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A Study of Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation in Alberta: Policy and Perception in a Collective Case Study

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A Study of Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation in Alberta: Policy and Perception in a Collective Case Study

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Abstract

Teacher effectiveness has long been identified as critical to student success and, more recently, supporting students attaining the skills and dispositions required to be successful in the early 21st century. To do so requires that teachers engage in professional learning characterized as a shift away from conventional models of evaluation and judgment. Accordingly, school and system leaders must create “policies and environments designed to actively support teacher professional growth” (Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Webbels, 2010). This paper reports on the Alberta Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation (TGSE) Policy (Government of Alberta, 1998) through the eyes of teachers, school leaders, and superintendents. The study sought to answer the following two questions: (1) To what extent, and in what ways, do teachers, principals, and superintendents perceive that ongoing supervision by the principal provides teachers with the guidance and support they need to be successful? and, (2) To what degree, and in what ways, does the TGSE policy provide a foundation to inform future effective policy and implementation of teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation? Results affirm international findings that although a majority of principals consider themselves as instructional leaders, only about one third actually act accordingly (OECD, 2016).

Keywords

teacher growth; professional learning; instructional leadership; supervision; evaluation

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Introduction

A consistent theme in literature about student achievement is that teaching matters. Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) note that, “efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to advance teacher learning” (p. 1). Thus, teacher growth is a “vitaly important dimension of the educational improvement process” (Guskey & Yoon, 2009, p. 495). Further, education reform in general can be linked to efforts to enhance the quality of teacher learning (Desimone, 2011). Bakkenes, Vermunt, and Webbels (2010) contend that teachers are “the most important agents in shaping education for students and in bringing about change and innovation in educational practices” (p. 533), which reflects a key message that student learning is the *raison d’être* of professional growth (Killion & Hirsh, 2013).

Teacher effectiveness has long been identified as critical to student success, and in the new Millennium, supporting students in attaining 21st century skills and dispositions became the emphasis. With this came an acknowledgement that models of teacher professional learning could benefit from reconsideration of conventional models of evaluation and judgment. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) described this as “the serious and difficult task of *learning* the skills and perspectives assumed by new visions of practice and *unlearning* the practices and beliefs about students and instruction that have dominated their professional lives to date” (p. 81, italics in original). To accommodate this shift, system and school leaders must create and actualize policies and environments designed to actively support teacher professional growth (Bakkenes et al., 2010).

This article describes a study of one such policy in Alberta, Canada, which was explicitly designed by education stakeholders to disentangle the language and enactment of a) growth, b) supervision, and c) evaluation. Twenty years after the policy was implemented, it still remained unclear the extent to which the Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation Policy (TGSE) was successful in differentiating between the practices used to support all three functions. Accordingly, a study was commissioned⁴ to gather perceptions from teachers, school leaders, and system administrators about their experiences in actualizing the policy. The component of the study reported upon here sought to answer the following two questions: (1) To what extent, and in what ways, do teachers, principals, and superintendents perceive that ongoing supervision by the principal provides teachers with the guidance and support they need to be successful? and, (2) To what degree, and in what ways, does the TGSE policy provide a foundation to inform future effective policy and implementation of teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation?

Review of the Literature

The vital relationship between teachers’ and students’ learning is reflected in educational policies throughout the world. For example, professional learning is linked with (a) “desired student

⁴ Alberta Education provided the funding necessary to conduct this study undertaken by researchers in three provincial comprehensive universities.

outcomes” (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 35), (b) “enhance[ing] the learning experiences of all learners” (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2012, p. 4), and (c) “support[ing] student achievement and success” (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016, p. 2). Several American states articulate an explicit relationship between teacher professional learning and student achievement. For example, the California Department of Education (2015) states that, “quality professional learning focuses on the knowledge and skills that educators need in order to help students bridge the gaps between their current level of knowledge, skill, and understanding and expected student outcomes” (p. 10). Similarly, the Texas Department of Education (2014) expects that,

Teachers establish and strive to achieve professional goals to strengthen their instructional effectiveness and better meet students’ needs. [They] engage in relevant, targeted professional learning opportunities that align with their professional growth goals and their students’ academic and social-emotional needs. (Standard 6 (A)(ii))

Singaporean policy (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2012) outlines that, “Teachers will have flexibility and autonomy to plan their learning relevant to their professional needs and interest. Their learning will be aligned to the knowledge and skills needed to nurture students in 21st century competencies” (p. 13). Further south, Australian policy (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012) identifies that,

Professional learning will be most effective when it takes place within a culture where teachers and school leaders expect and are expected to be active learners, to reflect on, receive feedback on and improve their pedagogical practice, and by doing so to improve student outcomes. (p. 3)

In Canada’s largest province, the Ontario College of Teachers (2016) recognizes that, “a commitment to ongoing professional learning is integral to effective practice and to student learning. Professional practice and self-directed learning are informed by experience, research, collaboration and knowledge” (para 5). These policies across the world confirm Burns and Darling-Hammond’s (2014) observation that policies connecting teachers’ learning and growth to student learning will “ensure that teaching practice develops to meet the continually changing demands on the profession” (p. 46).

Why Evaluate? Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings

Contradictory statements of purpose in policy documents are not surprising, since policy-making often involves the reconciliation of different goals by different interest groups (Stone, 2002). Further complicating policy development are the multiple aims and aspirations brought to bear when purposes are interpreted during implementation. Thus, in their review of literature on teacher evaluation, Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Pease (1983) emphasized that teacher evaluation must attend to several implicit norms and values that will be actualized when policy becomes practice. They posit that four models reflect underlying sets of assumptions about organizational context, the purpose of schooling, and the nature of teachers’ work that will influence, and be reflected in, policies to determine teaching effectiveness. Table 1 illustrates these contrasting assumptions as they connect teachers’ work and school leaders’ roles.

Table 1: Nature of Teachers' Work and Implications for Policy

Teachers' Work Viewed as:	Assumes that teaching is:	Teacher evaluation policy will focus on:	The principal's role is to:	Metaphor of evaluation
Labor	Rational and routine	Direct inspection of externally predetermined, concrete practices and behaviors	Provide assessment based on checklist of practices and behaviors	Evaluation is a checklist of external objective criteria
Craft	A "repertoire of specialized techniques" (p. 291)	Indirect assessment of teachers' skills	Manage teachers' acquisition of skill	Evaluation is a guideline, outlining a range of techniques
Profession	Based on special knowledge and judgment	Demonstration of pedagogical decisions	Prepare the administrative conditions for teachers to exercise judgment based on their knowledge	Evaluation is a prism, refracting agreed upon knowledge base applied in various ways
Art	Not predictable or codified	Teachers' autonomy, creativity, flexibility, and adaptability	Provide leadership and encouragement so teachers can flourish	Evaluation is a canvas for teachers to explore and shape

These alternate mental models, metaphors, or mixtures of presumptions often color the ongoing debate around teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation: Is the aim improvement or accountability? If the goal is to improve teaching in a sustained and longitudinal way over the course of a career, strategies of formative evaluation may be applied. If accountability for performance is the aim, summative evaluation may be emphasized. Is teaching a form of labor or piecework performed at the behest of an employer? If so, then collective agreements and contractual language become paramount in teacher evaluation. Alternately, is teaching a form of craftwork that reflects the progressive acquisition and refinement of a repertoire of techniques and tools acquired during long years of practice as an apprentice and eventually a master? If teachers constitute a profession or are in the process of professionalizing—as stereotyped in the conventional archetypes in medicine and law—professional autonomy is crucial in teacher appraisal. Hence, collegial approaches to teacher evaluation and credentialing become important in evaluating personnel. Or is teaching an exquisite art, subject only to the creative impulses of the author and the aesthetic of multiple beholders? Such a set of assumptions would see teacher evaluation as an exercise in artistic appreciation or connoisseurship. In other words, policies may be ambiguous or ambivalent in their original wording at the point of inception. Policy

implementation as translation brings into play yet another set of other complexities when enacted in schools.

Moreover, although accountability and growth are often considered antagonists, they may also be alternate sides of the same improvement coin. Although accountability is one aspect of quality education, reports on whether summative schemes improve teaching are not definitive. Based on 2013 TALIS results, the OECD (2016) concluded that evaluation conducted for purposes of external reward and positive reinforcement does not impact teachers' learning. In fact, according to Santiago and Benavides (2009), summative models of evaluation can actually impede teacher growth and development because fear of retribution causes teachers to be less likely to discuss areas of weakness. Alternately, if improvement is the underlying policy goal, teachers are more likely to address, reflect, identify self-improvement needs, and apply formative feedback (Santiago & Benavides, 2009). Yet, one of the evaluation trends reported by the OECD is an increased use of accountability measures, including public reporting of standardized test results and school annual reports, use of external examiners, sanctions for underperforming school agents, and rewards for good performance.

Situating Teacher Improvement through Feedback

Two categories of teacher growth and supervision models have emerged from the polarized debate. Value-added models (VAMs), of which Marzano's *Causal Teacher Evaluation* (Marzano, 2012) framework is often associated, use both formative and summative assessment to ascertain instructional effectiveness. A VAM "evaluates the academic growth students experience over the course of a school year, rather than comparing the current year's cohort with the previous years" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 15). In some jurisdictions that implement VAMs, performance-related pay is used to incentivize teachers who significantly contribute to student learning (Huang, 2015; Liang, 2013; Liang & Akiba, 2011; Podgursky & Springer, 2007; Woessmann, 2011).

However, other scholars advocate for movement towards improvement-oriented models. Killion and Hirsh (2013) summarized the characteristics of teacher improvement models as a shift from: (a) in-service education and professional development to professional learning, (b) individual learning to team-based, school wide learning, (c) separate individual teacher, school, or district professional development plans to effective professional learning embedded into team, school, and district improvement efforts, and (d) improving teaching practices to improving teacher quality and student learning. Brady (2009) concurred that:

Instead of thinking of professional development as a top-down system of bringing best practices into the school from outside agencies, recent research has identified the teacher and their teaching context as the site at which professional development is most effectively developed. (p. 337).

Fundamental to teacher improvement models is that "change must be meaningfully situated and sustained at the classroom level" (Butler & Schnellert, 2012, p. 1206). Teachers learn when they have opportunities to reflect upon and critique their practice vis-à-vis student learning over

extended periods of time (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Importantly, as Burns and Darling-Hammond (2014) concluded:

Teachers are the most valuable resource available to schools. They are the most influential in-school factor upon student learning, and also the greatest financial investment in terms of their training and ongoing compensation. Thus attracting high-quality individuals into the profession, providing them with the supports they need to make the transition from teacher candidate to experienced teacher, and retaining them in the profession are of critical importance to educational systems. Doing so requires policies that support teachers' continual professional growth, including working with and learning from colleagues, to ensure that teaching practice develops to meet the continually changing demands on the profession. (p. 46)

Context and Background

Alberta, as one Canadian province, has consistently been among the world's top-performing education systems in which students score well on international assessments such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) (Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010; Coughlan, 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Concurrently, over the past two decades, teacher professional growth in Alberta has been guided by two key policy documents designed to ensure the nature and level of high quality teaching that contributes to student learning: the *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS) (Government of Alberta, 1997) and the *Alberta Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation Policy* (TGSE) (Government of Alberta, 1998). The first, TQS, supports this expectation by outlining standards of pedagogical and professional effectiveness expected from all public school teachers. The second, TGSE, links teaching and learning through, "the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for students" (Government of Alberta, 1998, p. 1).

Additionally, in 1998, the Government of Alberta mandated all teachers to complete an annual Teacher Professional Growth Plan (TPGP). These plans must align with the *Teaching Quality Standard* and include professional growth goals, strategies and actions for learning, and indicators of goal achievement. The complementary TGSE policy stipulates that the growth plan will,

Reflect goals and objectives based on an assessment of learning by the individual teacher, shows a demonstrable relationship to the teaching quality standard, and consider the education plans of the school, the school authority, and the Government, or the program statement of an ECS operator. (Government of Alberta, 1998, pp. 3-4)

To support and guide teacher growth, school leaders are required to supervise all teachers in their schools by "observing and receiving information from any source about the quality of teaching a teacher provides to students; and identifying the behaviours or practices of a teacher that for any reason may require an evaluation" (Government of Alberta, 1998, p. 4). However, in this same policy document, the process of evaluation may be undertaken for any of three purposes:

Gathering information related to a specific employment decision; assessing the growth of the teacher in specific areas of practice; and when, on the basis of information received through supervision, the principal has reason to believe that the teaching of the teacher may not meet the teaching quality standard (Government of Alberta, 1998, p. 5).

Two of these purposes emphasize summative assessment of teachers for making high-stakes decisions, such as employment or certification. In short, the wording and language used to define teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation in the TGSE policy document can be interpreted ambivalently as accountability-oriented in some respects and as growth oriented in others.

Research Design and Methodology

This research study aimed to provide an independent examination of the *Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation Policy* (TGSE) (Government of Alberta, 1998) and of related policies at the school authority level. An eight-member research team from three comprehensive universities in Alberta (University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, and University of Alberta) used a concurrent mixed methods design (Creswell, 2012) to generate insights into educator experiences with, and perspectives on, the teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation within the Alberta policy context. Qualitative data⁵ were gathered through multiple case study research. Rich, specific, and relevant perspectives were sought from teachers, principals, and central office leaders. Focus group interviews were conducted using a *constructivist* protocol (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Among the strengths of this type of focus group interview is the ability to effectively and efficiently collect in-depth information that can provide shared understandings and differing perspectives, resulting in a deeper, richer, and more complex understanding of how teachers, principals, and superintendents experienced teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation.

Participants

From March 2017 to June 2017, members of the research team collected data through 32 focus group interviews with teachers, principals, superintendents, and other central office leaders in nine randomly selected school authorities that included public, selected charter, and independent schools across Alberta. All teachers, school leaders, and system leaders in the nine school authorities were invited to participate in homogeneous focus groups based on position in the jurisdiction. All respondents to the invitation were included in the sample. Through arrangements made by school and system personnel, two to four members of the research team visited each jurisdiction to conduct one or more 60 to 90 minute focus group interviews. Each focus group was prefaced with an overview of the ethical requirements of the study, obtained written consent, and permission to record the interviews. Voice data were transcribed by a third party service obtained by the University of Calgary. Written transcripts were returned to participants for the purpose of member checking, allowing participants two weeks to provide feedback. No transcripts were returned with editorial comments.

⁵ This paper reports on findings resulting from qualitative data collected as part of a larger study using a concurrent mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Plano, 2011).

Accordingly, data was gathered from teachers (N=64 in twelve separate focus groups), principals (N=53 in eleven separate focus groups), and central office leaders (N=33 in nine separate focus groups) to ascertain the ways in which participants were experiencing the TGSE policy and how the policy was being actualized to support teacher growth. Table 2 contains a contextual description of the nine participating school authorities.⁶

Data Analysis

Data analysis in these nine cases was guided by multiple case study methods (Merriam, 1998). In multiple case studies, four to ten *instrumental* cases are described and analyzed to provide insight into an issue. The issue under investigation within the bounded system of the Alberta school system in 2017 was *educator experiences with teacher growth, supervision and evaluation*. The nine cases were used as illustrative narratives to determine ways through which teachers and leaders at the school and administrative levels engaged in teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation in their unique contexts.

Focus group data and field notes were reviewed and analyzed independently by each member of each research team (see Table 2.) through iterative processes of reading, re-reading, theme development, and “deep reflection and interpretation” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 72). This analysis of the qualitative data was informed by the view that “coding is deep reflection about, and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data’s meanings” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 72). The interactive nature of data collection and preliminary analysis became an important part of the process. As a preferred practice, a minimum of two research team members reviewed interview notes and engaged in reflective dialogue that generated tentative themes at both the case and the cross-case levels. In second-level coding, pattern codes were developed. Using the descriptive categories and criteria that emerged from the initial data analysis, more detailed pattern codes were created to form the basis for the case descriptions.

Building on the findings and emerging themes that resulted from each research team’s individual case study, the cross-case analysis conducted collaboratively by all nine researchers identified eight larger themes. Though this theme development process was ongoing and continuous over the course of the study, four distinct stages of analysis included:

1. Commonalities among case studies were informally identified to generate a list of possible themes;
2. Following data collection in all nine settings, one researcher generated a preliminary list of possible themes;
3. All other researchers then had an opportunity to discuss, revise, and develop more fully articulated themes during team meetings; and
4. All researchers reviewed and refined the themes through three drafts.

⁶ Each case was given a pseudonym to protect anonymity. Demographic information has been approximated and, in some cases, adjusted to further protect the anonymity of the school authority.

Table 2. Context and Composition of Nine Illustrative Alberta, Canada Cases, 2017

School Authority	Students	Teachers: FTE	# of Schools	School Authority Type	Research Team
Purple Lilac School Division	6,500	320	35	Rural	A
Lodgepole Pine School District	98,000	5000	210	Urban	B
Black Cottonwood School Division	4,500	190	22	Metro	A
Cinquefoil Conseil Scolaire	3,200	160	19	Francophone	A
Silver Buffalo-Berry School District	40,000	2,094	90	Metro	C
Red Currant Charter Authority	2000	150	4	Charter	C
Twinning Honeysuckle Schools	800	60	3	Independent	C
Lowbush Cranberry School Division	1,500	103	18	Rural	B
Tamarack School District	10,000	550	25	Urban	B

Discussion and Implications for Practice

After completing all stages of aggregate, individual case, and cross-case analyses by the nine-member research team, eight themes emerged that described participants' experiences with the *Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation* policy, and how the policy was being actualized to support teacher growth. Each theme is described in Table 3. These themes indicate that many teachers do not perceive that they are part of a well-structured, consistent, process designed to provide them with timely feedback focused on growth and development. Additionally, many participants in all categories – teachers, school leaders, and system leaders – conflated supervision and evaluation, and there was a strong call for a more formative process designed to improve practice.

This research also points to an ongoing tension that has played out in the history of the field of supervision itself. Some scholars view teacher evaluation as an important supervisory practice (Marshall, 2013). Others emphasize use of the term instructional supervision to describe a range

Table 3. Eight Themes Emerging from Alberta TGSE Focus Groups

Theme	Description
Influence and Control of System Leadership	The vision of the central office team strongly influenced how the TGSE policy was enacted. In particular, when the central office team shared their vision of teacher growth and strongly supported the growth planning process, robust implementation practices were evident.
Intentional and Sustained Support for Growth	The intended outcomes of the TGSE policy were achieved when support for growth was intentional and sustained. This proactive focus on growth was seen as a possible way to circumvent many of the challenges associated with formal evaluation.
Desire to have More Time for Reflection/ Collaboration	Teachers appreciated and wanted more opportunities to engage in collaborative discussions with school leaders and colleagues about growth. Conversations that facilitated reflection on practice were viewed as an integral part of professional learning.
Individual Versus System Goals	Views varied on the degree to which professional growth plans should be developed in connection with school and/or authority goals. Many teachers, principals, and superintendents supported the integration of system, school, and individual goals; others expressed their desire for increased professional autonomy.
Developing Guiding Criteria	The development of criteria and exemplars was seen to be of value in guiding teachers in preparing their growth plans. Additionally, such exemplars were viewed to play a supportive role in the process of teacher supervision.
Growth Plans As a Form of Compliance	Teachers, principals, and central office team members developed annual growth plans in compliance with school authority policy. Many experienced teachers perceived that professional growth plans served a managerial and accountability function to which they complied, noting that sustained conversations about professional growth would be more helpful in improving their instructional practices and enhancing student learning than filling out standardized growth plans.
Conflation between Formative and Summative	Supervision processes were unclear, inconsistently applied, and not well understood. Supervision was often conflated with evaluation.
Time Constraints to Support Teacher Growth	Finding time to effectively engage in the processes of growth, supervision, and evaluation was a concern for principals. The amount of time required to repeatedly evaluate teachers transitioning from temporary to probationary to continuing contracts was particularly concerning and understood to primarily serve bureaucratic purposes.

of supportive practices, such as: coaching, critical inquiry, study groups, staff development, and action research – all of which are intended to *promote teacher growth* rather than *evaluate teacher performance* (Brandon, Hollweck, Donlevy, & Whalen, 2018; Glickman, 1992). Either way, the various use of terms is problematic for educational leadership and instruction more broadly, as the field of education is replete with loose rhetorical labels, buzzwords, and elastic concepts stretched across myriad divergent ideas. These highly abstract terms noted throughout the supervision research have multiple meanings, are often informed by vague theories subject to contradictory interpretations, and are thus prone to confusion. This study highlights the contradictory meanings and interpretation of what it means to provide supervision (formative feedback) and evaluation (summative feedback). As such, before teaching practices can be enhanced through supervision or evaluation, precise and concrete language must be used in policy and then translated into leadership actions. Yet, identifying and enacting the distinction between supervision and evaluation continues to be an elusive aspect of policy development and practical implementation.

Furthermore, results of this study support the articulation and application of a more comprehensive approach to instructional supervision within a broader range of ongoing, individual, and collective structures that support quality teaching. While much of the instructional leadership and supervision literature emphasizes Fullan's (2014) *direct* instructional leadership, we learned educators are looking to models that include *collaborative* instructional leadership. The latter is constituted by a wider range of purposefully employed individual and shared leadership practices designed to positively impact teaching and the broader learning community of a school). Specifically, data from this study highlights the desire for teachers to be provided timely, useful, and generative feedback within collective and supportive learning cultures. Unfortunately, results from this research echo findings from a recent OECD (2016) study that found, “a vast majority of principals act as instructional leaders, but about one-third still rarely engage in instructional leadership actions” (p. 28). Findings also corroborate a number of recent studies that have investigated and confronted the challenges associated with providing effective instructional leadership (Brandon et al., 2018; Brandon et al., 2016; Canadian Association of Principals, 2014; Schleicher, 2015).

Conclusion

Given the dynamic between formative supervision and summative evaluation, there is a need to reconceptualize a supervision model and to disentangle it from evaluation. Supervision is closely connected to professional learning and development, which promotes teachers' lifelong learning and growth mindsets. Evaluation, on the other hand, serves a summative function, primarily conducted for employment and/or certification purposes. Ultimately, formative and summative evaluation are integral to effective teacher feedback when it happens as a cyclical and iterative process. Given the results of this research, there are some recommendations that can and should be made in developing policy starting at the local level and percolating up various structural levels, including:

- The purpose of instructional supervision must be clarified and communicated more effectively to and from all members of the educational organization. This purpose should emphasize, as its focus, growth and improvement of teaching and student learning (Blase

& Blase, 1998; Brandon et al., 2018; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011a; Zepeda & Lanoue, 2017).

- Supervision should be varied and differentiated so that all teachers are engaged in a range of individual, small group, peer, and collective instructional supervision approaches clearly focused on building and supporting quality professional practice on an ongoing basis (Brandon et al., 2018; Brandon et al., 2016; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2017; Le Fevre & Robinson, 2014; Marshall, 2013; Pajak, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011b; Zepeda & Lanoue, 2017).
- Supervision practices should be informed by evidence gathered from multiple sources – classroom observations, pedagogic dialogue, artifacts of student work – to support professional practice, while at the same time deepening instructional leadership practice (Brandon et al., 2018; Brandon et al., 2016; Glatthorn, 1984; Marshall, 2013; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Pajak, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011b).

When put into action, supervision often feels like evaluation; something that is often reinforced by the very approaches that principals consciously or unwittingly use, such as checklists or trendy protocols. This confusion is made all the worse by the semantics of the word ‘supervision’ itself. To move beyond this point, educational policy and practice will require conceptual specificity regarding supervision, or risk another generation of teachers and leaders who have perceptions of de-professionalization, loss of autonomy, and policy restrictions that prevent feedback being provided in a growth-oriented manner.

Greene (1992) long ago pointed out that “teacher supervision does lead to professional development, but not without considerable resources (both personal and financial), effort, goodwill, commitment, and an unshakable vision of teachers as competent professionals able and willing to take control of their own professional lives” (p. 148). Yet, a larger, structural question is absent in much of the literature on supervision in schools. How is societal and systemic delegation of tasks and responsibilities contributing to a work intensification that simply prevents principals’ engaging in effective supervision? How are these work intensification issues creating barriers to principals being the instructional leaders they want to be? Just as importantly, what can be done to address work intensification so that principals feel they have the time to make supervision a routine way of being, and part of school culture? The challenge remains of how to make this happen systemically and systematically.

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Bonnie Stelmach is a professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. Her research focuses on parents' roles in K-12 education, primarily at the secondary level and in rural school contexts. Recently, her research agenda has moved into a direction that questions what makes parents feel in community with schools, and challenges the 'involvement' and 'partnership' discourses.