kid on his phone. Let me tell you a little bit about him."...But I think going together is just so much more powerful.

Teacher C said that his area director does not bring principals or assistant principals along on observations unless they are new to that position and he is training them.

Frequent and formative observation. Administrator C didn't want observations to be fearful for teachers. He said that one way for observations to be less intimidating is if they become commonplace and familiar:

> If my area director comes in once a year, that's an event...but if, for example, an area director popped into the back of my class for even 10 minutes, but it happened every other week, that's not so much an event, it's just...my area director. This is kind of what he does.... So to have it be less of an event, it takes away that...kind of pressure.

Teacher B's experiences with observation echo this thought. Speaking of his preservice experiences with observation, he said, "That was just dreadful." And he spoke similarly of his experiences with observation from his area director in his first area: "The area director would come occasionally, like once a quarter, but always it was just so fearful for me."

Administrator C also said that if observation is infrequent and a supervisor visits a class on a day when a lesson was uncharacteristically unengaging, the supervisor might draw the wrong conclusion about the teacher, and the teacher may experience greater stress as a result of the observation and feedback. He went on to talk about his experience as an observer:

> I tried to be pretty faithful about visiting them regularly. And I'd go to their offices [for the post-observation conference]. I didn't want them to come to my office. Again, I don't want it to be the event.... I'd try to just wander around [the building] and just talk, just "How are you doing? How are things? How's the family? And how are you feeling about the semester, and what are you working on?" So again...they knew that I had the responsibility to oversee the program and its success, and so they weren't opposed to that, but I didn't want it to be the—I've been called to the principal's office, so to speak.... I didn't go in with papers—I went in with my scriptures. I participated in class. I raised my hand and interject something, so I was just a part of the class.

The teachers interviewed for this study all spoke about being part of a culture of observation and feedback at some point in their careers. Each was part of a faculty at one or more points in their career, where there were frequent observations that were part of their normal expectations. These cultures of observation and feedback were also

characterized by formative evaluation rather than summative. The goal of the observations was simply to help teachers improve. Teachers agreed that when observation and feedback is part of the culture of a faculty, they are no longer intimidating, but seen as something positive that helps teachers improve.

Teacher A is observed two or three times each semester. He thought that a culture of frequent observation began in the late 1990s. He described the attitude of observation and feedback that began to develop at that time:

> We're coming to watch you. We're coming to evaluate you. Get used to feedback. Get used to people sitting in your classroom. In fact, it would be helpful if you asked for feedback after we interview you, or observation. That way it doesn't make it so awkward for the giver.

Teacher B's experience with frequency of observation and feedback has been variable. During his first year, he was observed by his area director four times. During his next five years, he was observed once each year by his area director, but rarely if ever by his principal. He doesn't remember any feedback from the next two years of his career. For the five years after that, he was observed at least monthly by his principal. This faculty developed a culture of observation and feedback, about which Teacher B spoke very positively:

> When he was the principal, he had this relationship with all the guys here. Like we would take a bullet for [him].... We were unified.... We knew he loved us.... [He] would come in at least once a month, and more often if you asked him to. And guys would ask [him] to come in and observe him. I'd never seen that before. Because they valued his feedback.

Teacher C spoke about the culture of observation and feedback that he experienced in his first assignment:

> On my very first faculty...our principal had us do lots of observations of each other. So we would have an inservice with a challenge to go observe another

> teacher sometime this week for a specific amount of time, but look for content, look for understanding, look for whatever it was for that week, and give feedback on it, and then come back and we'll report to each other the great things you saw and the things you want to get better. And so we created a culture of observation. And because of that, it became less intimidating and scary when someone offered criticism and feedback. It was, "We're all trying to learn together and become the best teachers we can." So that was helpful—knowing that I was going to be observed frequently and it was okay.

Teacher C's current faculty does not do the same thing, though he (as the assistant principal) and the principal each observe another teacher once a week. He said on his first faculty he was being observed once every 2 weeks, on average. That frequency dropped to three observations each semester after moving to his current faculty.

Effective feedback. Administrators and teachers agreed on several characteristics of effective feedback: that it should be given kindly, that it should be based on clearly defined standards, that it should be limited to just a few things for a teacher to work on, and that the post-observation conference in which the feedback was given, as well as any goal-setting that took place thereafter, should be a collaborative process between the teacher and observer.

***Kindness in feedback*.** Teachers and administrators thought that while candid feedback is important, there is a kind way to deliver it. Nonprofessional teachers are especially sensitive to criticism, according to Administrator A, who also said, "I have been appreciative of those coordinators who have approached feedback with gentleness, and always those good teachers are quick to request help."

Teacher C spoke very positively about his preservice trainers' ability to provide critical feedback in a kind way:

> I had some preservice observers that were phenomenal. My two preservice instructors, their feedback was always great, and even when they were—needed

> to be critical of something, they handled it in a very kind way. That made me feel like I could do better, versus one or two others that observed that I just felt like I was not a very good teacher and discouraged by that. Since coming into full-time employment, my current area director is phenomenal at feedback because of that same thing. He helps you discover it for yourself, what could have been better in the outcomes and making you feel like you can leave having a better lesson the next time because you know exactly what you want to change and you figured it out. He really did, but he helped you do it for yourself.

***Standards-based feedback*.** Administrators and teachers all agreed that feedback based on teaching-style preferences or personal opinions is not helpful. Teacher A says that observation and feedback has made him a better teacher when it has helped him "focus on the current goals, priorities, and teaching pedagogy" of S&I.

As previously noted, a part of Elder Paul V. Johnson's legacy in S&I was to create an atmosphere of kind and candid feedback. Administrator B related the counsel he got from Elder Johnson regarding feedback:

> Elder Johnson said, "For too long we've had...these expectations that were very practice-oriented." And he said, "Would you please get us away from that?" I remember his example. He said, "If you ever catch yourself giving feedback to a teacher with something like, 'You know, you spoke with your hands in your pocket,' or 'You were looking to the left,'...would you please get beyond those kinds of, you know, standards for feedback? That's not what this is about. Focus on what really matters. The principles that matter. Teach our teachers the principles. Certainly, they have to think about application and what that's going to look like in their class, but we're not going to change hearts by taking our hands out of our pockets. We've got to be talking about the Spirit and the role of the scriptures and the role of the student."

On the topic of providing feedback based on standards, Administrator C said the following:

> I always wrestled with the issue of, how do I identify but keep it tied to an objective standard and not to my preference and my way of doing it? So I think that's part of our problem as well. So you know, I'm a 10-year teacher. I've been teaching. I've had success in class. They've now appointed me to be a principal. And now I'm sitting in the back of somebody else's class. How do I keep this from being, "This is what I do and how I do it, and it works for me"? And to

> separate style from what are the fundamentals that need to be present for success and put your color or spin on it as you will.... We're getting better and better, but I don't know that we're completely there yet.

When asked what the standards are that feedback should be based on, Administrator C replied, "I think we have it...in our handbook."

Teachers were particularly insistent that feedback should be based on system-wide standards. Teacher A said that whether feedback is helpful "depends greatly on the person giving the feedback." He explained:

> Do they follow a standard from the [*Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook], or do they have some other way? The closer the observer is to the standard, then the feedback is better.... If the person giving feedback uses a standard—like the GTL—then it goes much better. If not, then it is a surprise how the observer wanted the lesson to be taught (the pedagogy or instructional preference), and it is usually discovered by the teacher after the lesson is taught, during feedback.

Teacher A said that most of his principals, institute directors, and area directors have given standards-based feedback, "except for one area director, and he didn't feel the need to read that." Teacher A felt like feedback that's not based on *Gospel Teaching and Learning* is not useful, because it is only based on teaching style and personal preference. He called such feedback "completely arbitrary. Almost always 100% subjective to his...or her personality."

Teacher B reported that receiving standards-based feedback was one of the reasons he was more open to observation and feedback: "I was willing to have [my principal] come in because I knew it was going to bless me. I knew he was going to give me feedback on the standard that was needed and what I was trying to reach and not his personal preference."

Teacher C addressed the topic of standards-based feedback more than any other

participant. He had had some bad experiences as a student teacher when observers (not his preservice trainers, but others) would give him feedback based on their teaching style or personality. Feedback he received that was based on common accepted standards "felt less harsh" to him.

Teacher C also said that standards-based feedback is more useful than feedback on a particular lesson plan, especially if the observer saw "the last time I was ever going to teach that lesson and I can't change anything about that. Whereas [feedback] focused on those outcomes—I can apply that to my next lesson and every lesson after this."

Teacher C is an assistant principal, but there are only two others on his large faculty who have fewer years of experience teaching than he has. Despite his lack of experience, he does not feel intimidated by the responsibility to observe and give feedback to teachers who have far more experience. He credits this partially to being careful to give standards-based feedback:

> That way when I give the feedback and say, "It's really good if you try this in your lessons," and I can open up [the handbook] and show them, "Would you read this? How could this make a difference?" Then it's never, "Well, that's just [your] opinion." Especially where I feel inadequate in this job anyway...I never want to give feedback that is based on [my] lack of experience or [my] grand experience. That doesn't really matter a whole lot to me. These are principles that are tried and true and/or revealed by our leaders. and I think it's easier to take the feedback when it's coming from those sources rather than, "[He] thought I should do this, but what does he know?"

***Limited feedback*.** Teachers and administrators talked about too much feedback being overwhelming. Administrator B said that this is particularly true of non-professional teachers who volunteer their time to teach seminary. He said he that as a coordinator, he would only give "maybe one" suggestion to nonprofessional teachers during post-observation conferences.

According to Administrator A, full-time teachers also benefit from fewer items to work on:

> I think [observers] can provide too much [feedback].... I've seen observers dump on a teacher, and I don't think that they necessarily have the capacity at that point to process everything that's thrown at them. And so, if you're asking the practical way to provide feedback, I would say in smaller chunks. If you can identify one or two things that went really well, if you can help them identify one or two at the most things that could be improved.... It's just too much at some point. And there's law of diminishing returns at some point that kicks in if you give them too much.

Teacher C says that although he can often spot multiple things a teacher could have done better, he intentionally limits his feedback to one thing the teacher can improve:

> It's interesting trying to figure out what kind of feedback is going to be the most helpful. Because if I want to get nitpicky with things, I can pick out 10 different things that, for outcome's sake. And if I'm looking at the manual I could show them, "You should have done this; you could have done this, maybe," and that's overwhelming and not helpful, and so trying to pick the one thing that will have the most, the biggest impact on their teaching is a challenge, but a fun one to try and figure out as you're talking to them.

Collaborative feedback. Administrators all thought that the post-observation conference between teachers and observers should be a collaborative debriefing of how the class went and the direction a teacher should take for self-improvement. This collaboration is another way to honor a teacher's autonomy during the observation and feedback process.

Administrator B reported that feedback works best when it is a collaborative discussion between the observer and the teacher being observed:

> I think it's really important that it's done in a spirit of a counsel so that you're together trying to arrive at how did things go. And teachers know, I mean, they generally—not always but generally—they know how things went, right? And they can even tell you why it didn't go well. And so in that spirit of counseling

> together to say, “Here’s what you’re working on, how did that go, how can I help you?” instead of “I’ve made an evaluation and here’s my report.”

Administrators were united in the idea that any post-observation conference should begin with a teacher self-assessment about how the class went. Administrator C said, “More times than not, and I mean...9 out of 10 times, they were the ones to say, ‘It didn’t go as well as I’d want.’...And more times than not, they knew why.”

Teacher C says that after he has observed a teacher, he decides what feedback he wants to give, but then rather than just giving teachers that feedback, he will discuss how the class went with them. He said, “They’ll usually come to that response themselves.” He also said that in discussing the lesson with a teacher, he can also see whether a teaching skill they failed to do well that day is something the teacher understands but just did not do well, or whether it’s something they need training on.

Teacher C likes being asked about how he thought a class went after an observation because it gives him an opportunity to reflect:

> I have appreciated questions that help me discover those principles on my own, so with engagement and deep learning, a question [my area director] will ask frequently is “When did you feel your students were most engaged in the lesson?” A question like that forces me to reflect back and, “This was the thing.” “Why do you think that helped them to be more engaged than other parts? When were they the least engaged in your lesson?” “It was during this part.” “Why do you think that was going on?” And he can gauge understanding based on my responses, but also I realize, “Oh, I was doing this, and that just was not effective for meeting the outcome.” And then based on that, he can make an invitation to improve in that area.... helping you discover it for yourself. Asking questions that help you reflect on your own lesson.

Following up. Though administrators did not talk about following up with teachers after giving feedback as an effective strategy, two of the teachers mentioned that accountability and follow-up improved their experience with observation and feedback

and made them more likely to apply feedback.

Teacher B compared some efforts that his area director and his principal have taken to follow up on feedback:

> Some guys didn't like this—but going back to [the area director]...his observations for one year was...I think it was him and the teacher together would identify an area of the lesson that was weak, fundamentally, and he would give suggestions: "This is—try this question, or try this approach here, let's rewrite this, let's work on this." And he would come on an A day at the high school level, and he'd say, "I'll come back tomorrow, B day, and see how you did." Because let's be honest, the tendency of most teachers when they receive feedback, I believe, is unfortunately not to change. They're kind of set in their ways, and this really prodded a teacher to implement this, try this, see it. And so he'd come back the next day and go to another class, and the teacher, whether he liked it or not, he was going to implement that in his lesson because he felt like, you know, your director's there, your boss is there, you know you gotta do it. And to what extent guys would change that permanently and adopt it, I don't know.... I know John, my one principal, that he would often...give that really good feedback and then he'd say, "Try this question," or "Do this," like "Do this next period and let me know how it goes." And he would follow up at lunch or after school. I remember he would say, "Hey, how did it go? Did you do it? Did you ask it?" And the teachers would say, "Yeah, I did," and they'd talk about the result. I mean it was really...kind of cool to see. Like guys would want to do it.... They would do it because they knew that John was a great teacher.

Teacher C also identified following up as an element of effective observation and feedback. He also had an area director that observed him two days in a row to see how he implemented feedback. Teacher C said, "It was awesome and helped me understand it better." He also reported that the good observers he has had have said something like, "Will you tell me after your next lesson if this change seemed to make a difference?" He also said that knowing an observer will follow up impacts his incorporation of feedback: "I'll have my lesson plan open and make an immediate change on there to try and reflect, and just try it. Because usually they'll...follow up."

Purposes of Observation

One of this study's major research questions addressed the purposes of observation and feedback in S&I. I asked each of the administrators what, based on their experiences, they felt the purposes of observation and feedback in S&I were. They identified three overarching objectives for observation and feedback in S&I: meeting the objective of S&I and measuring whether that is happening in the classrooms, improving teaching, and identifying problems in the classroom. They also all reported that different observers will have different sub-goals as they observe and provide feedback.

The objective of Seminaries and Institutes. Every administrator connected the purpose of observation and feedback to the objective of S&I as well as the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook in which the objective is found: "Our purpose is to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven" (S&I 2012, p. x). A subsection of the S&I objective defines how teachers should teach: "We teach students the doctrines and principles of the gospel as found in the scriptures and the words of the prophets. These doctrines and principles are taught in a way that leads to understanding and edification. We help students fulfill their role in the learning process and prepare them to teach the gospel to others" (S&I, 2012, p. x).

Administrator A said that the objective of observation and feedback is the same as the system objective. He added, "All of our observations should be focused at some point on whether or not that lesson ultimately led to them better understanding the Atonement and teachings of Christ."

In addition to helping accomplish the objective of S&I, Administrator A said that teacher observation can measure whether the objective is being met in a classroom:

> We've identified our own primary objective is to help these youth and young adults understand and rely. If that's the primary objective, we need a means to measure whether we're successful at that, right?...We do need something, or we can't measure whether or not we're successful.

Teacher improvement. While Administrator A said that the objective of observation and feedback in S&I was the same as the system objective, he also said that teacher development for him is "the primary objective" for observation and feedback. Administrator B's experience agreed: "As a coordinator, I think my objective was certainly to improve the experience in the classroom." Administrator C said that principals and area directors are looking for how to help teachers improve, since teachers are an investment for S&I. He said that as a principal, institute director, or area director, "My responsibility is to help them be a better teacher than when I first got them."

Administrators agreed that most observation and feedback in S&I is formative rather than summative. Administrator B said that an area director's observation and feedback might be more summative in nature than a principal's or institute director's because an area director has to make decisions about placement and sometimes termination of employment. He also said, however, that an area director's evaluation is not entirely summative because "we don't send in reports that say we've graded out our teachers. This one's an A, and that one's a D. So it's summative, but probably not in the truest sense of evaluations that people think of."

Administrator C thought that observation should be entirely formative, and he worried that some teachers have a negative opinion of observation and feedback because

they view it as more of a summative exercise.

Teacher B had a negative experience with observation and feedback during his preservice training and first assignment where he felt that observations were judgments on his teaching. After he had an area director and principal whose clear purpose was to help him improve, he had a better experience:

> I knew that [my principal] had no other purpose than to help you improve. And I knew that [he] knew my strengths and I felt like my strengths outweighed my weaknesses and I was on good standing with [him]. I just knew that. [My area director] would make me nervous when he'd come in, too, but not anything like preservice. Preservice—your career, your dream, your dream job is on the line, and you were—I was petrified of that.... The thing that was so confusing about preservice, you never knew where you stood. You never knew, 'cause they'd never give the feedback.... Occasionally they'd say, "Hey, good job," but it was like pulling teeth trying to get any feedback out of them. They really kept it close to the vest.

Administrator A, however, would like to see some formal summative evaluation in S&I in the case of employment termination:

> We don't currently have anything that's summative in nature. Especially for firing.... I think we have a bit of a summative approach to our hiring. We do formative evaluations, we document, document, document leading up to termination, but I've actually campaigned for more summative assessments leading up to termination.... Because we have a lot of them that want to come back. Well, when they want to come back, we have nothing summative to go to. We have formative assessments, but nothing that's kind of an overall assessment of what they did. So they leave voluntarily to pursue other employment, and they want to come back in 14 months, but we don't have anything to fall back on. So I'm actually a proponent of having more of that. I just don't know how to design it.... But I think it would be helpful.

It should be noted, however, that Administrator C does not think that teacher observation and feedback are the best way to improve teaching: "I don't know that [observation] is at the top of my list. If we're going to really change teaching, I think there are some other things that I would put ahead of it." He thought that teacher self-

assessment was a greater catalyst for change than observation and feedback.

Identifying problems in the classroom. Closely related to the objective of measuring whether the S&I objective is happening in classrooms is the objective of identifying problems in classrooms. Administrator C identified this as his primary reason for teacher observation: "I think more than anything else...it's really more of the identify: we've got a problem. It's a whole other question, what are we going to do about it? But it's more to catch problem spots."

Several of the participants spoke of observation and feedback as providing a mirror for the teacher. It helps them see things about their teaching that they would otherwise be unaware of. For example, Teacher C said;

> It's hard to recognize in the moment what you're doing and what impact it's having. In preservice I remember once we had to film ourselves teach a lesson and then just watch it to see things we do.... In a more general sense, I think observations do the same thing. I can't always recognize that I'm missing part of my lesson, or in the moment, it's harder to see. And an observer who's trying to be effective I think can help you see yourself and what things you can improve on.... I'm a far better teacher today because of observation and feedback than I ever would have been.

Goals of different supervisors. While Administrator B said that for every supervisor, "at the heart of it, the way you approach [observation and feedback], the things you're looking for by way of good teaching are the same," he and the other administrators agreed that supervisors at different levels had different roles regarding observation and feedback. The S&I positions that include a responsibility to observe teachers and provide feedback are coordinators, seminary principals and institute directors (and their assistants), area directors, and preservice trainers. Even regular teachers are encouraged to observe one another as part of inservice training (S&I, 2012).

Coordinators. Coordinators in S&I work in areas where there are not enough Latter-day Saint youth to require a full-time seminary teacher. In these areas, local members of the Church are asked by their ecclesiastical leaders to teach seminary as a calling. Because this assignment or calling typically comes from leaders over a group of LDS congregations that are known as a stake, these teachers are called stake-called teachers. Coordinators are usually responsible to help train and support all the stake-called teachers in multiple stakes.

As a coordinator, Administrator B oversaw and trained 63 seminary teachers and 25 institute teachers in addition to teaching two night courses per week. The number of teachers he oversaw meant that he could only observe each of them once or twice each school year. He said, "If I'm only going to be here once, they need to have support. They need to be appreciated. As we do talk about improving teaching, it's got to be one thing, maybe."

Each of the administrators also said that the goal of observation and feedback with stake-called teachers is not to try to help the teachers become as good at teaching as full-time teachers are. Each of them said that stake-called teachers do not respond well to feedback that will turn them into a better teacher, but that they do react to feedback that will help their students have a better experience. Administrator B said he learned that as a coordinator:

> I learned pretty quickly that when you talk to [stake-called] teachers, when you give feedback, you observe their class and you start to talk about how they can improve as teachers, that there's some resistance because they don't often—again, this is not everybody, but generally speaking, a lot of our [stake-called] teachers don't believe they'll ever be at that level of teaching, that they'll have the opportunity of that kind of training and time. They're trying to prepare tomorrow's lesson, not become a master teacher in the sense that maybe you talk

> about with full-time person whose craft it is to be a teacher. But if you talk to them about their students and about the experience that their students are having, they're very anxious to give their students the best experience they can. They're already sacrificing a lot, they're already working really hard at this, and if instead of saying, "Here's how you can be a better teacher," you say, "So what are you trying to create for your students? What experiences and what challenges do you have?" then they're all in.

Seminary principals and institute directors. Administrator A said,

> The principal, in my mind, is the primary inservice leader. And as such, he or she has the primary responsibility for observation and feedback, and for growth in the building. An area director takes a secondary role in my mind. Now their objective should be the same—it's to accomplish the system-wide objective—but...as an area director I would...consistently lean on my principals to take that primary role.

Teacher A confirmed that his institute director is the person who observes him more than anyone else and that

> only the institute director has the full picture. The area director...and others that are coming don't have my professional growth plan, so they have no context to come in and give me any feedback. So they won't even know what my goals are. The institute director does because he sat down and held us accountable in June to write it.... Then he'll come back and do it in an interview, and then he's observing as well. So only truly the principal or the [institute] director has a graph that can even connect the dots."

Administrator B agreed: "An area director's probably going to get into that classroom once or twice a year. We've been encouraging area directors to not take the place of principals." He went on to say that while a principal has many administrative responsibilities, observing the teachers on their faculty and providing them feedback is

> their most important responsibility.... The other ones are really important, too, but still, we're a teaching organization. We're here for the students, and their job—to make sure that that experience is what is should be—is the most important thing they do.

Teacher C's experiences have not supported this view of a seminary principal being the primary supervisor. When asked who he viewed as the person who is primarily

responsible to observe him and provide feedback, he said,

> Over my five years, it's been the area director and, when we had one, his assistant area director, because of how focused they were on meeting outcomes and explaining what those outcomes were.

Area directors. Area directors have a responsibility to train the teachers in their area and to observe them and provide feedback. Administrators recognized, however, that their role is different from that of seminary principals and institute directors.

Participants talked about one purpose of observation and feedback unique to area directors, and that was to use observation as a way of training seminary principals and institute directors. Administrator A said,

> As an area director, I would come to observe the principal observing the teacher. To me there was more benefit in observing the principal give the feedback. When I left, I knew that principal would then be left with the responsibility for inservicing in that building.

Administrator B had this to say:

> I hope [area directors will] go with principals and help the principals do their role as the one who's the inservice leader and not bypass them and think that in one visit once a year they're going to improve teaching, because, you know, you could see anything on one day. It's not really going to tell you how the teacher is doing that year. It gives you a sense, because there are some things that are hard to fool—hard to fake, right?...And so I think when an area director goes, he needs to understand that, and talk to the principal and know a little bit more about what's going on. And he's probably there...to be one more voice of overall assessment and goal-setting and, you know, placement opportunities...because he's always looking at whose principals are retiring, or there's a need at the institute...and getting to know people and be supportive and build relationships, which I think is a little different than a principal, who had an inservice meeting, taught a particular skill, practiced it, and then went to observe and give feedback on what they're practicing and working on.

Teacher B's area director used observations as an opportunity to train him as the principal:

> The thing that was the best for me for feedback...something that [my area

> director] would do that was best is he would train us to give the feedback. So for example—this was brilliant—he'd come over here and he'd schedule, "Hey, we're going to go see Brother Jones third period. Are you available?... I want you to join me. And I want you to give the feedback." And so you would together go with the area director, sit in the classroom, and you'd watch the lesson, and or you'd leave five minutes before the lesson's about to get out. I remember vividly doing this several times, and you'd jump into another room, you'd sit down, and [the area director] would say, "All right, what did you see?" And I would—boy, that's when you're really taking notes in the lesson and looking for these gaps because he expected us to be the guy that could go in there and give feedback like he could.... So then he would watch as you gave the feedback. He'd say a couple things, but he would...model it. Like I remember watching him give feedback, and I would...take notes on what he was saying and how he was giving feedback.

Teacher B said that before giving the feedback, his area director would discuss with him what they had seen and how they felt the class had gone. Then his area director would review with him some of the things they had discussed:

> "Let's make sure you point out these things that he did great. We're going to praise on these things. Let's help him identify this part of the lesson where he could do better, and let's point to that. We're in the handbook where we can train that, so he knows that's not just from us." So we'd sit down with [the teacher], and I'd give him the feedback while [the area director] was sitting right there. And it was really good. And he'd jump in and say some things, and that's what he expected. And then he would pat you on the back, "Great job," or whatever. If I remember right, after the teacher left, he'd give you feedback on how you gave feedback.

When Teacher C was assigned to be an assistant principal, he had a similar experience with his area director:

> The first two months of the school year, Brother Anderson, our area director, took me out observing with him [to] everyone on our faculty. So we just outlined the whole first term and made a schedule, and we observed two or three teachers a week...and at the end of the lesson, he and I would step aside for a while, and we'd come in my office and chat for a couple minutes, and he would just ask what I saw. And if there were things that I missed, he would point out, "Did you notice this?" and so he'd give me great feedback on my observing the same way he'd give to someone teaching. And the very first time he asked, "Would you feel comfortable giving the feedback, or do you want me to do it?" and encouraged me to do it myself, so then we went—I gave the feedback, and he prefaced it by explaining why I was there. He said, "He's in training, too, and he's going to give

> great feedback, and so I'm going to step aside and let him do it." And I'd give the feedback and turn to him and say, "Anything else?" And he'd either say no or add a thought or two that could be helpful. Then we'd come back in my office a last time and debrief what happened during the feedback portion. So that was awesome just 'cause I—I've been done with that for over a month now and still observing. I feel more comfortable in what I need to do.

Administrator B talked about another way area directors can improve teaching through observation. As they observe the teachers in their area, they can take note of which teachers do well at certain teaching skills. Then when teachers see a need to improve in a particular area, an area director can give them an idea of which teachers they can go see in order to get a better idea about how to improve in that area.

Teacher B had an area director who would use colleague observation in a similar way to help struggling teachers improve:

> [He] would take that teacher—they'd get a sub—take that teacher with him and he would go to...three different/four different teachers that day. Spend the whole day with them.... [The area director] would come to my classroom sometimes with a teacher from the area.... And they'd sit in your classroom, and they'd observe as long as he wanted to. It might be the whole lesson. They might leave a couple minutes early to get to the next building.... So he used that to totally train guys who were struggling.... He would find a guy that was struggling with perhaps relevance or clearly identifying the truth or some variety, or whatever, and he knew the guys in the area who were killer at it, really good. So he'd take them there and he'd give them the vision.... And he would talk with the teacher afterward: "What did you see?" You know, "What did he do? What did you like? How did—"...and off to the next...to see another guy who's doing a great job.... He wasn't just going with who he thought was great. He might take that teacher to a guy who's just like him and sit there through it and use that as a not "Hey, you're like this guy," but "Hey...what did you notice [about] how he did this or how he did that?" And that guy would go, "Oh, wow...he didn't do that, and so we didn't reach that outcome. We didn't get to that level." And it was a great way to train.... I remember sitting in a principals' meeting where even a principal said [to the area director], "Your approach to do that is paying more dividends than anything else that's going on."...All the principals...loved it, and we'd tell him, "Hey, could you take out so-and-so...and spend a day with him?"

Preservice trainers. Preservice trainers have some of the most clearly defined

purposes to their observation. It is their responsibility to train student teachers and then help determine whether those student teachers should be hired to teach full-time. Regarding preservice trainers, Administrator B said,

> You're trying to make decisions about whether or not to hire them.... At first give them a lot of feedback and give them a lot of help and make sure you train, but at some point, you kick the training wheels off and see if they can do it without your help. And you're making an evaluation. So it's kind of the first semester a lot of help, second semester a lot of observation and evaluation.

Colleagues. Administrators viewed colleague observations as very different in purpose from supervisor observations. Administrator B said,

> I think a colleague goes as much to learn, and he is to help, right? You go to observe and think about the skill this teacher has that you could learn from.... So they're going to observe for their own benefit as much as giving feedback. But yeah, I think they can talk together after and say, "What are you working on?" and "Here's what I saw," and kind of like a mirror more than an evaluation.

Administrator C said that watching their colleagues will help teachers to find out, with the help of the Holy Ghost, what they need to improve. He thought that teachers are better at finding out what they need to improve than supervisors are, and that watching other teachers will help with that.

Teacher A said that he preferred colleague observation to supervisor observation, especially when the colleagues are teaching the same course and can use observation and feedback as a way of figuring out how best to teach a particular lesson or develop a particular skill.

Individualized Approach

In agreement with situational leadership theory, administrators agreed that a teacher's experience, ability, and attitude should have an influence on the way a

supervisor approaches observation and feedback.

As stated earlier, participants believed that observation and feedback were more effective when they were driven by the teacher. But administrators also agreed that a teacher's ability to assess their own teaching, or correctly identify what they need to improve on, can be affected by a lack of experience or ability as a teacher. Administrator A said that there is "no question" that teachers who are struggling are less able to choose well the things that an observer should look for. He then said, "I still think that we'll get more traction if they invite [the feedback], but if they can't see it, somebody has to point it out."

Administrator C tried to allow teachers to drive both the observation and feedback and tried to help teachers see what he saw if it was not immediately apparent to them:

> I consciously tried to ask them at the outset, "Is there something you're working on that I could specifically watch for?" Now if there were other glaring things, I obviously saw them. Then it was my task, how do I, in a constructive way, maybe help them see what I saw (if it was a glaring enough of a thing)? And that was pretty rare. But I tried to be me: "What can I do to help you? What are you working on?"

Administrator C did admit that there are some teachers who cannot see what they are doing wrong, and that those teachers need more directive feedback. He related a story about a struggling teacher whose supervisor saw some major problems in what this teacher was doing. When the observer asked the teacher after the class was over how the teacher felt the class had gone, the teacher responded that he thought the class had gone really well. Administrator C said that "it almost got him fired" because he was so oblivious to the things he was doing wrong. He said that struggling teachers typically need a more guided experience through observation and feedback.

Administrator A said that feedback should be "driven by individual need," and that the needs of newer teachers are often different than the needs of more seasoned teachers. Whatever their different needs, he said that an observer should tailor observation and feedback to those needs:

> I think I'd spend more time with an apprentice observing skills and helping them fine-tune skills, and with a seasoned teacher, I might spend more time on teaching principle and doctrine. And now there are those seasoned teachers who get caught in a rut or stuck in a rut that could be freed from that rut by being taught a skill or two, so again, it's driven by individual need, but I think out of the gate, an apprentice to me would need more help fundamentally with some of the top few skills that would help them invite the Holy Ghost quicker, but again, all of it would be driven by needs. So I guess in some cases the seasoned teacher would need just as much help as a new teacher.

Administrator B felt that a teacher's attitude was more of a factor in observation and feedback than even their ability or experience:

> The attitude of the teacher has a lot to do with the ability of having good feedback. And I've seen teachers who are struggling, but whose attitudes of wanting to improve and have feedback and recognizing their deficiencies have made that experience very positive. And I've seen teachers who aren't doing very well, but get very defensive, have a hard time making that a good experience. And so I don't know if it's the level of their performance in the classroom as [much as] their attitude toward feedback, generally.... Maybe a combination, but I'd probably say more attitude.

Teacher A said that a teacher's attitude will determine whether he gives feedback or not. Because he is an associate institute director rather than an institute director, he does not feel that it is his place to provide feedback to teachers who do not want it. After observing a class, he will always ask teachers if they would like feedback before telling them what he observed. He says that every teacher asks for feedback except for teachers who are close to retirement:

> If they're going to retire that year or in the next year, they generally don't ask for feedback.... And one openly said this year, who's retiring, "You don't need to

observe me this year. And if you do, it won't matter."

Teacher B has found teacher attitude to be a discouraging problem for him as a seminary principal:

> You know, the thing I struggle with [as a principal]...that I guess has been bothering me lately is that guys...don't want to accept the feedback to change. I mean, I'll be honest with you, I've got a couple guys, including...some of the guys that I've had as my assistant principal...they want to change what they hear from Salt Lake. You know what I mean? Doctrinal mastery. I've got guys here that are still not on board to do it like we've been trained to do it. They want to do it when it comes up naturally in the scripture block, which means they never get to the scenarios and they are still fighting it and wondering when it's somehow going to shift back.... I just feel that too many guys feel that their way of teaching that they've taught forever, that's the way to do it.

Teacher C recognized the need for teachers to be humble enough to take correction without being offended by it:

> As far as receiving feedback, first understanding the purpose, and it's not to criticize you, and it's not to make you feel bad. We're trying to help each other improve, so just getting that out of the way. And the way the observer approaches it I think can help with that feeling. And being humble enough to recognize that we can all improve in lots of different ways, and maybe you don't always agree with the feedback given.... And not being offended that something you did wasn't observed the way you hoped it would be.... We can be careful at not being offended like I was early on when I was given straight talk in my feedback.

Supervisor Training

The training that observers receive, or lack of training, was a part of the participants' experiences with observation and feedback. Administrator A received training on observation and giving feedback: "The central office provided training specific to observation and feedback about the time that I was asked to be a principal. That was just a lifeline for me. I leaned very heavily on that." At the same time, he said that the administration has identified the training of supervisors as

> ...a major gap in our current training. We feel very strongly that we need to be better at training our principals on observation and feedback.... We have to be better. Because the only attention we're currently giving are those teachers that are on PIPs—those that are on Performance Improvement Plans, those that are on probation, those that are dealing with potential termination. They get all our attention. And the good teachers are craving some honest feedback, and we don't have the time or the resources. We need to be better.

Administrator C wants to see an improvement in feedback skills in all those who have an administrative responsibility: "I just don't know that we're good at it still. I don't know that we're as honest as we should be." He explained that the problem is that seminary principal and institute directors and area directors are simply teachers who have been asked to suddenly take on an administrative role. Included in their new responsibilities are teacher observation and feedback, but as for the training they receive, he said, "I think we could provide better training."

In addition to better training, Administrator B admitted that seminary principals and institute directors are not given clear expectations regarding their responsibilities to observe and provide feedback. When asked how often they should observe teachers on their faculties, he said;

> We've never communicated that.... We probably should.... We've got faculties of two, we've got faculties of 15, so it's a good question. I wonder if the area directors—how they would answer that.... I think we've said we want you in classrooms, we want teaching to sparkle, you have the role as the inservice leader, which includes observation and feedback, and we've left it to them.

S&I is in the process of reducing the size of the areas that an area director is responsible for. In the last few years, new areas have been created so that area directors directly supervise fewer teachers. In one case, an area with 94 teachers was reduced to 50 teachers. Administrator A said that these changes were in part to give area directors more time to train seminary principals and institute directors on observation and feedback.

S&I has also provided online training materials for new seminary principals, so that when teachers become new seminary principals or assistant principals, they can take this course as part of a certification project that will improve their performance. The problem with this course is that when I asked the teachers about their training, none of them mentioned it. When asked specifically about this training, Teachers B and C said that they had never heard of it and were never asked to complete it. This despite working as a principal and vice principal for five and one years, respectively.

Teacher B, who is currently a seminary principal, said of his training, "I remember there was a meeting down at Jordan Valley Institute. I think it was kind of focused on some feedback [and] observations." He said that most of his practical training came from his area director who observed alongside him and would give him feedback on how he gave feedback.

Administrator A acknowledged the online training available to new seminary principals and institute directors, but said that in addition to that,

> We think that there needs to be more global inservice training for coordinators and principals. And just more focused attention on observation and feedback. This...will move mountains faster than anything. We really believe that teaching will improve if observation is increased and improved and feedback is fine-tuned and improved.

Observation Instruments

Although there are not any formal instruments in use in S&I currently, observation measures have been a part of employees' experiences with observation and feedback. Administrator A was a supervisor at a time when supervisors were encouraged to develop their own observation instrument. The idea, he said, was that "if you build

your own metric, you'll own it.... And there was some...real advantage to us kind of owning our own rubric." He described his instrument as follows:

> I started with strengths, and identified those, and then called my next category "suggestions." So I started off with a summary of the lesson, and then covered the strengths of the individual, a couple suggestions, and then the rubric itself was broken down this way: "Our purpose is to help the youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal with their Father in Heaven" as kind of a banner statement. And then there were five columns: "Gospel teaching and learning takes place by the power of the Holy Ghost" was column one. Column two: "This teacher helps students fulfill their role in the learning process and prepare them to teach the gospel to others." The third one: "The teacher inspires students to live the gospel of Jesus Christ as found in scriptures and words of the prophets. Doctrine and principles are taught in a way that leads to understanding and edification." The fourth one is, "The teacher cultivates a learning environment of love, respect, and purpose." ...And the fifth one is, "They use study and teaching skills effectively." And so as I went through, I just identify anything in one of those five columns.

Administrator B also created his own observation instrument. Several of the categories he looked for were similar to those used by Administrator A:

> There's a few core things that every teacher that's successful does.... I think the ability to invite an experience conducive to the Holy Ghost.... A teacher who has the ability to appropriately express love and connect with students.... An ability to open the scriptures and help students engage in the scriptures and have the scriptures come to life and love [them].... An ability to have students fulfill their role successfully.

Administrators and teachers varied as to whether they thought an observation instrument would help or hurt teachers. Administrator A said, "I do think it helps to provide a written, documented form that [teachers] can go back to, but even that probably ought not have more than one or two things that they can work on." He seemed open to the idea of having a uniform instrument system-wide, though he said that he probably would not use it exactly as it was intended: "I'd be grateful for it, because I'd use it as a framework for my assessment and feedback, but I probably wouldn't rely solely on

whatever form was created."

On creating a uniform observation measure for S&I, Administrator B said,

> There was a time when I really wanted to do that.... We spent years trying to do that, but we could never come to a consensus of what that form would look like. So I wonder if we've learned enough now and if we could keep it principle-based enough, we might be able to do it now, because we were trying to be too prescriptive.... I remember trying to do exactly what I'm saying. Maybe we could do now, but I don't know. I'm open to that possibility.... Maybe we ought to look at this again.

Teacher B had an assistant area director that would use a form during observations and then afterward give him a copy of it. His preservice trainers also used one. He was open to the idea of using one system wide.

> I think a form could be good. I think it has some aspects of being good because it can identify...clearly, here's the standard—this is what we're looking for. This is our expectation. So overall I think it would give a really good, broad picture of the lesson and how a teacher is measuring up against that.... Depending on the design of the form, it could...be limiting as well, you know? You know, and to me, it seems like...every area—and this might be a problem with a form like, too, is that it seems like every area director kind of does their own thing. You know what I mean? And so you'd have to sell it, you know? This is the form we want to use.... And so I see the challenge in getting the buy-in to do that, by first the area director. And I think if an area director's behind it, I think every principal would be behind it, especially if it was a great tool that could really help a guy while they're giving feedback and probably even some suggestions for observation and next step, you know.... That could be good.

Teacher C saw pros and cons to using a predesigned form. When asked whether such a form would be a good idea he said, "Yes and no." He explained why it might be a good idea:

> [It would provide] clear outcomes and teachers [would] know what's expected of them. So when they're observed, they know the observer is going to look for these things. And as I prepare, I'm going to put that in, and hopefully they would recognize I did these things and that was a great lesson and it helped out. And then that helps the observer as well so that there's a uniform expectation, so it's not, "Today I got [the principal], next day I get [the assistant principal], and they're going to give wildly different feedback." And that would be great.

He then explained why it might not be a good idea:

> S&I is very dynamic in their focus, at least in my first six years, where every year the priorities have changed slightly. The wording has changed, or we've gotten a new one, and that dynamic aspect I think allows teachers and observers to emphasize different things at different times, so as helpful as that sheet could be, it could also restrict a little bit what an area director or a principal or a teacher individually needs to receive in their feedback.

Administrator C did not think observation measures would be a good idea. He thought that teachers would view them suspiciously: "How do I know what he's [writing] doesn't end up on some administrator's desk or in the files somewhere in Salt Lake?" He thought that "not having a paper, purposely, or not typing anything, could help send a message: 'We're not trying to put something down as a record. I'm here to [help you] take [your teaching] to the next level.'"

Teacher A also did not like the idea of an observation instrument:

> I think creating another form is a bad idea. I think a better idea would be to use [*Gospel Teaching and Learning*].... We've had enough forms. I don't know. Unless the form is.... just something simple from chapter three where an evaluator will come in and say, "I'm going to watch to see how well you did this, this, and this, and talk about it." See, that's a standard. That's not—forms in the past that I've seen get complicated because they try to be so comprehensive that it dilutes it to the point where, if you were breathing, you could argue if somebody was doing a good job or not a good job. Or the subjectiveness of the reviewer comes through so heavily.... So I'm a little anti-form, just because I don't know if it's needed unless it's directly from a handbook where we already have a common language. Otherwise, you're going to create a new document that is the new standard that we have to now go after, and often when you reduce it to a form, they aim towards that in their teaching to the exclusion of other things.... I even found that with the SOAS [Student Opinions About Seminary] back in the late 90s and early 2000s is, that those 15 to 20 questions...they really kind of forced a teacher into those areas a little bit stronger. And creating a form means, "You do well on these to the exclusion of anything else, you're a great teacher." You did not have to have context or content at all to be successful in SOAS. And that's one of the downsides of having a form. It's just not going to capture everything, and then when it tries to, it gets diluted.

Things participants would want to include. Administrators and teachers agreed on several elements an observation measure would have to include: it would have to be adaptable to fit the needs of the individual teacher being observed, it would have to be based on system-wide standards, and it should involve some direction to report on the kinds of experiences the students had rather than only on what the teacher did.

Adaptable to individual teachers. In agreement with situational leadership theory, participants agreed that a one-size fits all approach to observation is not as effective as tailoring an observation to an individual teacher. Administrator A said that "every teacher's different, so the needs of that teacher should drive the observation and feedback as opposed to some system plan." He went on to say that the form would have to be able to be used for one thing that a teacher wanted an observer to look for: "You'd have to, as an observer, be able to pull this principle out and say, 'This is my entire focus today,' as opposed to 'I gotta check all the boxes.'"

Teacher B also thought such a form would have to be something an observer could use even when looking for a single teaching skill or learning outcome:

> It seems like half of the time...we're asked to look for a specific thing, so I think that the form would have to have the ability to say, you know, "I'm zoning in on this one aspect." So it would have to be...able to adapt to that.

Teacher C pointed out that the form would have to change from year to year to reflect the changing priorities of S&I. He also suggested a way to make a form adaptable to individual teachers and for individual observers. He said the form could have "a blank spot at the end" in which area directors or seminary principals could write down what predetermined things they were going to look for.

Standards-based. Administrator A said that an observation instrument would

"have to be principle-based. And those principles would have to focus on the objective and the fundamentals of effective teaching."

As has already been shown, Teachers A and B both think that any observation form would have to be based on standards from the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook. Teacher C also said that the form should include those standards: "The [objective] would want to be on there as well, and key principles from the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* manual. So emphasis on all seven of the fundamentals, not just the teaching pattern, but all seven points."

It bears pointing out that an instrument being adaptable to individuals' needs and being based on widely accepted standards seems initially contradictory. Suggestions for future research in Chapter V address this further.

Student experience. Administrator C was the only participant who mentioned student experience, but it was a significant part of his response to the idea of a uniform observation measure:

> There's no question it would include for me issues like...I would hope that the observation form would focus not so much on the teacher but on "Are you watching students?" "I saw you ask you this question, and I couldn't see 30 at once, but I was watching this side of the room, and all but one went right to their scriptures looking for the answer. You set that up really well." It's those kind of—what kind of experience are they having? Because sometimes it's been too much about the teacher."

Things participants would not want to include. Some elements of an observation instrument that teachers and administrators said they would not want to see include checkboxes and quantitative measurements.

Several participants spoke of observation instruments with checkboxes as though they were the epitome of bad observation measures. Administrator A said,

> I remember one assessment that was used. It was two pages long with about 60 boxes that were checked. And the observer would just go down and "They did that, they did that, they did that." To me that's not nearly as effective as saying, "The principle today is students need to feel the Holy Ghost." "The principle is they need to leave having been invited to take action on the lesson." ...It ought to be principle-based and focus on more open-ended as opposed to boxes checked.

Administrator B also said he would not want any observation instrument to be quantitative:

> We get weird sometimes. We have people out there with stopwatches.... We can be so directive and so prescriptive as to practices, you know? I'm trying to get the sense of students are participating, so I actually time student participation instead of just watch the students and get a sense of what's happening, you know? And so anything that would claim to measure those things that are really hard to measure, like the role of the Spirit, even the role of the student to some degree. I mean, you could identify, for example, how many verses of scripture did we read today, but does that tell you whether or not the scriptures were used appropriately? Those kinds of things are kind of hard to get at. But could you say, "Were the scriptures used appropriately, and what evidence is there?" Yeah, we could probably do some of that.

Administrator C said that when creating evaluative measures in a past assignment, "I didn't want any kind of a scale, because I know what a 3.8 means compared to a 4.1." He went on to say,

> I've heard the stories of the area director, the principal with the stopwatch, you know, "Out of a 50-minute class, you spoke for 48 of them," and I wouldn't want that. How do you zero it in to ask the kinds of question that are not so easily recognizable, quantitative? "How many minutes did you talk? How many questions did they ask? How many of your questions were feel questions?" How do you get the overall sense when the class ended? I was edified, and I know they were edified. You could just tell. How do you capture on a form those issues? So it's not, well, you've got 28 students, and you had 21 of them with scriptures open on their desk. Or if they were on phones, you had 19 of them actually in with you and not doing something else. Again, I don't know what that helps. But how do you capture this overarching at the end of it all, "That was a good experience. I'm glad I was here. I'm better for it"? And that's subjective. That becomes the challenge.

Teacher A reported an anecdote that demonstrated that observation measures that

score teachers on a scale and compare them to other teachers can be damaging. He told me about a teacher who quit after his area director administered the preservice SOAS (Student Opinion About Seminary) evaluation in all of the full-time teachers' classes. This teacher said to him,

> I'm quitting.... My scores are too low.... I just found out that my scores are lower than anybody being hired in preservice. And I'll never—I'm not even close to what's coming in or what's out there in the area. I'm way behind. And I just haven't improved. So I guess this isn't for me.

Teacher A went to say,

> It's healthy to have people in your room watching you and helping you improve.... as long as it's sold that way and not as a club: "I'm going to put a score on you. I'm going to put a note in your file. You're going to pay, 'cause I'm coming in to watch you." When it turns to that kind of a nasty culture, then there's trouble with observation.

Textural Description

In phenomenological research, a synthesis of what the participants collectively experienced is called a textural description (Creswell, 2013). I have divided this textural description into two major elements of teacher observation and feedback and will describe what participants experienced in each of these elements. These elements are the process of being observed and receiving feedback and the process of observing teachers and providing feedback.

Being Observed and Receiving Feedback

Participants all first experienced being observed and receiving feedback while in preservice training as part of becoming employees of S&I. Participants who have worked for more than 20 years did not speak about their experiences in preservice, but those who

have worked for fewer than 20 years still spoke about their preservice experiences as a part of their experience with observation and feedback either positively (as a time of improvement and learning) or negatively (as a process that was intimidating and uncertain).

All participants but one spoke of being observed very infrequently at the beginning of their careers. They spoke of observation being something that only their area director did, and that seeing him was rare. They reported either that an area director's infrequent observations were big events that made them nervous, or that an area director's visits were very brief and inconsequential. The one participant who was observed often at the beginning of his career was Teacher C, who has been teaching for fewer than six years.

The teachers who participated in this study had far more experience being observed than the administrators who participated, since they were all in administrative roles (seminary principal, area director, etc.) by the time observation and feedback became more regular in S&I.

Teachers reported being observed regularly by seminary principals or institute directors as well as area directors and/or assistant area directors over the previous 10 years. When their supervisors' major goal was to help them improve rather than to judge their performance (formative rather than summative), they all reported positive experiences. They also reported positive experiences when observers would provide feedback in a kind and encouraging way, and when that feedback was based on standards that were established by S&I. Each teacher also reported that knowing an observer was going to follow up with them on previously given feedback influenced them to apply the feedback.

All participants disliked being observed by either colleagues or supervisors whose feedback was based on the observer's teaching style or personality, rather than on established standards of effective teaching widely accepted in S&I.

Teachers and administrators all reported positive experiences with observation and feedback when there was a predetermined objective the observer would focus on during a particular observation, though their experiences varied as to whether that focus was determined by the teacher or the observer.

Observing Teachers and Providing Feedback

Because each participant has or has had responsibility to oversee other teachers, each of them had experiences being the observer and providing feedback to teachers they had observed.

Participants varied as to their first experiences providing feedback after observations. Some were coordinators when they first gave feedback. Some were seminary principals or assistant principals. One was encouraged by his seminary principal, along with the rest of his faculty, to observe his colleagues and provide feedback.

Not every participant had experienced a collaborative teacher observation involving both an area director and seminary principal or institute director, but those who had all spoke favorably about it. They mentioned that when an area director observes with a local supervisor, it prevents the area director from drawing a wrong conclusion from an observation if what was observed does not typify a regular classroom experience in a teacher's class. Participants said that it was also good for the local supervisor because it

gave them a chance to be trained by the area director on observation and feedback skills. They also said that collaborative observations were good for the teacher because a local supervisor can defend them to the area director, or explain why some things happened the way they did, or why some students reacted the way they did.

Most participants mentioned that they had experienced frequent observations at some point in their careers and that these more frequent observations had helped to create a positive culture of observation and feedback. They also liked formative and relaxed observation and feedback.

All participants spoke of the importance of basing the feedback they give on well-established standards that are clearly explained in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook rather than giving feedback based on their own personal preferences or teaching styles.

Participants spoke of the importance of providing limited, focused feedback after an observation. Interestingly, none of the teachers spoke of *receiving* limited feedback as being a key component to a positive experience when they were observed. Administrators who had been coordinators said that limited feedback was particularly important for stake-called teachers, and that feedback should be couched in terms of how it will help the students have a better experience rather than how it will transform the teacher into a more skilled pedagogue.

Participants agreed that teachers should be collaboratively involved in the post-observation conference about their lesson. Participants said that allowing teachers to comment on how they felt the class went allowed them a chance for self-reflection, and that teachers are generally good at identifying the parts of the lesson that went well or

that did not go well and often why they did not go well.

Participants experienced a variety of positive and negative attitudes from the teachers they observed. They reported that a teacher with a negative attitude will not apply feedback or sometimes even accept it. In their experience, the attitude of a teacher makes a bigger difference than the teacher's ability or experience when it comes to receiving and applying feedback.

Structural Description

A structural description includes the contexts and situations in which participants experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013) and makes up the "how" of their experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants have experienced observation and feedback in a wide variety of contexts and situations. They experienced it as student teachers before they were hired. They experienced it as teachers when their area directors observed them. They experienced giving feedback after observing stake-called teachers, their colleagues at large-faculty seminaries or institutes, and the teachers on their faculties over whom they had supervisory responsibilities. Some had been preservice trainers or area directors, and they experienced observing and providing feedback for a larger group of teachers that generally saw them as having the ability to hire or fire them.

The phenomenon of observation and feedback was perceived positively by participants, especially when done in positive ways that have already been discussed in this chapter. For participants who have worked for S&I for longer than 10 years, observation and feedback were not a significant part of their experience, but all

participants viewed observation and feedback as a major element of their careers now.

Teachers all reported that being observed and receiving feedback has helped them improve and succeed in their teaching. They were grateful for supervisors who helped them become better teachers through observation and feedback.

They also expressed frustration toward observers whose feedback was not helpful, or who delivered feedback in a way that discouraged them rather than inspired them to change. Participants were also frustrated by teachers whose attitude precluded feedback or its application.

Participants reported a sense of responsibility over those whom they observed. They felt a desire to help those teachers improve, and to give them feedback that would be useful in a way that would encourage those teachers rather than discourage them. Participants who had coordinated felt particularly protective of stake-called teachers in this regard.

All participants strongly supported the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook and felt that their responsibility as supervisors was to measure whether the standards in that handbook are happening in classrooms and then train teachers to better incorporate those standards into their own teaching.

Essence of Observation and Feedback in Seminaries and Institutes

Phenomenological research includes a final synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions that "presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure" (Creswell, 2007, p. 62), and that represents the common experience of all of the participants with the phenomenon.

Although observation and feedback have not always been frequent in S&I, all participants of this study viewed observation and feedback as a regular part of current employment in S&I and something that can help teachers improve when done correctly. All participants viewed collaboration between supervisors and teachers as an essential part of effective observation and feedback. All participants viewed the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook as the standard by which teaching should be measured and upon which feedback should be based. All participants preferred formative observation and feedback to summative.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The research questions for this study were as follows: What are the purposes or objectives of teacher observation and feedback in S&I? What expectations do S&I administrators have for teacher observation and feedback, and how do teachers in S&I perceive the process of teacher observation and feedback? How would S&I supervisors and teachers feel about the creation and use of a formal observation instrument during teacher observations?

This chapter will answer those questions, compare my findings with the literature reviewed in Chapter II, and make recommendations for practice and future research.

Research Questions

In this section, I will discuss how the findings from the present data answer the above research questions as well as associated questions mentioned in Chapter I. Included with the discussion of the second question, how teachers perceive observation and feedback, is an examination of the differences between administrators' experiences and expectations for observation and feedback in S&I and teachers' experiences with them.

Purposes of Teacher Observation and Feedback in S&I

As reported in Chapter IV, S&I administrators identified three major purposes of observation and feedback: accomplishing the objective of S&I, improving teaching, and

identifying problems in the classroom.

A related question of this research was whether different kinds of supervisors have different objectives when they observe teachers. Administrators said that the overall objectives of observation and feedback are the same for almost all supervisors, but that different supervisors have different ways to accomplish those objectives.

Administrators identified one type of supervisor that does have a purpose for observations distinct from these overall goals: the preservice trainer. Preservice trainers have the responsibility to train student teachers and determine whether those student teachers should be hired as full-time teachers.

All other types of supervisors share the overall objectives listed above, though administrators had unique expectations for each supervisor: coordinators need to be sensitive toward stake-called teachers and support them while limiting feedback to the most essential ways that those teachers can help their students have a better experience; seminary principals and institute directors should observe frequently, their observations and feedback should inform and be informed by faculty inservice training, and they should know their teachers' goals and use observation and feedback to help teachers accomplish them; and area directors should observe along with the local supervisors as a way to train the supervisors to develop observation and feedback skills.

Administrators agreed that colleagues have a different purpose than supervisors when observing. They thought that a colleague's purpose when observing is more to learn than to provide feedback, though they can still do that.

Administrators expected observations to be mainly formative except when making hiring decisions, and one administrator wanted summative evaluations to be a

part of observation and feedback for teachers leaving S&I. Administrators reported that focused feedback, limited to one or two things for a teacher to work on, is better than giving too much feedback. They also expected feedback to be based on teaching standards laid out in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook, especially the Objective of S&I and the Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning.

Administrators also thought that observation and feedback should be teacher-driven, but that when teachers lack experience or ability, the process may need more direction and guidance from the observer.

Administrator Expectations and Teachers' Perceptions

Answering this research question revealed places where teachers' experiences aligned with administrators' expectations and places where they did not. In addition to answering this question broadly, this study sought to answer the following related questions: What do teachers believe the purpose of observation to be? How do they feel about being observed and being given feedback? To what extent do teachers' experiences with observation and feedback align with administrators' expectations? Are there specific observation practices that teachers generally prefer over others? Do teachers' perceptions of observation differ based on their amount of experience?

Teachers reported that they thought the purpose of observation and feedback was to help them improve as teachers. Teacher C, for example, said, "I am a far better teacher today because of observation and feedback than I ever would have been." Teacher B had this to say about a past area director that did well training teachers in the area (which included frequent observation and feedback): "He did an excellent job, and I'll forever be

grateful. He changed how I taught for the better. It was just awesome."

Teacher B also shared an anecdote of a teacher on his faculty that changed because of observation and feedback. This teacher was "loud and mean" and "was just bounced around the area. No principal wanted him. No principal, no one. Because...none of them had the courage to want to give him the feedback." Teacher B was the assistant principal at the time that this teacher came to their faculty and was fielding calls from upset parents in the first few weeks of the year about this teacher. The seminary principal at the time was a man that Teacher B described as giving him the "best observations and feedback" he has received. The seminary principal "went in and observed him, he provided feedback, and corrected some personality things that wasn't really meshing with the kids. And the guy accepted it and changed.... It was pretty cool to see."

While teachers reported that observation and feedback had helped them improve, they all said that observation and feedback alone would not have created that change. They had to be done a certain way for them to be useful. Every teacher felt strongly that feedback that was not based on the standards in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook was not useful.

Teachers preferred formative feedback from an observer who was genuinely interested in helping them improve with no other motivation. Teacher B spoke about feeling fear at being observed by preservice trainers and by his first area director, but really appreciated being observed by his last seminary principal and area director because they

> had no other purpose than to help you improve.... I was willing to have [my seminary principal] come in because I knew it was going to bless me.... I could share with him and talk openly why I did this or that in the lesson.

As for whether teachers' experience correlated with their opinions about observation and feedback, teachers all expressed the same preferences in observation and feedback styles regardless of their experience. The younger two teachers seemed a little more enthusiastic about how observation and feedback had helped them improve than Teacher A, who also said that teachers close to retirement do not want to be observed in his experience. If there is a correlation with experience, it might be that younger teachers are more likely to believe that observation and feedback can help them improve than older teachers, but the sample size of this study is too small to draw any definitive conclusions.

Comparisons Between Administrators' Expectations and Teachers' Experiences

Teachers and administrators shared several examples of successful strategies for observation and feedback, which were presented in Chapter IV. Below is a discussion of similarities and differences between what administrators viewed as best practices for observation and feedback and the experiences of the teachers.

Teacher autonomy. Administrators thought that teacher observation should be driven by the teacher being observed—that teachers should instigate it and give their observers something to look for, or that their goals for improvement, as recorded on their professional growth plans, should be taken into consideration by the observer. Administrator C identified a disconnect between the goals teachers set on their professional growth plans and the things their supervisors looked for when observing.

Teachers, with some exceptions, did not report having an experience like that described by administrators. Teacher A, in his long career, has never had an area director

or seminary principal regularly allow him to determine what he or she should look for, though he has had that experience with colleagues when he asked them to come observe him looking for a particular thing. One of Teacher B's former area directors eventually allowed teachers to determine what he should look for after a long period of training in which he always observed looking for something of his own choosing. Both Teachers A and B reported experiences with area directors who always chose what they would look for, and both teachers reported that teachers would change their behavior in order to demonstrate what the area director was looking for. Teacher C has been able to collaboratively decide what his observers look for, but also reported that as an assistant principal, he has been told what to look for during his observations by his area director, rather than being able to give teachers the option.

Based on the experiences of these teachers, autonomy to determine what an observer looks for during an observation is more rare than common and depends greatly on the supervisor and what he or she thinks should be done.

Collaboration between area directors and seminary principals. Administrator A reported that "the most successful means for observation" is when an area director takes a local supervisor along with him for observation. Administrators also reported that area directors could train local supervisors in observation and feedback by taking them along. Administrators thought that local supervisors should be primarily responsible for the improvement of teaching on their faculties, and that observation and feedback can be used in conjunction with inservice training to accomplish that purpose.

Teacher A reported that the only time he has ever had an area director observe at the same time as a local supervisor was by accident. Teacher B had one area director who

observed with local supervisors "more often than not." His current area director does not take him (the seminary principal) along when observing teachers on his faculty. Teacher B reported that he preferred the practice of the previous area director, who took the seminary principal with him to observe. Teacher C's area director takes new seminary principals or assistant principals along when observing as a way to train them (a training that Teacher C thought was very helpful), but that area director does not typically take local supervisors along with him when observing unless they are new to administrative responsibility. Teachers also differed on whether they viewed their faculty supervisor or area director as being their primary observer and provider of feedback.

The experiences teachers have had when area directors did bring a seminary principal or assistant principal along were positive. But again, whether this happens seems to depend entirely on the area director.

Frequent and formative observation and feedback. Administrator C felt strongly that frequent and informal observation helps teachers feel less intimidated and makes observations more formative than summative. Teachers agreed, reporting positive experiences with more frequent and formative observation and feedback. Again, whether they experienced frequent and formative observation and feedback depended on their faculty and area director. That is not surprising given that Administrator B reported that S&I has not communicated to supervisors how often they should be observing teachers.

Effective feedback. Administrators experiences' have shown that feedback is most effective when it is delivered with kindness and as a formative evaluation based on well-established standards for teaching, focused on one or two suggestions for improvement, and given in a post-observation conference in which observer and teacher

collaboratively discuss how the class went and how the teacher could improve.

Teachers reported varied experiences, but most of their experiences with ineffective feedback came from observations that took place more than five years ago. Their most recent experiences with receiving and giving feedback show that what administrators deem effective feedback is the kind of feedback being given frequently right now in S&I. Teacher A did report a recent lack of collaboration during feedback in which he was encouraged to do things that he did not feel would be as effective. In that case, the direction came unilaterally from the supervisor, and while it was based on one standard mentioned in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook, Teacher A felt that prioritizing that standard above others would lead to a worse experience for students in class.

Following up. As previously mentioned in Chapter IV, teachers reported that accountability and follow-up from the observers made them more likely to apply feedback they received. Administrators never mentioned following up on feedback during their interviews, but based on the experiences of the teachers, it may be a practice worth encouraging.

How Supervisors and Teachers Feel About Formal Observation Instruments

No participants were completely in favor of observation instruments unconditionally. Even those who were open to using one, or having one used on them, were clear about what it should or should not include. Two participants (Teacher A and Administrator C) were opposed to observation measures and were very particular about what such a measure should be like before they would consider endorsing it.

Participants who were opposed to observation instruments said that if they were used, they would have to be based on the standards in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook, but that such an instrument should not include a comprehensive list of every standard in that manual. They said it would also have to be a qualitative form with open-ended categories rather than a quantitative form with checkboxes. Administrator C also said that for him to support any measure, it would need to include a focus on the students rather than just the teacher.

Other participants additionally suggested that an observation instrument should include a flexibility that can allow for adaptation to individual teachers' needs and what they ask an observer to look for.

Participants mentioned some potential benefits of a form, including that it could help observers limit their feedback to well-established standards and that the teacher could receive a copy of the form that he or she could refer back to as he or she tries to improve. Kimball (2002) found that teachers are more likely to apply feedback provided to them on an observation instrument than feedback from a supervisor without such a form. A form could also be used to help train observers. If it included a place for observers to write down what a teacher wanted them to look for, or a place to record their observations of what students were doing, then observers who used the form would better understand what was expected of them. Eksi (2012) found that less experienced observers prefer having an observation instrument during observations to guide their feedback.

Participants also mention some potential problems with a form, including that it might limit what observers look for or give feedback about, that it might not be flexible enough to help teachers individually or conform to system or area priorities, or what an

area director is encouraging teachers to do, and that it might be more threatening to a teacher to know that a record is being kept of his or her performance.

Comparison of Findings with Theory and Research

This study confirms much of the literature on teacher observation and feedback that has come before. The current study adds to the literature that has been published about situational leadership theory, clinical supervision, observation and feedback in S&I, and research on observation and feedback in general.

Situational Leadership Theory

The findings of this study support the following major arguments of the situational approach to leadership: leaders are most effective when they change their behaviors to match the needs of their employees, the supervisor's approach to observation and feedback is most effective if determined in part by a teacher's ability and willingness to improve, and newer teachers and less effective teachers sometimes require and/or prefer more directive feedback and less autonomy (see Glickman et al., 2010; Kimball, 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Northouse, 2010).

Participants of this study agreed that a supervisor may need to tailor his or her approach to observation and feedback based on a teacher's pedagogical ability, experience, and attitude. Most also agreed that a teacher's inexperience or inability may require a more direct approach to observation and feedback and less autonomy. One administrator felt that a teacher's attitude was a greater factor than his or her experience or ability levels.

Clinical Supervision

This study also validated the clinical supervision approach to observation and feedback, which includes the assumptions that teaching is a behavior that can be observed and influenced in order to benefit learners, that formative feedback is generally more beneficial than summative, that feedback should be based on a teacher's concerns rather than a quantitative checklist, that supervisors more effectively help teachers when working alongside them as colleagues rather than being above them, and that teacher improvement is more likely when teachers are allowed to drive their own improvement (see Cogan, 1973; Glickman et al., 2010; Goldhammer et al., 1969; Sullivan, 1980).

As reported in Chapter IV, S&I administrators' experiences agree with all of those assumptions. Teachers' experiences did not always match these expectations (the extent to which supervisors worked alongside them, or allowed them to drive their own improvement, depended on the leadership styles of their supervisors), but teachers reported better experiences with observation and feedback when they aligned with the assumptions of the clinical supervision approach.

Clinical supervision researchers differ as to the specific steps of observation and feedback, but several of the findings of the current study agree with the general practices of clinical supervision. Seminary and Institute administrators and teachers prefer observers to have a specific skill or outcome they are looking for that is established between the teacher and supervisor prior to the observation. They also spoke positively about post-observation conferences in which the teacher and supervisor discuss what happened and what went well and what could have been better. Administrators and teachers also preferred that the teacher being observed drive what the observer looks for,

and the discussion about how the class went, as well as any goals for improvement. All of this agrees with the general practices of clinical supervision.

While observation and feedback in S&I are less formal than in clinical supervision, the underlying assumptions and general practices agree enough that clinical supervision could be seen as the model upon which current S&I practices are based. This is especially likely given the incorporation of elements of clinical supervision into the formal observation programs used by S&I in the early 1990s (Lunt, 1995; Howell, 1995).

Previous Seminaries and Institutes Research

Much of previous S&I research studied the effectiveness of particular S&I observation and feedback initiatives. Interestingly, despite interviewing four participants who have worked for S&I for longer than 25 years, only one of them spoke of previous observation programs. Teacher A spoke about the Teacher Support Consultant (TSC) program in which a full-time employee was assigned to observe and provide feedback to an area as his or her major professional responsibility. Tippets (1984) found that the program had a positive influence on instruction in S&I. Teacher A spoke positively about the program and requested his TSC to observe him and provide feedback. The three administrator participants of this study were hired between the years of 1979 and 1992. None of them mentioned the TSC program when talking about their experience with observation and feedback, although it was in use when they were hired. They all said that observation and feedback were virtually nonexistent when they were hired. This suggests that the positive effect Tippets found from the TSC program did not extend to all teachers of S&I at the time, or at least that the effect was not impactful enough for employees to

talk about it decades later.

Lunt (1995) studied the most formal and comprehensive teacher observation system that has been used in S&I to date, *The CES Employee Evaluation Handbook* and its accompanying four observation instruments. The program also included clear objectives for observation and feedback in S&I. Lunt found that each of the instruments was valid and reliable, but also that supervisors and teacher did not like it. It must not have been used very widely based on the responses from participants in this study. None of the four participants who were employed during the four years that this program was used in S&I even mentioned it as a part of their experience, though they again agreed that observation and feedback were not a part of their experience at that point in their careers.

Other Research on Observation and Feedback

As reported in Chapter II, previous researchers have disagreed on the impact of observation and feedback on teacher improvement. Some studies have identified specific practices related to observation and feedback that are correlated with teacher improvement, including supervisor credibility, teacher autonomy, and particular kinds of feedback.

Supervisor credibility. Researchers found that teachers are more likely to apply feedback when it is given by a supervisor they view as credible (Kimball, 2002; Nolan et al., 1993). Teachers perceived their supervisors as credible when the supervisors were experienced educators or when they demonstrated content and/or pedagogical mastery. They found that teachers were not generally willing to apply feedback from a supervisor who was less experienced or less familiar with their course content than they were.

Participants of the current study did not all discuss supervisor credibility, but Teacher B did report that the teachers on his faculty appreciated the feedback of a former seminary principal because they knew he was a great teacher.

As a young assistant principal with fewer than six years of experience as a full-time S&I employee, Teacher C provides an interesting example. When asked whether he felt that the more experienced teachers on his faculty ever seemed to dismiss his feedback because of his relative inexperience, he said no. He reported that he bases his feedback on the standards provided in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook and that the teachers appreciate the feedback because it comes from standards they accept. This finding agrees with research by Kimball (2002), who found that when supervisors give objectives-based feedback, teachers overlook their lack of experience.

Teacher autonomy. Many researchers have found a connection between teacher autonomy in observation and feedback and teacher improvement as a result of observation and feedback (Cogan, 1973; Glickman et al., 2010; Goldhammer et al., 1980; Kimball, 2002; Nolan et al., 1993; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2007). As previously stated, participants of this study agreed. My findings also agree with previous findings that allowing teachers to determine what an observer looks for, as well as allowing them to control what is later discussed, and what goals are set, are ways that teachers can be given greater control to drive the experience.

Another practice that allows for greater teacher autonomy and that leads to teacher improvement is giving teachers an opportunity for self-reflection (Kimball 2002; Nsibande & Garraway, 2011; Nolan et al., 1993Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Glickman et al. (2010) wrote that this is particularly true of experienced and capable teachers, but that

less experienced and less capable teachers are less likely to benefit from self-reflection (see also Nsibande & Garraway, 2011). Participants of the current study did not speak as much about the importance of self-reflection, though they did talk about the importance of allowing a teacher to describe how the class went before the observer provides feedback during the post-observation conference. Teacher C said that this practice gave him an opportunity for self-reflection, which facilitated self-improvement.

This agrees with Le and Vasquez (2011), who found that when supervisors would ask carefully worded questions during a post-observation conference to help teachers discover their own shortcomings rather than simply telling them what they did wrong, teachers are more likely to make positive changes. Multiple administrator participants of this study said that when they ask teachers about the class, almost all teachers are able to identify the things that went well and the things that did not go well.

Effective feedback. Chapter II reported several elements of feedback that researchers have found will increase the likelihood that teachers will find feedback useful. Chapter IV includes a similar list of effective elements of feedback found in this study. I will not repeat all of these elements here, but for comparison I will discuss several cases where the findings agree.

Researchers have found that critical feedback is less likely to offend teachers when an observer is sensitive to the feelings of the teacher, and when teachers themselves are allowed to identify their own shortcomings through guided self-reflection during a post-observation conference (Le & Vasquez, 2011). This study agrees with those findings, with participants confirming that feedback is easier to take from observers who are kind and sensitive, and that this is particularly true for stake-called teachers.

Researchers have previously found that teachers view summative evaluations negatively, that summative evaluations do not correlate with teacher improvement, and that teachers prefer formative feedback (Glickman et al., 2010; McGreal, 1982). Teachers and administrators of S&I agreed that observation and feedback should be designed to help teachers improve and that they should happen frequently and informally. This may be one reason why previous observation measures in S&I have fallen out of use quickly after their introduction and why there is no such instrument in use in S&I currently.

Participants of this study and previous researchers of observation and feedback agree that feedback should be based on commonly accepted objectives or standards (Al-Shammari & Yawkey, 2008; Gitomer et al., 2014; Kimball, 2002; VanTassal-Baska et al., 2007).

Teacher participants of this study said they were more likely to apply feedback from observations when observations were frequent and when they knew observers were going to follow up on feedback they provided. This agrees with studies by Protheroe (2002) and Tuytens and Devos (2011).

The two major elements of effective feedback identified by previous researchers that were not discussed by the participants of this study are the importance of positive feedback and using descriptive feedback.

Research shows that less experienced teachers respond particularly well to positive feedback. When they are praised for things they did well, they want to do better (Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2016), and when observers point out why something they did worked well, teachers improve more quickly (Le & Vasquez, 2011). While some participants mentioned giving positive feedback at the outset of a post-observation conference, none

talked about it being an important part of feedback or discussed why it was an effective practice. Participants may have agreed with these findings if they had been presented to them, but none volunteered any connection between positive feedback and teacher improvement based on their own experience.

Previous literature has argued for observers to describe to teachers what they observed without assigning meaning to it (Glickman et al., 2010; Nolan et al., 1993). They found that when supervisors provide descriptive feedback, it facilitates a collaborative discussion with the teacher and allows them to identify their own areas for improvement. Participants of the current study did not talk about providing descriptive feedback except as a good idea for colleagues to provide when observing one another. It seems more common in S&I for supervisors to allow teachers to interpret meaning without giving them prior feedback, descriptive or otherwise.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of the current research, I recommend that S&I take the following steps to improve teacher observation and feedback.

1. **Clarify the purposes of teacher observation and feedback.** While I have identified several purposes that were generally agreed upon by administrators, if all the administrators of S&I were to collectively come up with a list of objectives in the same style as those listed in *The CES Employee Evaluation Handbook* (CES, 1991), those objectives would certainly be more crystalized than what I have presented here. This clarification could be included in any revised handbooks S&I publishes in the future for teachers or administrators. Clarifying the purposes of observation and feedback and publishing them widely would disseminate them throughout S&I and help supervisors at every level better understand what is expected of them.

2. **Clarify Expectations of Supervisors Who Have Observational Responsibilities.** In order to do this, administrators of S&I would first need to

determine what they expect of area directors, seminary principals, and institute directors and then make those expectations known. For example, the administrator participants of this study hoped that teachers would drive what observers looked for, but whether that has happened depends on the area director and seminary principal/institute director. Similarly, administrators thought that area directors would be most effective if they took seminary principals or institute directors along with them to their observations, but in most cases, this is not the reality for the teacher participants I interviewed. Are there times and circumstances when area directors or faculty supervisors should determine what to look for rather than asking a teacher what they would like them to look for? If so, when are those times? In addition, are there circumstances when or reasons why an area director should observe alone? If so, what are those circumstances or reasons? A clarification of the supervisory roles of area directors, seminary principals, and institute directors would help teachers to experience observation and feedback in ways that more closely mirror the expectations of the administrators of S&I.

3. **Facilitate Local Training in Observation and Feedback.** Administrators agreed that local supervisors lack training in how to observe teachers and provide feedback effectively. Teachers B and A reported that a former and current area director of theirs, respectively, had trained them by observing with them, and both of them spoke very positively about the practice. If system-wide initiatives designed to train supervisors, such as the online training for new seminary principals, are not working, it would make sense for S&I to encourage more training on a local level, with area directors training seminary principals, institute directors, and their assistants in observation and feedback by participating with them.

4. **Encourage Current Supervisors to Take Advantage of Training Materials Already Available.** Seminaries and Institutes has created online materials for new seminary principals that are designed, among other things, to train them in teacher observation and feedback. Whatever efforts have been made to encourage local supervisors to use these materials were insufficient for the teacher participants in this study, none of whom had ever heard of them. These training materials need to be advertised and faculty supervisors made aware of them. S&I could also consider inviting assistant principals and associate institute directors to complete the online training as well.

5. **Discuss the Possibility of Creating an Observation Instrument.** Observation instruments have been created for and used in S&I in the past, and historically they have been short-lived and viewed negatively by teachers and administrators. This study shows, however, that the culture of observation and feedback in S&I has changed in the last ten years. Such an instrument could be created and presented as a formative measure and may more likely be viewed that way by S&I personnel. S&I administrators could commission

> research that would provide for the creation and testing of such an instrument to better determine if such a thing could benefit S&I teachers and students.

Some of these recommendations apply better to S&I areas in the Intermountain West, where seminary and institute faculties are larger and where this research was conducted, than they do to areas in the rest of the world. Many areas of S&I have coordinators and one-man seminary or institute programs, where area directors are the faculty supervisors of all the full-time employees and where those employees are the supervisors of many stake-called teachers. Those areas would also benefit from some of these suggestions, but some clearly would not apply as well or in the same way.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to six participants, all of whom worked in one of two counties in Utah. The findings of this study do not necessarily reflect the experience of every teacher in S&I. Future research could be done to include more teachers and supervisors to create more generalizable findings. A simple survey of area directors could tell S&I a great deal about how well the findings of this study represent common practices in S&I. More interviews with supervisors or teachers could reveal greater insight into successful methods for observing and providing feedback.

Based on feedback from participants, it may be possible to create an observation form that would prevent potential problems that can come with such measures. A form could include broad categories, such as the Objective of S&I and the Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning. If the form provided a blank space for an observer to record his or her observations about one or all of those categories (depending on the needs of the

teacher or the focus of the area), then it might be flexible enough to work as a formative instrument that could be used in teacher-driven observation and feedback, while still being standards-based. Such a form could also be amended yearly to allow supervisors to record observations about current system priorities. Space could also be provided for the supervisor to record impressions about what students are doing and how they are engaging with the lesson, and for supervisors to record any observations related to what a teacher has asked them to look for if the teacher requests help with something that cannot be categorized under one of the fundamentals.

As previously noted, observation instruments carry a connotation of summative feedback, which can cause fear in teachers and resistance to observation and feedback. If a more formative form were created, observers could be instructed to give the form to the teacher afterward, not keeping a copy for themselves. This might help teachers see that even though a form is being used, it is a tool designed to help them improve rather than report them to someone higher up.

Future research could include the creation of an observation instrument based on these parameters and the testing and further refinement of said instrument. Such research would certainly help S&I know whether the potential benefits of using such a measure outweigh the potential disadvantages.

Conclusion

The teachers and administrators interviewed for this study have had positive experiences with observation and feedback. Two of them reported that their experiences had been career-changing. Participants' experiences have demonstrated that when teacher

observation and feedback are performed in the right way, they can help teachers improve, which in turn helps students have a better experience in S&I classrooms.

There is a disconnect between administrative expectations of observation and feedback and local practice. Those expectations are not widely known, and the extent to which they are a reality for teachers has been determined largely by the leadership style of their area directors, not all of whom are conducting observation and feedback in the way that the administrative participants of this study agreed is most effective.

Although administrative expectations are not always met, the teachers interviewed for this study indicated that when they have been met, their experiences with observation and feedback have been positive and helpful. If the purposes of and expectations regarding observation and feedback in S&I were clarified and if training for supervisors were better publicized and expanded, more teachers could have the kinds of experiences with observation and feedback that current S&I administrators are hoping for.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent

Page 125 of 138
Protocol #8957
IRB Approval Date: 11/17/2017
Consent Document Expires: 11/16/2020
IRB Password Protected per IRB

v.8 3 May2017

Informed Consent

The Purpose of Teacher Observation and Feedback in LDS Seminaries and Institutes of Religion

Introduction
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Michael Freeman, an associate professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University. The purpose of this research is to identify the purpose of teacher observation and feedback in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I).

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether to participate in this research. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you have before you agree to participate.

Procedures
Your participation will involve being interviewed about your experiences with teacher observation and feedback in S&I. The interview will last no longer than one hour. You may be contacted for follow-up questions based on your original responses. A digital audio recording will be created of your interview. You will be provided with a transcript of the interview in order that you may (if you desire) correct anything from the interview you are not satisfied with.

Risks
This is a minimal risk research study. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. If you have a bad research-related experience or are injured in any way during your participation, please contact the principal investigator of this study right away at 435-797-1474 or mike.freeman@usu.edu.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this research study. More broadly, this study will help the researchers learn more about teacher observation and feedback in S&I and may help those researching these topics in the future.

Confidentiality
The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide as part of this study remains confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize that a response came from you based on your style of speaking or based on an experience you share.

We will collect your information through interview questions. A digital audio recording of your responses will be made. This recording and a transcription of it will be securely stored on a pass-word protected device. They will be deleted four years after completion of the research.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others (Utah State University, S&I, or state or federal officials) may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now and change your mind later, you may withdraw at any time by communicating your desire to do so to Chris Garner by email, phone call, or in person. If you choose to withdraw after we have already collected information about you, your information will not be used and will be deleted if you do not desire that information to be used for purposes of this research.

Compensation

For your participation in this research study, you will not receive any monetary payment or compensation.

IRB Review

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 435-797-1474 or mike.freeman@usu.edu. If you have questions about your rights or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Director at (435) 797-0567 or irb@usu.edu.

Mike Freeman
Principal Investigator
(435) 797-1474; mike.freeman@usu.edu

Chris Garner
Student Investigator
(435) 668-5854; chrisgarner1982@yahoo.com

Informed Consent

By signing this document, you agree to participate in this study. You indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have, and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records.

Name Date

Appendix B

Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol 1

The following interview protocol is to be used when interviewing S&I supervisors about their experiences with classroom observation and feedback. The interview is to be semi-structured. The order of the following questions may be adapted based on the flow of the interview or the participants' responses. Additional questions will be needed to follow up on participants' answers, some of which could be based on the bullet points below.

Interviews will be conducted wherever is most convenient and comfortable for the participants. Interviews will be recorded on two devices, unless participants do not consent to being recorded. Either before or at the beginning of the interview, give each participant a copy of the consent form at the end of this appendix.

Interview Questions for Supervisors

1. How long have you been employed as a full-time religious educator in S&I?

2. What is the nature of your current assignment?

3. What experience have you had with classroom observation and feedback in S&I?

    - Context and situations that have influenced experience

    - Previous S&I observation initiatives

4. What do you think is the purpose of teacher observation and feedback in S&I?

    - Is it being met?

    - What do you expect observers to look for?

    - Does it differ based on the type of supervisor?

    - Summative/formative?

5. In your experience, what is an effective way for an observer and a teacher to debrief the observation experience and provide feedback?

    - How do you decide what feedback to give?

6. What would you think about the possibility of a supervisor using a predesigned form during observations in order to focus their observations on specific things?

    - What might it include or not include?

Interview Protocol 2

This interview protocol is to be used to interview S&I teachers. The interview is to be semi-structured. The order of the following questions may be adapted based on the flow of the interview or the participants' responses. Additional questions will be needed to follow up on participants' answers, some of which could be based on the bullet points listed below.

Interviews will be conducted wherever is most convenient and comfortable for the participants. Interviews will be recorded on two devices, unless participants do not consent to being recorded. Either before or at the beginning of the interview, give each participant a copy of the consent form at the end of this appendix.

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. How long have you been employed as a full-time religious educator in S&I?

2. What is the nature of your current assignment?

3. What experience have you had with classroom observation and feedback?

    - Contexts and situations that have influenced your experience

4. How do you feel about being observed, generally? Why do you feel that way?

5. Based on your experience, talk about the value or lack of value of teacher observation and feedback in S&I.

6. How do your supervisors typically provide you with feedback?

    - How useful is it?

    - How often do you incorporate it?

    - Do you set goals, or does the supervisor?

7. What would you think about the possibility of a supervisor using a predesigned form during observations in order to focus their observations on specific things?

    - What would you expect to be included or not included?

CURRICULUM VITAE

CHRISTOPHER B. GARNER

Education:

2018	Ed.D.	Curriculum and Instruction; Utah State University Expected date of completion: Spring 2018 Dissertation: *A Qualitative Exploration of the Current State of Observation and Feedback in the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*
2010	M.F.H.D.	Family and Human Development; Utah State University
2005	B.A.	History; Brigham Young University

Professional Experience:

2017–Present	Seminary Curriculum Project Manager, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion
2016–2017	Curriculum Writer, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion
2006–2016	Seminary Principal, Coordinator, and Instructor, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion
2003–2006	Instructor and Language Tutor, Missionary Training Center, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Professional Presentations:

Garner, C. B. (2015). Teacher Observation in Seminaries and Institutes, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Central Office Research Forum, Salt Lake City, UT.