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The Wicked Problem of the Intersection between Supervision and Evaluation

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore how principals in eight high-functioning elementary schools in one American school district balanced teacher supervision and evaluation in their role as an instructional leader. Using the theoretical framework of 'wicked problems', to unpack the circular used to problematize teacher supervision and evaluation, the findings analyse how elementary principals in these eight buildings acknowledge the tensions and conflicts between supervision and evaluation, specifically as they relate to improving teacher instruction. Specifically, the results of this study highlight not only the differences between supervision and evaluation, but also the intersection between the two functions, as well as how high-performing elementary school principals serve as an instructional coach rather than a manager of teachers. While the two functions of supervision and evaluation are inherently different, it is the acknowledgement of the intersection between the two functions that can allow building principals to progress as instructional coaches who can better develop human resources and create higher-functioning school systems. Overall, this study points toward the importance of elementary principals having the instructional leadership skills to differentiate supervision and professional development need for teachers, which in turn influences the evaluation of a teacher is in her/his respective career.

Keywords: Teacher supervision, Teacher evaluation, Instructional supervision, Instructional leadership

Introduction

Across America teacher evaluation and supervision reform is underway, prompted in part by pressure from the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) flexibility waivers, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Much has been written in the theoretical literature about what educators and scholars think makes for effective supervision (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2014; Zepeda, 2012), evaluation (Darling-Hammond,

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2013; Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000), and the merging of these two functions (Marshall, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013), specifically if this is in the best interests of helping teachers grow as instructors and thus impact student achievement. Within the literature, and to a greater extent with practitioners and laypeople, the terms evaluation and supervision are frequently and incorrectly used as synonyms.

As early as the 1920s, the roles and interactions of personnel in schools gradually became more formalized as public scrutiny of education increased, causing supervision (supportive feedback to improve instruction) to become intertwined with evaluation (assessment of ability), to the point that now "supervision is usually understood as teacher evaluation in the schools" (Hazi & Ricinski, 2009, p. 2). In a study of 100 teachers and their principals, Ponticell and Zepeda (2004) found that "for all teachers and for the vast majority of principals, supervision was, quite simply, evaluation" (p. 47). With regards to teacher supervision, the meaning and definition is typically intended to target professional growth (i.e. formative feedback), which is often complex and usually situational, relying on a combination of knowledge, technical skill, and interpersonal skill (Glickman et al., 2014). Alternatively, with regards to teacher evaluation, the meaning and definition is primarily an administrative function (i.e., summative evaluation) to judge value, to determine whether the teacher meets minimum standards, and in some situations to determine positive or negative employment actions (Zepeda, 2012). Teacher evaluation, as detailed in the review of the literature, is a human resource function. Thus, the purposes of evaluation and supervision are distinct; supervision is ongoing support for professional growth purposes while evaluation is primarily an assessment of performance. As a result, clear definition and review of the literature regarding teacher evaluation and supervision for teacher growth provide important insight to better understand school reform and school improvement efforts that are intended to improve student achievement, particularly as is relates to the differences in the definition and intention of teacher supervision and teacher evaluation.

Teacher Supervision

Teacher supervision (i.e. formative feedback) is focused on ongoing support, teacher improvement, and teacher professional growth. Supervision may include a wide variety of formal and informal efforts, including the clinical supervision model of conferencing before and after an observed lesson, staff development activities (large group, small group, or individual), portfolio development, goal-setting, data analysis, and reflection (Ponticell & Zepeda, 2004; Eady & Zepeda, 2007; Hazi & Ricinski, 2009). Similarly broad, researchers note that supervision may be provided by a wide variety of people; including administrators, peer teachers, instructional coaches, and independent consultants (Alila, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2015; Beach & Reinhartz, 1989; Oliva & Pawlas, 2004; Wiles & Bondi, 2004). The ultimate purpose of supervision is to indirectly help student achievement by helping a teacher improve instruction, which require different instructional goals and strategies based on the strengths of individual teachers (Glickman et al., 2014). Thus, there is an inherent aspect of supervision that is situational in nature, namely the need to identify appropriate support that is dependent on a variety of factors, including instructional goals, strengths and needs of a teacher, the career stage of the teacher, and overarching organizational goals (Beach & Reinhartz, 1989; Wiles & Bondi, 2004; Glickman et al., 2014).

Tension is noted between the desired collaborative, trusting relationship and conflicting functions when the supervisor is also an administrator (with responsibilities such as summative evaluation, resource allocation, and employment decisions). Oliva and Pawlas (2004) summarize this ongoing discussion in the literature, while recognizing that in small schools and small school districts resources and staff sizes are such that administrators

must also be supervisors. Wiles and Bondi (2004) also note that collective bargaining has pushed the field of supervision into a management posture. Thus, time limitations and tensions for those in dual administration/supervisory roles are major challenges facing the field of teacher supervision (Ryan & Gottfried, 2012). Additionally, reduced flexibility poses challenges for school systems as states increase the number of mandates for testing, curriculum, and teaching, which create additional "intrarole conflicts" for supervisors tasked with reforms with which they potentially disagree (Oliva & Pawlas, 2004, p. 13). Finally, supervisors face a challenge of moving from helper to judge, as they are frequently tasked with playing a role in teacher evaluation (Beach & Reinhartz, 1989).

Teacher Evaluation

Teacher evaluation (i.e., summative evaluation) focuses on the organizational need for accountability, determining and documenting the level of a teacher's performance over a specific time period (Hazi & Rucinski, 2009; Platt et al., 2000). As posited by Oliva and Pawlas (2004), "summative evaluation…is assessment of teacher performance by an administrator for the purpose of making decisions about such matters as tenure, retention, career ladder, and merit pay" (p. 367). Thus, teacher evaluation is typically formal and uses standardized criteria, forms, and procedures defined in policy to ensure accurate measurement. Typically teacher evaluation cycles are time-bound, with summative evaluations usually occurring annually for probationary teachers, and typically once every one to three years for teachers who are tenured or on a continuing contract. At the conclusion of the cycle an evaluation cycle, if the summative evaluation determination is satisfactory, a new cycle typically begins, while an unsatisfactory summative evaluation may lead to development of an improvement plan or employment action such as dismissal.

However, teacher evaluation produces tension between system rigidity and protection from arbitrary action, influenced by a desire for fairness (DeSander, 2000) and legal defensibility (Glickman et al., 2014). Koski (2012) describes this tension as:

> From the teacher's or union's perspective, such rigid and predictable systems minimize arbitrary administrative evaluations that may be based on personality conflicts, inappropriate factors, or sloppy observations. From the administration's perspective, these rigid systems do not sufficiently account for a teacher's impact on student performance, are time consuming due to paperwork, and do not give the principal sufficient flexibility to provide meaningful feedback and, ultimately, make decisions about the teacher's future employment (2012, p. 86).

Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2013) and Glickman et al. (2014) note that rigid systems may preclude tailoring helpful feedback to teacher needs. Additionally, due to the fear of litigation, evaluators may limit potentially helpful or challenging feedback (DeSander, 2000) and develop a "norm of non-interference" with teachers (Goldstein, 2007, p. 481). Altogether, the evaluation process can result in negative side-effects in schools. Evaluation is often perceived to be unhelpful in improvement and primarily for punitive purposes (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Weisburg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). The process can inadvertently discourage improvement through negative feelings, reduced participation, decreased willingness to alter behavior, and erosion of trust (Glickman et al., 2010; Marshall, 2013). Teachers who perceive themselves as performing well are maddened when colleagues they perceive as poor performers receive evaluation ratings similar to their own (Weisberg et al., 2009), or conversely, attempt to protect peers when dismissal of an ineffective teacher is sought (Marshall, 2013; Platt et al. 2000).

Theoretical Framework: Wicked Problems

Education is a socially constructed institution, allowing it to be continually problematized based on various demands of society, including political, economic, and environmental

pressures (Southgate, Reynolds, & Howley, 2013). Based on the notion of 'wicked problems', namely that they have no definitive formulation or solution, no correct or wrong answers, and no finite amount of solutions (Margolis & Buchanan, 1995), education faces a problem within the realm of instructional supervision and evaluation of teachers. Rittel and Weber (1973) conceptualized wicked problems as issues that employ circular logic to define social problems, which in turn hampers the ability for a group within a society (i.e. educators) to define and identify a problem, and consequently prevents change to produce more equitable practices. Within instructional supervision and evaluation, the wicked problem that exists are the conflicts and tensions that arise between the two functions. Supervision is needed to coach teachers and help them reflect on personal instructional goals, however it is a time-consuming process that also needs to be able to show results if teachers are not meeting the needs of students. Evaluation is needed to produce high-quality school systems and retain quality teachers, however it is often a litigious process that can negatively impacts the climate and culture of school buildings and districts. Thus, using the theoretical framework of wicked problems to unpack the discrepancies of supervision and evaluation, particularly how both supervision and evaluation can be used to support successful elementary school leadership, is necessary to better understanding the human process in creating better school systems.

Method

This research is the final analysis of part of a large data set (Mette, Range, Anderson, Hvidston, & Nieuwenhuizen, 2015; Range, Anderson, Hvidston, & Mette, 2013), in which the purpose of the study was intended to identify common supervision and evaluation traits shared by successful elementary principals in one urban district in a Midwest State in America. For this study, successful principals were defined as principals that lead schools with high student achievement on state standardized tests for third and fourth grade math and communication arts. The district selected is one of the largest in the state with a district enrollment of almost 22,000 students, and the eight elementary schools were selected due to their previously mentioned high student achievement on the state standardized test. All eight elementary schools selected in this analysis are in the top 10% of student achievement in the state studied. Specifically, the researchers of the study were interested in understanding 1) how teacher supervision and evaluation were conceptualized ideologically as well as implemented in action to drive continuous improvement of teachers, and; 2) how principals provided differentiated support for individual teachers based on experience and ability. Thus, this study sought to inform the practice of teacher supervision and evaluation for elementary principals by examining and understanding the personal experiences of administrators working in high achievement elementary schools in the largest school district of an American Midwestern state.

As part of the qualitative analyses used in this study, the administrators of the eight elementary schools were interviewed to examine their perceptions of instructional supervision and evaluation, and specifically how these perceptions informed their practice (Saldaña, 2013).

Great care was taken by the researchers to value the contributions and input of the participants, specifically the opportunity to work collaboratively with practitioners to increase the validity and authenticity of the conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). A semi-structured, purposefully broad interview structure was used to allow for participant to help direct the flow of the interview as well as answering the research questions of this study. Interviews with each elementary principal occurred her/his convenience, typically during the school day. All participants agreed to allow the researchers to use a digital voice recorder to document the interview and focus on the

conversational approach to the interview. As a result, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and used for qualitative analyses.

Table 1. *Demographic Information for Elementary Schools Studied*

School/ Participant ID	Enrollment	% Free/ Reduced Lunch	Number of Teachers	Principal Gender	Years of Principal Experience	Teaching Background of Principal
1	152	54.5	8	Female	16	Classroom teacher
2	243	48.6	15	Female	4	Classroom teacher
3	346	27.7	21	Female	5	Classroom teacher
4	355	24.8	20	Female	20	Classroom teacher
5	399	26.8	26	Female	9	Classroom teacher
6	467	23.6	29	Male	8	Music teacher
7	518	17.2	30	Female	7	Classroom teacher
8	534	32.2	30	Female	15	PE teacher

Initial coding was used to identify emergent themes, and the wicked problems theoretical framework was used to then conduct second cycle analysis (Creswell, 2013). Then, using an elaborative coding process, the researchers built on their understanding of the previous analyses from this large data set to help refine constructs teacher supervision and evaluation (Saldaña, 2013). Thus, through the data analysis of this study, the themes that emerged helped frame the leadership characteristics of the eight principals who lead high achieving schools, focusing on the conceptualization and implementation of teacher supervision and evaluation, as well as the differentiated support provided for individual teachers based on experience and ability.

To provide additional validity and reliability to the study, the researchers gathered additional observational data and documents during the data collection process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Moreover, district documents related to the supervision and evaluation of teachers, state teacher standards, and the state educator evaluation model were collected and analyzed, and were particularly important in the context of this study. In doing so, the triangulation of data and collected documents provided multiple perspectives to inform the study (Creswell, 2013), specifically regarding teacher supervision and evaluation in the selected Midwest district.

Results

Two themes emerged from the interviews and analyses of this study regarding the conceptualization and implementation of teacher supervision and evaluation, as well as the differentiated support offered by high functioning elementary principals to teachers based on individualized ability and experience. One finding is there is overlap between the theoretical definitions of teacher supervision and evaluation, namely that both are intended to support and monitor instruction, target areas of ongoing improvement, and develop a collective building conscious of instruction. A second finding is the notion of a principal serving as an instructional coach, whereby she/he fosters trusting relationships with teachers, values feedback from teachers to target school improvement efforts, and

differentiates individual teacher improvement efforts based the level of teacher expertise. Thus, despite the wicked problem that creates tension and conflict between the intentions of supervision and evaluation, the high-achieving elementary principals in this study were able to reconceptualize their role to provide both and support teachers to grow and develop as professionals.

Supervision and Evaluation: The Venn Diagram of Instructional Leadership

The first component of this study was to understand how teacher supervision and evaluation were conceptualized ideologically by eight high-achieving elementary principals. Of the eight principals who led high-achieving elementary schools from the selected urban school district, three common beliefs of the school leaders emerged regarding the overlap of supervision and evaluation. These factors inform the ongoing, day-to-day practices of their instructional leadership practices and vision for the school building. These notions of instructional leadership were largely influenced by the beliefs that the overlap of supervision and evaluation allowed principals to a) support and monitor instruction, b) target areas of ongoing improvement, and c) develop a collective building conscious of instruction that informs instructional practice. Not only did these leadership beliefs value the ability to support and monitor the instructional environment of their respective school buildings, but they also informed principals on when they needed to provide more specific direction to struggling teachers and when they should allow teachers to drive their own professional development opportunities (see Figure 1). Moreover, it appears that because principals could focus on the strengths of teachers while simultaneously providing a supportive environment to promote individualized teacher growth, the school culture supported and valued a collaborative work environment that built a collective conscious of continual improvement, for both students and teachers.

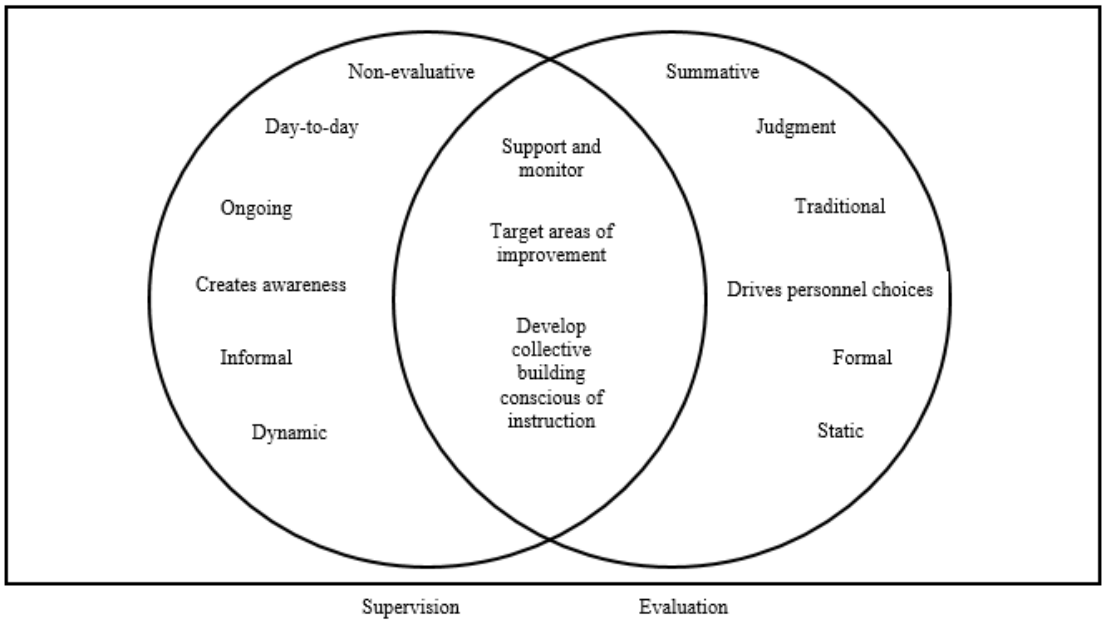

Figure 1. *Supervision and evaluation: The Venn diagram of instructional supervision*

Support and monitor instruction. Perhaps the most important aspect of the instructional supervision provided by the principals in this study was their ability to be present in classrooms in order to create awareness of the instruction being provided by teachers in their buildings. Not only did this allow principals to provide teachers with quick, formative

feedback in an informal manner, but it also helped them identify areas of improvement teachers might target and provide teachers with the support needed to successfully improve as an instructor.

> I think that can be the purpose behind it for an administrator…[to] look at the quality of what's going on in your building and make sure that you're maintaining certain standards. [P5]

> I try to be listening and if there's things that I can get for them, support them with. I feel like their plates are very full, so if there's anything that I can do to help facilitate and make things easier I'm happy to do that. I feel like visibility is probably one of my strengths. I'm in the classrooms pretty much daily in some format whether it's a fly-by saying, 'good morning' or doing walk-throughs or just being very visible and present. [P7]

By ensuring their presence in teachers' classrooms, the elementary principals in this study were able to help support and monitor the learning environment in a supervisory, formative manner, which in turn was used to inform the eventual identifiers for each teacher's summative evaluation. Thus, principals used the information gathered from their walkthroughs to develop professional development plans that were then evaluated through ongoing observations.

> I think my greatest strengths are simply being visible, visibility in the classroom, being accessible to teachers and being willing to help and support them as they need it. And with evaluation, I think just giving feedback to teachers. [P3]

As a result, principals used this concept to target ongoing improvement, which informed both supervision and evaluation.

Target areas of ongoing improvement. Regardless of the ability of the individual teachers in their respective buildings, a common leadership trait of the principals in this study was the belief that all teachers are able to continually improve their instruction, whether they are considered high-functioning or low-functioning. Through an unwavering focus on student achievement, principals provided instructional leadership for all teachers that impacted both the supervision and evaluation of instructors.

> I think ultimately it's to improve instruction and then to improve student outcome[s]. So, you know, when you go in, during that whole evaluation process you're looking at how, how can you be continually getting better and how can we continually get our scores up and get our achievement higher? [P4]

Thus, teachers were expected to be able to measure and increase student knowledge, and continually focus on how their instruction might improve with professional development opportunities. For teachers that were novice instructors or struggled to engage in self-reflection, the administrators provided more principal-directed professional development opportunities. Conversely, those teachers that were high-functioning and able to self-reflect on how to improve their instruction, the elementary principals in this study gave them more leeway to select and implement their own professional development activities. As commented earlier, however, all improvement efforts were monitored by principals, regardless of teacher ability.

In targeting areas of improvement, principals leading these high-achieving schools reflected on the importance of how to tactfully approach individual teachers, as well as collective faculties, and the targeted improvement efforts.

> I think it's real critical that I read the situation, I think not just my building, but individuals, and know if it's the time that they need to be pushed, and I really need to support and really push them out there to go to the next level. Or, is it a time that we need to just kind of hold right there and practice to get better at what we're doing or is it a time to really pat them on the back and celebrate for a little bit and let us get our feet back under us before we push

> again? And I think that's my job, is to be able to know that timing. Timing is everything so to speak. [P8]

> Well, when I'm doing walkthroughs or going through the evaluation cycle or when I'm doing my surveys with the teachers, I try to pick things that are going to be relevant and meaningful that ties to our school improvement plan…so we're not kind of doing just the scattered gun approach, but… [rather] that intentional focus. [P7]

Whether building-wide or individual focused, the elementary principals in the study understood the need to provide situational instructional leadership, thereby acknowledging there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to teacher supervision and evaluation. Through the reinforcement of targeting areas of growth to support ongoing improvement, the high-functioning principals were able to develop a collective building conscious about instruction and student engagement.

Develop a collective building conscious of instruction that informs vision. A third component of the intersection of supervision and evaluation provided by principals in this study is the notion of creating a collective faculty conscious in regards to selecting school improvement efforts, while still valuing the improvement efforts of individual teachers. The ability to principals to provide their own input to influence various aspects of school improvement efforts, but also value the voice and feedback from teachers themselves, seemed to create a balance of input from both administrators and teachers that influenced the instructional vision of the school.

> We formed our collaborative learning teams, our whole faculty study groups and … the leadership team here at school chose what the overall, overarching theme was going to be for our learning this year. But then each whole faculty study group could pull out a piece of what was under that umbrella to fit what they wanted to study the most either at their grade level….they really got to choose where their learning was going to be focused, and I think that's important to give them that ownership just like the kids in the classroom, you know? [P6]

> We're trying to put all of our time, not all of our time, but a lot of our energy in our professional learning in how we can improve that nonfiction reading piece to improve scores overall in all subject areas. So that will be our site goal, and then you know, if there is an individual, you know, like individual plans that need to be made based on observations…then that will just be done on a one-on-one basis. [P4]

By allowing teachers to have input on areas of improvement, principals in this study attempted to address the wicked problems of the conflicts and tensions between supervision and evaluation by developing a culture that valued the professional opinions of teachers while still providing necessary leadership and direction-setting from the principal position.

The Principal as an Instructional Coach

The second component of this study was to understand how high-functioning elementary principals provided differentiated support for individual teachers based on experience and ability. A strong theme that emerged was the idea of these elementary principals seeing themselves as a coach in promoting instructional supervision. Thus, building administrators who provided leadership to the eight high-achieving schools seemed to provide leadership as a coach and promoted the notion of teamwork in order to foster continual teacher improvement and greater student achievement. This was largely influenced by a) fostering strong, trusting relationships among teachers and administrators, b) valuing feedback from teachers to target school improvement efforts and identify necessary professional development, and c) differentiating individual teacher improvement efforts based on level of expertise to ensure. These factors were pervasive among the interviewed principals, suggesting a mixture of shared leadership and direct

improvement efforts to targeting continual teacher improvement in order to attain or maintain high student achievement. By differentiating the supervision and evaluation of teachers based on their level of function, these elementary principals were able to empower highly effective teachers to have input and buy-in to school improvement efforts, but also balance overall school improvement by providing leadership to struggling teachers. Moreover, the principals seemed to perceive their function as a leader to allow teachers to grow and knowing when to provide direct interventions to help teachers improve, rejecting the notion that evaluation is about "getting rid" of underperforming teachers as some school reform efforts suggest, but rather valuing the importance of providing supervision to build an inclusive school culture that is supportive of change, growth, and experimentation to meet the ever changing needs of students.

*Building a team with a strong foundation: Trusting relationships***.** A major component of principals' leadership styles in the eight high-functioning schools focused on fostering trusting relationships with teachers. By developing a supervision cycle that focused on providing feedback built on trusting relationships, principals were able to provide feedback that targeted specific instructional improvement efforts, and thus valued a team mentality, allowing the principal to focus efforts as a coach in terms of celebrating strengths and helping teachers target improvement of individual weaknesses. One of the principals explained her greatest strength in providing teacher supervision and evaluation as the idea of being a coach.

> Well for me, I'm a coach at heart…but I really approach it that way because, you know, you're taking a whole group of people with a lot of different personalities and a lot of different strengths and weaknesses and you're trying to mesh them together for a common goal. And my whole purpose here is to bring out everybody's strengths and, you know, [identify] weaknesses while we help each other get better in those areas, if we elevate everybody's game, so to speak…. But I'm just trying to coach them to bring out the best in them, build some trust with them so that they'll also get outside their comfort zone to work on their weaknesses and know that it's not a 'gotcha' situation, it's a 'I'm not going to be upset with you unless you're refusing to try'. [P8]

Another principal described her role as an instructional leader by commenting on the importance of focusing on the individualized growth and improvement of teachers:

> It's about their personal growth and development…. I also think a part of that strength is that relationship building with teachers. I think being an effective coach you have to have a relationship and a buy-in and a respect for them. Trust building I think would probably be tied to that relationship building. [P5]

Thus, the principals of these highly effective elementary schools commented on the importance of building trusting relationships and being supportive of individualized growth in order to serve as a coach for teachers to help target ongoing instructional improvement within their buildings.

As a result of their approach to providing instructional leadership, the elementary principals were able to target specific growth plans for individual teachers despite the highly prescriptive nature of district supervision and evaluation requirements. By focusing on creating strong, trusting relationships, principals were able to create an environment that focused on the ability to improve and valued personal growth, development, and goal setting.

> For me, I use a cognitive coaching model as much as I can with the constraints of our evaluation system that we have to use…. It's my experience it's really all about teacher growth…. I think being an effective coach you have to have a relationship and a buy-in and a respect for them. Trust building I think would probably be tied to that relationship building. [P5]

> I spent a lot of time just carrying around a coffee cup as opposed to a clipboard or writing anything down and just walking in and out of rooms just to begin to establish that I was going to be coming in but it wasn't to be invasive. [P8]

Consequently, the effectiveness of the elementary principals in this study to play the role of a coach as the instructional leader is predicated on the ability to build meaningful, trusting relationships with faculty prior to engaging in critical feedback. In doing so, these principals disrupt some of the circular logic of the wicked problem that separates supervision from evaluation, and in doing so helps identify solutions to the problem of placing blame on teachers for low student achievement. Instead, focus is placed on trust between teachers and principals.

The feedback loop: Valuing the voice of teachers. In the eight high achieving schools, the openness and willingness for principals to gather and use teacher feedback to inform decisions on selecting professional development opportunities to improve student achievement seemed to address some of the issues of the wicked problem caused by the conflicts of supervision and evaluation. The elementary principals in this study were able to involve teachers in setting their own goals and providing support to help accomplish agreed upon improvement efforts. Principals also commented on the importance of valuing the knowledge of teachers and giving them the respect to allow individuals to improve as a professional.

> [I use] more of a coaching type role and really, 'Hey, what can I do to support you?' Because quite honestly they know more about how to teach their content than I do, and so I just try to ask those questions that focus them on their goals and where they want to go more so than I do about the nitty gritty…. [P1]

Subsequently, principals in this study internalized a team approach by valuing teacher's opinions and working collectively to produce a supervision and evaluation environment that focused on increasing or maintaining high student achievement rather than reinforcing a culture of compliance.

Additionally, principals in this study clearly valued the voice of teachers as a collective faculty to help determine targeted professional development opportunities. The ability and the desire for these principals to listen to the voice of their faculty not only increased their supervisory awareness; it also helped choose professional development responses to building-wide student achievement concerns (see Figure 2).

> Well, again I think that takes a lot of listening. You have to be willing to really listen to the teachers about what do they, you know, what are they missing that they feel like they need professional development for. Just last week we formed our collaborative learning teams… [and] the leadership team here at school chose what the overall, overarching theme was going to be for our learning this year. But then each whole faculty study group could pull out a piece of what was under that umbrella to fit what they wanted to study the most either at their grade level or if they're a multiage group, you know, the vertical alignment in that process, but they really got to choose where their learning was going to be focused, and I think that's important to give them that ownership just like the kids in the classroom you know. If you want student input so that that guides their learning the you've got to have the teacher input to guide their learning you know? [P6]

> All those times that I'm in and out [observing classrooms] I'm talking with teachers and getting [feedback], it helps me identify where we need additional training and…so that they can keep giving me feedback…. I mean, I don't want to miss anything because the communication lines aren't open with us…. It gives them a chance to actually evaluate and, you know, where are they still feeling like they need additional support or where do they feel they need additional administrator support because, you know, sometimes those aren't the same thing. [P8]

Thus, by allowing teachers to give feedback on what support might be needed to help target school-wide improvement efforts, the elementary principals in this study were able to further develop and support a team atmosphere that valued the voices of teachers and kept the overall effort of the school on student achievement.

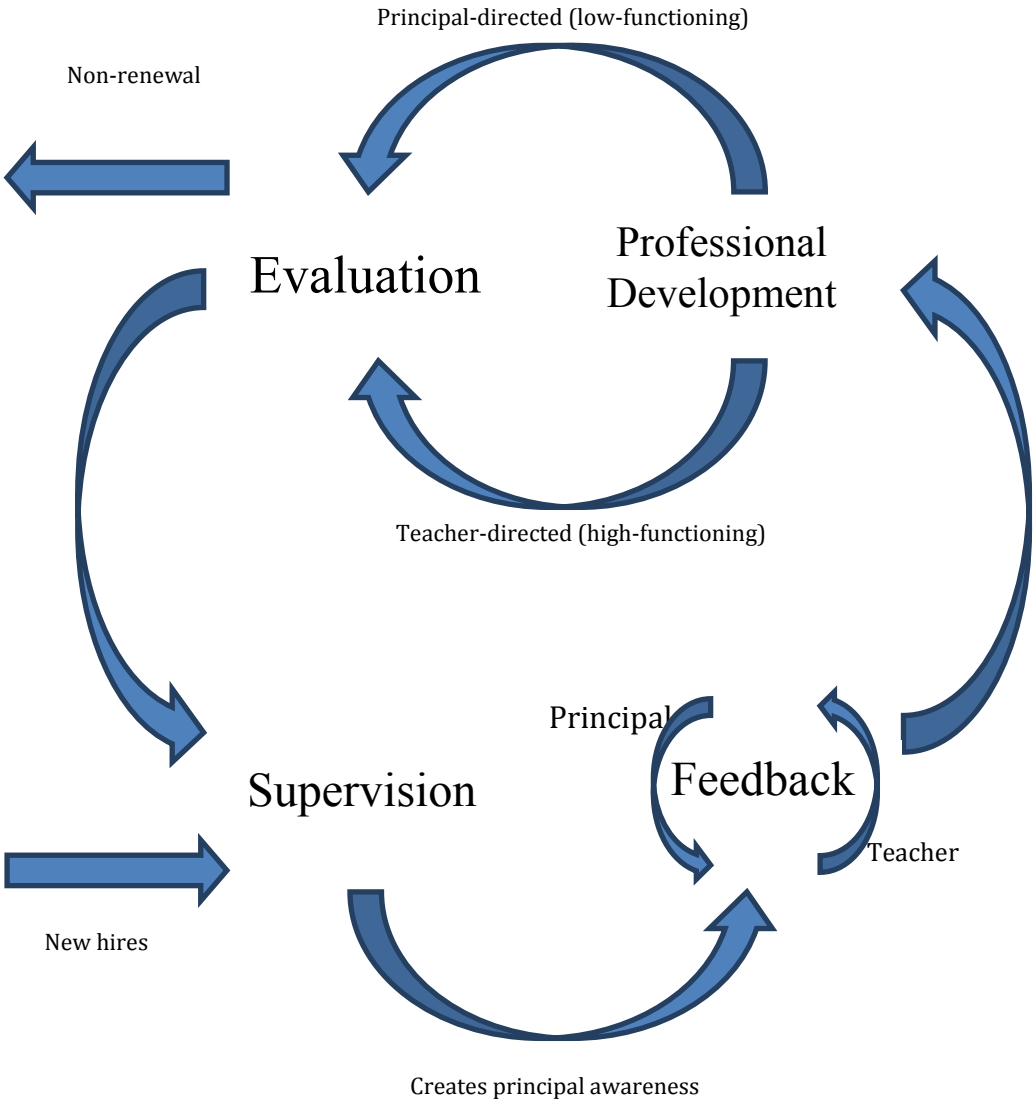

Figure 2. *The revised cycle of teacher supervision and evaluation* (as adapted from Zepeda, 2012)

High or low-functioning? The basis for differentiation. Differentiation of supervision and evaluation provided by principals in this study occurred based on the perceived level of teacher expertise and need. Specifically, the observations of each individual teacher by the principals in this study determine how direct a principal would be when reviewing proposed teacher professional development plans. Teachers who were high performing, able to reflect on practices, and highly self-motivated, tended to be allowed to develop individualized professional development and needed little additional administrative support. Conversely, teachers who were low performing, unable to readily reflect on instructional practices, and showed low levels of motivation to improve tended to receive much more direct, principal-determined professional development to target areas of improvement (see Figure 2).

> I took a cognitive coaching approach with all of them, but with the higher performing teachers I sort of, if they were doing great I kind of asked them what do you, what do you want to work on and just let them go because they were very self-motivated, they knew what they wanted to work on and they were always trying to get better whereas those who were just getting started or had not, were not as high as performers I maybe would try to direct them a little bit in areas that I saw as needing some support. [P3]

> I think a lot of it though is the conversations I have with the staff I probably use more of a cognitive coaching approach with those staff members that are those master teachers and really just try to coach them more than I do someone who might be struggling or who might really be new to the profession and just needs a lot of scaffolding where I might be a little bit directive, I still try to use that cognitive coaching approach but sometimes you just need to say, you just got to say it and so I think you just kind of have to figure that out with your staff but I think that I probably fall back on those cognitive coaching strategies and how I have conversations with different staff members. It really just kind of depends on where they are in their quest towards mastery. [P1]

By differentiating support for individualized professional development opportunities, the elementary principals in this study were able to better able to target areas of improvement for those teachers struggling while still valuing continual growth and development by all teachers in their respective building. While more autonomy was given to teachers who were highly motivated to improve, and who were self-reflective enough to target their own areas of improvement, principals in this study expected growth from all teachers, regardless if they were low-performing or high-performing.

> I think that when you are…working with someone who may need a little bit more support, that support is going to be a little bit more directive as far as, 'Ok these are the things that I need to see going on in your classroom' maybe because there's just a low level of consciousness about those things and you need to draw their attention to it specifically. Whereas if you have a teacher that is a little bit more with it, and just a good solid teacher, it may be more directed by them as far as the areas of growth that they're looking for in themselves and what I may go in and monitor for, you know, help them monitor and grow. [P5]

Thus, principals in this study seemed to have an expectation that all teachers would continually improve their instruction, and as a result, improve the overall ability of the school to provide high quality education to students. In doing so, the elementary principals in this study address the wicked problem of society placing blame on teachers for low student-achievement, but rather focus on the importance of instructional ability and motivation to continuously improve.

Discussion

This qualitative study was conducted to understand elementary principals' views about teacher supervision and evaluation in eight high performing elementary schools, including how supervision practices created high performance and ultimately informed teacher evaluation. The results add to the literature concerning teachers' formative supervision and summative evaluation, specifically principals' responsibilities to engage in instructional leadership to build the capacity of teachers. In sum, the results can be summarized as, 1) beliefs about the ideologies of teacher supervision and evaluation become intertwined when implemented in action, and; 2) the role of principal as an instructional coach can be accomplished through building strong relationships with teachers and valuing teacher feedback to provide differentiated professional development opportunities.

The elementary principals in this study highlight a gap between theory and practice by conceptualizing the ability to provide supervision and evaluation independently, but also

acknowledging there is an intersection between the two functions, which literature has suggested are mutually exclusive (Glickman et al., 2014; Hinchey, 2010). Using a Venn Diagram framework to analyze leadership perceptions of supervision and evaluation, principals in the study described notions of instructional leadership that were largely focused on the intersection of the two functions, namely the need to support and monitor the instructional environment, the targeting of ongoing improvement efforts building-wide as well as individually, and valuing teacher opinion when informing the vision of the school building as it pertains to instruction. The ability of the principal to be an effective instructional leader by helping teachers focus on goals of lessons and identifying areas of improvement is inherently related to supervision (formative feedback), but interestingly enough, principals in this study suggest a connection to evaluation that is informed by ongoing supervision, one that takes into account supervision and influences the yearly evaluation (summative feedback). Thus, while the two functions are separate, they inform one another, and as such can be considered a wicked problem (Rittel & Weber, 1973), specifically the tension between the two functions as in-depth supervision of instructional practices and professional development are necessary to make evaluative decisions about ongoing employment.

Perhaps the most important factor to point towards school success in this study was how principals supported their faculty as an instruction coach, specifically with targeting the constant improvement of instruction within their respective buildings. These successful elementary principals were able to challenge their teachers to accept the notion that continual professional development was an expectation, and through building strong, trusting relationships, as well as valuing teachers' feedback, principals were able to differentiate improvement efforts for individual teachers. By understanding the individualized needs of teachers, developing a sense of trust to continually improve instruction as a collective faculty, and addressing agreed upon areas of improvement efforts, these principals were able to ensure all teachers received targeted improvement efforts through differentiated supervision that guided improvement efforts regardless of the level of teacher expertise in the name of increasing student achievement (Range, McKim, Mette, & Hvidston, 2014; Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2002; Memduhoglu, 2012).

Conclusions

The literature regarding teacher supervision and teacher evaluation suggests separate functions that focus on different aspects of developing a school staff (Ponticell & Zepeda, 2004; Eady & Zepeda, 2007; Hazi & Ricinski, 2009). Supervision is focused on the ongoing development of teachers through the use of formative feedback (Glickman et al., 2014; Zepeda, 2012) while evaluation is focused on the measurement of teachers' abilities to instruct at a high level through a summative process (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). However, based on this study of eight high-performing schools in one large district, there appears to be a gap between theory and practice. Herein lies the wicked problem of supervision and evaluation – not only might there be overlapping of beliefs about the function of supervision and evaluation (the intersection between the two functions), but there differences of opinion about how instructional leadership is provided, as seen by the friction between theory and practice.

The definition of what is supervision as a theory is something that has been debated for years among scholars (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015; Glickman, 2013; Goldsberry, 2014). However, there is a real need to acknowledge that practice can inform theory as much as theory can inform practice. In this case, high-functioning principals who support teachers and who have high student achievement aren't simply teaching to a standardized test. Instead, they are focused on developing teachers on an individual basis, and are attempting to create a school climate where continuous growth and development

are embedded within everyday practice. Moreover, these eight elementary principals are not implementing a top-down agenda; rather they are suggesting that teachers, regardless of their years of experience, have expertise in different areas and are responsible for reflecting on their own growth. If teachers cannot, or are unwilling to, embark on this reflection, then it becomes the principal's job to ensure this growth happens to maximize student success. Given these observations, researchers would be wise to continue to study exemplar instructional leaders to understanding more about how practice might drive the development of new theory.

As such, future research could examine how the theory of supervision, the formative feedback provided to teachers intended to promote growth as an instructor, can exist in practice within the current high stakes agenda of school accountability that predominately focuses on evaluation as a human resource function. Moreover, the with additional research, focusing on how supervision can serve as a human resource function to grow teachers, not simply remove them if ineffective, might be considered highly beneficial to practitioners and rethink the current paradigm of supervision as a theory. These research efforts have policy implications for state departments of education throughout America, particularly as new evaluation and professional growth systems (Mette & Fairman, 2016).

In light of the findings from this study, one question is begged to be asked, for both researchers and practitioners: If the instructional leadership offered by principals helps teachers improve their instruction, and student achievement is positively impacted, does it really matter if the process is labeled as supervision or evaluation (Hazi, 2016)? In practice, the terms are often used incorrectly as synonyms, with a large amount of energy focused on the evaluation of teachers and little support offered in the way of instructional coaching, which contributes to the wicked problem of teacher supervision and evaluation. In theory, the terms are delineated and considered mutually exclusive, however there appears to be a widening gap between the acceptable definitions of researchers and practitioners. Within these differences of opinions, however, none of the discrepancies matter if educators, as a whole, cannot agree upon common inroads to improve the American public education system and reduce the asinine approach to American public school reform. Research has shown that school improvement efforts are quite simple – the focus on and monitoring of instruction if crucial, and teachers need to be able to provide feedback to and accept feedback from principals regarding professional development opportunities in order to function as a learning organization (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Marks & Nance, 2007; Monk, 2008; Senge, 1990). These eight elementary principals offer an example of how this can be accomplished, and both researchers and practitioners should take note.

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