Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences during an Annual Performance and Development Cycle

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Abstract: In this study, the perceptions and experiences of eighteen teachers across three primary schools in Victoria, Australia, were examined as they participated in an annual performance and development cycle, guided by the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework. The study sought to investigate teachers' experiences and perceptions of the cycle to understand the aspects perceived as valuable to these teachers. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were held with teachers at the beginning and end of each school's annual performance and development cycle, and responses were thematically analysed. Findings suggest that school leaders perform a critical role in the success of performance and development processes, and cultivating a culture of learning and development with a focus on individual and collective improvement helped teachers feel connected to these processes and empowered as learners. The findings of this study have implications for the individual and collective nature of performance and development. Based on research and findings, a five-step model is proposed to support the design and implementation of meaningful teacher performance and development processes.

Introduction

With strong evidence that expertise can be developed (Berliner, 2001; Ericsson, 2007; Hattie, 2003) and quality teaching has a powerful impact on student performance (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Yoon et al., 2007), supporting teachers to develop their practice has been at the forefront of education policy guidelines and reform (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Hattie et al., 2014). As such, systems of teacher performance evaluation and development have been introduced across the world to enhance teacher learning and development while at the same time ensuring processes to evaluate, retain and grant tenure to teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Elliott, 2015; 2019; Hallinger et al., 2014).

The past decade has seen an increased emphasis on performance and development systems as a mechanism for providing teachers with feedback for improvement, judging effectiveness, and tying appraisal results to rewards and career advancements (Kraft & Christian, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]; 2020). At a national level, the *Australian Performance and Development Framework* (AITSL, 2012), hereafter referred to as *The Framework* was to provide a framework for performance and development processes in schools to support teacher learning and development, against the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute of Teaching and

School Leadership [AITSL], 2011). The *Framework* intended to ensure every teacher, every year, in every school across Australia received regular, appropriate, and constructive feedback on their performance, opportunities to identify areas for development, as well as effective and ongoing support to further improve their practice (AITSL, 2012).

The *Framework* was endorsed by Ministers at the Standing Council in August 2012 and provided a means to deliver on the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council for Education, 2008), which sought to improve educational outcomes for all young Australians. *The Framework* has also provided a means to deliver on more recent objectives from the Australian Productivity Commission (2017) that Australian governments focus on improving the skills and effectiveness of existing teacher workforces. With an emphasis on improving teaching to improve student outcomes, *The Framework* provides guidance to each state and territory to develop their teacher performance and development systems. These systems comprise an annual performance and development cycle incorporating the phases outlined in *The Framework* and the adoption of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2011) to describe effective teaching.

With a continued focus on systems that support and develop quality teaching, as articulated in the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019), this paper provides an important contribution to better understanding how the current performance and development processes have served teachers. Calls have also been made more broadly for further investigation of teachers' perceptions and experiences of performance and development in schools and to understand how to support the implementation of meaningful processes (Baker et al., 2017; Clinton & Dawson, 2018). With the aim to find out what teachers found useful and what helped make the cycle meaningful, the present study sought to examine the perceptions and experiences of 18 teachers in three schools in Victoria as they participated in an annual performance and development cycle. The research question guiding this study was, what aspects are identified as useful in supporting teachers to consider a performance and development cycle meaningful to develop their practice?

Literature Review

A wide body of literature supports the view that quality teaching is a significant in-school factor affecting student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hattie, 2003; Nye et al., 2004; OECD, 2005) and that performance and development processes may provide an important means for teachers to improve their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Huber & Skedsmo, 2016; OECD, 2020). If well-designed, teacher performance and development systems can be used as a tool to increase teacher effectiveness and achieve better student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Kraft & Christian, 2022; OECD, 2020). While significant investments have been made by policymakers worldwide to the development of teacher performance and development processes, some have argued that better approaches to appraisal and feedback are required for these processes to be more effective (Jensen & Reichl, 2011; Hughes & Starr, 2019; OECD, 2013).

The Framework was to support the implementation of effective performance and development processes in Australian schools, providing an outline of the characteristics of an annual performance and development cycle and the culture required to support it. As presented in Figure 1, *The Framework* highlights five elements deemed essential to building an effective performance and development culture. These include a focus on student outcomes; an understanding of effective teaching; leadership; coherence; and flexibility according to contextual issues of readiness. It also describes a structure for appraising,

developing, and refining teaching practice. This cycle includes reflection and goal setting; professional practice and learning aligned to goals; opportunities for feedback, and a review to evaluate goals achieved and set future targets. The literature informing aspects of *The Framework* relevant to this study and aspects of the performance and development cycle that might be perceived as meaningful to teachers are presented in this section.
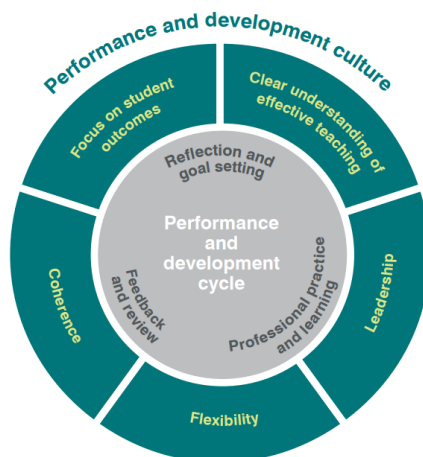

Figure 1: The Australian Performance and Development Framework (AITSL, 2012)

The reflection and goal-setting phase of the cycle within *The Framework* involves teachers reflecting on their practice and setting measurable goals for improvement. Reflection and goal setting has been found to assist in providing a clear course of direction and focus (Locke & Latham, 2002) and has been identified as a critical lever for school improvement (Louis et al., 2010). Teachers who set goals are better able to direct their attention to those goals (Hattie, 2012) and are more motivated to persevere (Bandura, 1997; 2006; 2012). Reflection and goal setting have been identified as central skills to the development of self-regulated learning capabilities, assisting teachers to monitor their performance and reflect on the impact of their actions (Sims et al., 2021; Timperley, 2011). With a positive relationship between clear goals, feedback and motivation, reflection and goal setting are an integral part of any performance and development system.

Within *The Framework,* professional practice is described as a collection of evidence used for ongoing feedback, reflection, and further development, while professional learning refers to the activities teachers engage in to improve their teaching. According to *The Framework*, teachers may draw on multiple sources of evidence to reflect upon and evaluate their practice. This evidence could include the impact of teaching on student outcomes; direct observation of teaching; the teacher's impact on colleagues and the school as a whole; student feedback; peer/supervisor feedback; parent feedback; teacher self-assessment; and participation in professional learning and reflection about its impact (AITSL, 2012). Professional learning, as part of performance and development, continues to take a prominent place in education policy and practice and is well-recognised as a key mechanism for enhancing teacher knowledge and skills (Dinham, 2011; Ingvarson, 2003; OECD, 2005).

The feedback and review phase of *The Framework* includes formal and informal feedback on goals and actions for improvement that is outlined in a teacher's performance and development plan. The progress of goals within the plan is monitored throughout the school year with a formal review to be conducted at the end of the cycle. At the review meeting, the reviewer(s) and the reviewee are to evaluate performance and identify future professional development needs.

Fundamentally feedback is information communicated to an individual that is intended to improve performance. According to Wiggins (2012), feedback should be goal-referenced; tangible, transparent; actionable; user-friendly (specific); timely; ongoing, and consistent. As outlined by Hattie and Timperley (2007), high-quality feedback should address the gap between current and future performance, providing information about: Where am I going? (feeding up); How am I going? (feedback) and, Where to next? (feeding forward). Ongoing, specific feedback is a powerful lever for improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2012). Feedback has been identified as essential to helping teachers improve their teaching by identifying and developing specific aspects of their practice and has been identified as a key component of job satisfaction (Gates Foundation, 2010; OECD, 2009).

Research is unambiguous that successful performance and development relies on creating a supportive school culture, thus suggesting that the contexts in which teachers work profoundly shape their effectiveness. A successful approach to performance and development, as noted in *The Framework*, relies on building a supportive performance and development culture and processes that include opportunities for teachers to engage in reflection and goal setting, professional learning, ongoing feedback, and a review of their performance against goals.

School leadership plays a critical role in the success of performance and development processes and is well recognised as having a significant effect on features of a school organisation which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning creating the conditions under which quality teaching and learning can occur, and supporting and fostering quality teaching (Barber & Moushed, 2007; Day, 2017; Dinham, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2020; Lui & Hallinger, 2018; Robinson et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2009). Although school leaders perform a critical role in the implementation of effective performance and development shaping the experiences teachers have with the process (Barry et al., 2020), Hughes and Starr (2019) note there are discrepancies in the intentions and approaches to teacher appraisal, producing mixed outcomes for schools and education systems.

Although *The Framework* provides a useful guide to support implementation, the quality and extent of implementation of teacher performance and development processes vary (Clinton & Dawson, 2018), with few studies about teachers' perceptions of evaluation processes and the aspects of the process that may enable it to surpass such expectations (Baker et al., 2017). With teacher performance and development processes still prevalent in policy and practices across schools and educational systems, this present study aims to provide empirical evidence regarding aspects that shape teachers' experiences of performance and development and those perceived as valuable to supporting their development.

Research Design

This study sought to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences as they participated in an annual performance and development cycle at their school. A purposive sampling method was applied (Cohen et al., 2011) to identify schools that had recently introduced a teacher performance and development cycle using the guidelines outlined in *The Framework*, and to select teachers with a range of years experience. Data were collected in two phases across the 2016 school year, at the beginning (Phase 1) and towards the end (Phase 2) of each school's annual performance and development cycle. A qualitative semi-structured interview methodology was applied, drawing on individuals' interactions with others as well as an understanding of the contexts within which they participate (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Sampling Procedures

This study captured the perspectives of 18 teachers across three government primary schools (six teachers in each school) in Victoria. Purposive sampling was used to select schools purposively based on "judgement", "typicality" and schools in "possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 156). The schools were located in metropolitan Melbourne and were defined as being above the Australian Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) average (1000) as calculated by parent occupation and education, geographical location and proportion of indigenous students at the school, indicating a higher level of educational advantage. These schools were also selected on the basis that they had performance and development processes in place incorporating the key characteristics articulated in *The Framework*. Teachers from each school were selected in an attempt to include teachers with a range of years of teaching experience and teachers who had been at their current school for varying lengths of time. Of the participants, there were teachers at each school with a range of years of teaching experience (from two to more than 20 years), and those who had been at their respective schools for between two and 17 years. Pseudonyms are used to denote the three schools (School A, School B, and School C) and individual participants (e.g., Teacher A1, Teacher A2, etc.).

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected at the beginning and towards the end of each school's annual cycle with six teachers, 18 teachers in total. At each school, three teachers participated in two semi-structured interviews, and three teachers participated in two focus group sessions. The first interviews and focus group sessions at each school were held at the start of the year (Phase 1), and the second sessions were held towards the end of the school year (Phase 2). Teachers who expressed interest in participating in focus groups or interviews were contacted via email to set a time for the first session. Of those who volunteered to be involved in either focus groups or interviews, teachers were selected in an attempt to include teachers with a range of years of experience in both the interviews and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups provided individuals and groups of teachers to share their perceptions and experiences as they underwent the cycle to investigate what helped or would help contribute to it being a meaningful process.

During Phase 1 of the study, at the beginning of the school year, semi-structured interviews were held with three teachers at each school to generate data about the initial stages of the performance and development cycle and understand how the direction for their areas of improvement was established. Semi-structured interviews were used as they are "particularly good at enabling the researcher to learn, firsthand, about people's perspectives on the subject chosen at the project focus" (Davies, 2007, p. 29). Through interviews, the experiences teachers had during the process and their thoughts, values and actions about the process were investigated.

The focus groups included different teachers to those participating in the interviews and aimed to validate themes from the literature and the interviews. In the first focus group, teachers were invited to record responses to a stimulus prompt about what they considered to be the purpose of performance and development and what they considered an effective performance and development process to look and sound like. An opportunity for further discussion following the activity to examine overarching intentions, possibilities and limitations of the performance and development process was also held. The written responses

were collected at the end of each session as well as audio transcripts of the recorded discussion that followed.

The second interviews, conducted during Phase 2 of the study, were held towards the end of the school year and focused on teachers' experiences within the cycle, their progress towards achieving their goals and any professional learning, feedback, and review that had recently taken place. Interviews were structured to ask questions about each aspect of the performance and development cycle: reflection and goal setting, professional practice and learning, feedback and review. An example of questions asked at the start and end of the cycle is outlined in Table 1.

Aspect of cycle	Interview questions (start of cycle)	Interview questions (end of cycle)
General reflection	What does the current performance and development process look like at your school?	What did the process involve this year? What were the most/least important aspects to you?
Reflection and goal setting	What are the goals/objectives you've identified in your plan for this year?	What have you worked on this year and what have you achieved?
Professional practice and learning	What professional learning experience are you seeking to engage in this year to help you improve?	Was there any professional learning you engaged in this year that influenced your practice or assisted in progress towards your goal/s?
Feedback and review	What does the meeting/review stage of the performance and development process entail at your school?	What did the feedback and review components of the cycle look like for you this year? What type of feedback did you receive this year, and from who? What role did it play?

Table 1: Example interview questions corresponding to each aspect of the performance and development cycle

In the second focus group session, teachers were invited to share what they considered were the strengths of the current performance and development cycle, and areas for improvement. Following this activity, a discussion was held with the group asking for any further considerations. This step invited teachers to clarify what role they considered the process played in supporting their practice and enhancing student learning. The objective of this phase was to better understand strengths and areas for improvement within the current performance and development approach.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of data was applied as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82), while allowing the "interpretive social scientist to generate qualitative hypothesis" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. xiii). The analysis drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic coding to proceed from descriptive to inferential data to abstract analysis. After becoming familiar with the data, the analysis then proceeded in six steps: i) familiarising yourself with the data; ii) generating initial codes; iii) searching for themes; iv) reviewing themes; v) defining and naming themes; and vi) producing the report. This process of data analysis began by listening back to audio recordings, transcribing data, and reading through the written transcripts and documents several times to obtain an overall feel. At this point, additional memos were made against each transcript, reflecting on preliminary codes, patterns, and descriptions of what each may mean. The themes were then represented in a web-like map to illustrate the

relationships between each set of themes. In the final stages of analysis, a table of themes was produced.

Throughout the study, triangulation and member checking were employed to ensure greater trustworthiness and soundness of the interpretations of the data. This involved drawing on data from teachers in different year levels, and different schools, at different time points and cross-checking transcripts, interpretations, and preliminary insights with participants to support the credibility of findings.

Research Ethics

Ethics approval was granted before conducting the study, and informed consent was sought from the school principals and teachers. Meetings were held at each school at the beginning of the school year and teachers were provided with information about the research project and were invited to participate. These information sessions provided an opportunity for teachers to ask questions about the project and to seek their interest in participating in interviews or focus group sessions. The ability for participants to withdraw at any time was reiterated. Participants and schools were provided with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Findings

Four themes emerged from the study as important to supporting meaningful performance and development. These were: clear expectations and accountability; providing guidance and support; a culture to support learning and development; and metacognitive strategies to assist development. Table 2 shows the structure of themes and subthemes and illustrative data extracts or quotes presented alongside each theme.

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Example Responses
clear expectations and accountability	wanting to be held accountable wanting a clear rationale/sense of purpose	▪ consistent process ▪ valid judgment ▪ consequences for underperformance ▪ clear expectations ▪ don't see an alignment between process and learning ▪ consultative process ▪ no consultation/telling me what to write	More accountability for goals not achieved. As it stands, each time there has been an emphasis on not worrying if a goal is not achieved (Teacher B5). Or you've identified this as being something that you need to work on, so let's put something like that. So as far as the process at the moment, I would like to see more of that, so a bit more collaboration and ownership between myself and the school (Teacher C1).
providing guidance and opportunities for teachers to develop their practice	opportunities to develop guidance/advice provided	▪ structures in place to support ▪ wanting time for ▪ resources, guidelines provided ▪ seeking examples ▪ constructive feedback, direction	I think it's pretty good because I can talk to [Principal/Assistant Principal] about my goals and go through them, and I know they'll support me (Teacher C2). So [Principal] took the time to give me feedback on how to organise myself and what sort of things I should be looking out for in the meantime in order to produce a folder (Teacher A1).
a culture to support learning and development	seen as valued and valuable culture of learning	▪ feeling valued and heard ▪ knows me and the school ▪ opportunity for professional dialogue ▪ acknowledgement ▪ moving together in the same direction ▪ positive relationships ▪ trust	I agree that positive relationships are key to building a strong professional development model (Teacher A5). If done well the process allows for collegiality and stronger links between school goals and effective teaching and learning (Teacher C4).
applying metacognitive strategies to assist development	setting meaningful goals visible impact	▪ depth and breadth of goals (quality over quantity) ▪ fostering self-reflection ▪ focus on growth/impact/development	If we didn't have this process, we'd still do our daily teaching and do it well, but we wouldn't have to sit down and really think about where we are now compared to twelve months down the track or twelve months before (Teacher A6). So obviously, if I've got that spread, but if I don't have all kids sitting in the middle, I know that I'm starting to cater for those kids, and I guess it's a value add of the growth between the marks (Teacher C2).

Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Interviews and Focus Group Data

Clear Expectations and Accountability

A common view among teachers was that clear expectations and accountability for their actions and goals were essential to a meaningful performance and development process. Teachers acknowledged that accountability led to better communication of expectations for performance and brought greater clarity to what would be evaluated, how teachers would be evaluated, and what goals to work on. Teachers agreed that the actions of school leaders formally consulting teachers and administering a consistent process at the school was important and helped ensure greater clarity and importance of the process:

> *It just brings to light the areas that the school needs to work on so that we're all aware of it. I think that's important. We all know why we're here and what this particular setting requires of us so that we can achieve better student outcomes (Teacher A6).*

Teachers at each school talked about the important role of school leaders investing in the process, "seeing what is actually happening" (Teacher C2) and the critical role that played in delivering on the accountability aspects of performance and development to get "a true idea of whether or not the goals are being met" (Teacher C2). As a teacher at another school explained, "there needs to be more accountability for goals not achieved. As it stands, each time, there has been an emphasis on not worrying if a goal is not achieved" (Teacher B5). Another teacher commented that a current weakness in the process at their school was that there is "no follow up – no real accountability" and noted that "if it was more meaningful to leaders, then it might be more meaningful to staff" (Teacher C4). These examples revealed that a teacher performance and development process that had clear expectations and accountability was perceived to be more meaningful to these teachers, setting high expectations and connection to its purpose.

Providing Guidance and Opportunities for Teachers to Develop their Practice

While supportive school leaders promoted accountability and rigour in the process, articulating its purpose and validity through consultation and consistency, the second part of the process was about development. A recurrent theme in the data was that teachers valued time spent with colleagues to develop their practice and that effective school leaders provided guidance, support, and opportunities for teachers to improve. Teachers explained that this support included school leaders providing feedback, setting up opportunities for teachers to work with others and prioritising time to meet with teachers. As several teachers explained: "I valued the time the headteacher took to discuss my goals with me and make them realistic" (Teacher A4); "I think it's pretty good because I can talk to school leaders about my goals and go through it and I know they'll support me" (Teacher C5) and "I found the one-on-one feedback to be very valuable as individual needs can be discussed" (Teacher B3). A focus on development, as indicated by these teachers, included school leaders making time for conversations with teachers and teams of teachers, providing resources to assist goal development and evidence gathering, and providing feedback to teachers about their strengths and areas where improvements could be made.

While those participants at one school indicated that school leaders supported them to develop their teaching, one teacher explained that while "support is provided" there was "perhaps too much" (Teacher B4). Further comments from teachers emphasised too much support from school leaders undermined the rigour of the process, as two teachers explained:

"I just think that their intentions in setting goals for us are good, but I think probably in most cases it's probably backfired" (Teacher B4), "I appreciate the thought of trying to limit the time we're putting in it, but that's just all defeating the purpose" (Teacher B5).

Although teachers valued the support school leaders provided through the performance and development cycle, providing feedback, and supporting them with the development of their goals, too much support was counterintuitive to the process and its intent. These teachers acknowledged that while school leaders 'providing guidance and opportunities for teachers to develop their practice' was important, to be meaningful, the process needed to be rigorous, this included teachers being involved in the development of goals that they perceived as useful, and challenging, and receiving "constructive feedback on how to make improvements or further goals" (Teacher B1). This theme captured the important role of school leaders in providing opportunities, and guidance to teachers to learn with and from others and cautions the role of leaders in guiding teachers as opposed to instructing them.

A Culture to Support Learning and Development

School leaders played a key role in influencing teachers' perceptions of performance and development and how it was implemented in these schools. While *The Framework* provided teacher performance and development guidelines, findings suggested there were variations in individual interpretation and implementation at each school.

A persistent theme across the interviews and focus groups was that 'a culture to support learning and development' was essential to effective performance and development. This included a professional learning culture built on trust and continuous improvement; as one teacher explained, "if done well the process allows for collegiality and stronger links between school goals and effective teaching and learning" (Teacher C4). Teachers in these schools noted that effective leaders supported teachers in particular ways, building a collegial culture and providing professional learning opportunities for teachers to develop their practice, with a focus on its impact. This was seen as valuable to teachers. For example:

> *I agree that positive relationships are key to building a strong professional development model. Getting to know your colleagues as people, not just professionals, leads to building trust, which leads to more open and honest discussions. They say having a growth mindset means seeing vulnerability as an open door to learning (Teacher A5).*

Teachers agreed that a supportive culture was the foundation for effective performance and development. In contrast, it appeared to be less effective when it was perceived not to be valued by school leaders, as two teachers indicated: "the process just seems more like, just let's get through it and seems to be disingenuous" (Teacher B4) and "if it was like fully based on improvement that would be great, but it never feels like they actually want you to try something and improve, they want you to tick a box" (Teacher B1).

When performance and development cultures were imbued, these teachers expressed feeling connected to each other and indicated that the process was an effective way to develop their practice. As one teacher explained, the importance of a performance and development culture was in the connection between trust, relationships, and learning:

> *I realised that our performance and development process is a cycle; hence learning itself is a cycle, and it never stops. One piece of learning will lead to another, so that's why I drew the cycle symbol here, and I just wrote some words that popped out at me – trust, respect, vision, consultation, and it's very much a two-way or three-way;*

however many people are involved, it's not something you do alone, it's something you do with others (Teacher A6).

A culture that supported learning and development reinforced a commitment to the process and each other for these teachers. This was strengthened through subjective norms, confirming the importance of shared beliefs about working together to improve. These findings suggest that professional learning within the school may support a sense of collective improvement and a culture that supports learning and development. This culture appears to be a result of school leaders who cultivate an environment built on mutual trust and support.

Applying Metacognitive Strategies to Assist Development

Teachers' abilities to articulate success criteria for improvement and apply metacognitive strategies to assist development enhanced the authenticity of the process. The theme 'applying metacognitive strategies to assist development' reflected some teachers' approaches to developing their practice as part of the performance and development cycle. These strategies included using feedback and reflection and, in the case of some teachers, a capacity to diagnose, monitor, and evaluate the development and achievement of goals.

Reflection was a common method identified by teachers for developing individual and collective capacity. As the following teachers commented: "the focus on reflection is what makes the performance and development process important and useful" (Teacher A5); "it's time to consider teaching and think about self-improvement" (Teacher B6); and, the process "provides time to reflect - we ask the students to do it all the time, but we don't often get a chance" (Teacher C6).

When teachers shared a common language about progress and demonstrated the capabilities to diagnose, monitor, and evaluate their learning it supported the premise that when school leaders and teachers share a common language about progress and valued professional collaboration, they built greater confidence and competence among their teachers. The connection between the goals teachers set, actions taken and reflection on learning and achievement operated in a way that one teacher explained as an "inquiry process of our learning" (Teacher A6) and another explained as connecting to the impact of their teaching on students, noting that "I give the students a pre-test and a post-test to see how far they can go. So it's really building that awareness of how much they're learning and growing as well" (Teacher C3).

These teachers expressed a sense of accomplishment and purpose towards achieving goals and improving their practice, which appeared to strengthen their connection to the performance and development process. These methods facilitated greater control and regulation over thinking and included planning, monitoring, and evaluation of goals, as one teacher explained:

> I make [my goal] something that I can actually measure; I looked at *their [reading assessment] when they came into my class, and what will help me measure my goal. …. I noticed that the students' inferential comprehension, in particular, was not very high. So once I made that goal, I started doing a few things, like consulting with literacy coaches …. this helped me to put their advice into the classroom. I looked at a lot of evidence, my students' work samples and those kinds of things, and used that to see how far I had progressed on my goals (Teacher A3).*

This theme affirmed that teachers desired opportunities to reflect on their practice.

The strategies these teachers applied appeared to foster metacognition which assisted with critical awareness and their ability to evaluate the impact of professional learning on their practice and student learning. The teachers' abilities to monitor their learning and development led to greater agency and connection of these teachers as learners. The schools, therefore, became sites of learning in which teachers worked with others to judge, evaluate, and develop their practice. Within an effective performance and development culture, connected and empowered teachers valued the process and were positioned as learners.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this research was to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences within an annual performance and development cycle and identify aspects that may support the effective implementation of performance and development processes that are valuable to teachers and support their development. Teachers' perceptions are essential to increase understanding of implementation successes and challenges. This study confirmed that school leaders played a pivotal role in setting up the conditions and structures for teachers' individual and collective development. Meaningful teacher performance and development occurred in these schools when school leaders valued and built collegial cultures among school leaders and teachers. These leaders were explicit about and shared common narratives about high expectations, inviting teachers to choose effective teaching methods and providing feedback mechanisms to facilitate higher impact so that a focus on improving became the norm in the school. The findings suggest several aspects support teacher performance and development to be perceived as meaningful to these teachers.

Success Criteria are Defined

A teacher performance and development process that was 'developed *with* rather than done to teachers' helped articulate the intentions and objectives of the process, informing success criteria that were clear, co-constructed, and supported. The process was more meaningful when teachers understood what success looked like as part of the process, drawing on common understandings of teaching and learning to develop goals based on student needs and their own.

Trust and Respect Imbue the Culture

As identified by these teachers, effective leaders helped frame the importance of the process. A process with no real sense of accountability had positioned the process to be of little value for some teachers, however, providing opportunities to connect with others and school leaders valuing the process imbued a culture of trust and respect that the process was important. This supported the notion that the process was an opportunity to develop as individuals and as a school.

Expectations are High

A teacher performance and development process that focused on development disrupted storylines of 'tick the box' and 'compliance' moving the narrative to one that empowered teachers with authority over the development of their practice. When tokenistic

targets and goals were set, the cycle was perceived as a waste of time. Setting goals that were purposeful and providing feedback about where to next for these teachers demonstrated to teachers they were valued, the process was meaningful, and there were high expectations in place.

Process Intentions and Objectives are Clear

It was apparent that the performance and development cycle was considered meaningful when both school leaders and teachers had positioned the process as focusing on accountability and their development as teachers. In these instances, there were clear intentions and objectives for the process guided by school leaders who facilitated the development of shared understandings for these teachers. These leaders set up the conditions in their school that built subjective norms that we work together to improve and set high expectations that increased the value of the process. School leaders' ability to effectively communicate the purpose of the performance and development cycle through their messages and actions seemed to allay possible tensions about its purpose and strengthened these teachers' trust in the school leaders and the process.

Self-Regulatory Learning Behaviours are Developed and Valued

Teachers' ability to articulate success criteria for improvement and use self-regulatory learning behaviours enhanced the value of the process. These behaviours amplified a teacher's sense of mastery and thus the effectiveness of the process for these teachers. Effective school leaders provided opportunities, including professional learning, for teachers to develop strategies to support self-regulatory learning behaviours, including determining goals and actions, monitoring their learning and development, and seeking and applying feedback which helped teachers to monitor and evaluate their teaching impact.

Proposing a Model to Support Meaningful Teacher Performance and Development Processes

These findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of effective performance and development may increase when there are clear intentions and objectives of the process, there are high expectations built from trust, and a focus on development is emphasised. These findings further support the importance of instructional leadership (Hattie, 2015a; Robinson et al., 2008), trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), and leaders who cultivate effective performance and development cultures (Dinham, 2011; Hallinger et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2009). This study supports Hargreaves' (1994) notion that "what we want for our children we should also want for their teachers: that schools be places of learning for both" (p.34).

The data generated in this study suggests that the conditions that support student learning parallel the conditions that support teacher learning. Thus, the focus on nurturing the development element of teacher performance and development is essential. In response to the findings, the acronym STEPS has been proposed, highlighting five critical criteria to consider when implementing teacher performance and development. These are:

- *S*uccess criteria are defined
- *T*rust and respect imbue the culture
- *E*xpectations are high
- *P*rocess intentions and objectives are clear

- *S*elf-regulatory learning behaviours are developed and valued.

Although this study was completed in 2016 and before a pandemic that disrupted many aspects of our lives, including the nature of schools and schooling, teacher performance and development processes remain a permanent feature in schools, and perhaps even more so as teachers deal with new approaches to learning and teaching, and continual teaching and learning improvements remain high on the agendas of governments and systemic decision makers (Hughes & Starr, 2019). This study has proposed a model to support meaningful teacher performance and development processes and presents an opportunity for schools and educational systems to review the implementation and use of *The Framework* to better support teacher professional learning and development.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has limitations in terms of scope, scalability, and location as it involves schools in one system, one state, and one country from three government primary schools in metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. It would be difficult to assume that these experiences were representative of all teachers within or beyond these schools and, therefore, do not claim to represent the perceptions of all teachers. The findings, however, do explain possible enablers of effective performance and development from the perception of teachers in these schools and may be considered alongside other aspects articulated in *The Framework* as important to facilitating effective practices in schools to support teacher development.

The findings offer a starting point to further examine the mechanisms supporting effective teacher performance and development; however, further research to evaluate the impact of these processes on enhancing teacher and student learning is required. The importance of a culture of learning and development should not be underestimated, and although teacher performance and development processes often present as a focus on individual development, the collective nature of supporting individual development within the collective also warrants further investigation.

Conclusion

This study indicates there is a range of considerations when implementing a performance and development process perceived as meaningful to teachers. For these teachers, the school leaders in each school were key to implementation. A meaningful cycle was supported by school leaders who generated accountability and focused on enhancing individual and collective impact. The findings presented here do not offer a tick-the-box list to facilitate performance and development in all schools. However, they do explain possible enablers of meaningful performance and development, proposing a series of *STEPS* to support successful implementation. These *STEPS* may be considered alongside other elements outlined in *The Framework* as essential to meaningful processes that support teacher growth and development.

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