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Assessing administrators' perceptions and practice of supportive supervision

Ramrattan, Narsh

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**ASSESSING ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICE OF
SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION**

NARSH RAMRATTAN

B.Ed., University of Alberta, 1992

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Dedication

To my loving and supportive family I dedicate this project. In particular, I would like to recognise the years of untiring support and encouragement offered by my Mom and Dad. (Even though those words would never cross your lips, yes, I should have completed it right after my B.Ed.).

To my loving wife, thank you for all the occasions during which you had to be both parents to afford me the time to complete this project. To my three sons whom I love very much, your impressionable eyes compel me to live as noble a life as I can, pursuing the highest ideals if only to serve as a useful example for you.

Abstract

Recently there has been much interest in defining effective practice for principals, and, in particular, the role of the principal in encouraging and supporting growth in teachers. In this project I have employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses to explore the concept of supportive supervisory practices from the perspective of administrators. Specifically, the administrators I chose for inclusion in this study were those that were identified by their colleagues and supervisors as having made a positive impact on the growth and development of teachers under their supervision. Through interviews with five administrators representing a couple of rural school divisions in Alberta I have explored how effective administrators view the practice of supervision. During these interviews I asked administrators specific questions to determine how significant a role they thought teacher supervision played in their administrative duties. Further, I encouraged administrators to elaborate on what strategies and structures they found the most conducive to encouraging and supporting teacher growth. Based on their responses, I have made some suggestions as to how principals can actively and effectively support teacher growth. Some of these strategies involve creating specific structures conducive to helping teachers while others involve processes that engage teachers in reflecting on their practice. In presenting these findings I propose a model for teacher growth that employs an assessment for learning philosophy and process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleagues who participated in this study who generously gave of their time to help me in this endeavour. I have learned and continue to learn from the wisdom and experience that you so generously share. It is a privilege to work alongside administrators of your calibre.

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Introduction

Research indicates that the impact of principal practice on the achievement of students is second only to that of teachers (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Reeves, 2004b; Shulman, Sullivan, & Glanz, 2008). Effectively informing teacher practice, therefore, has the potential to create significant positive impact on student achievement. Teacher supervision is the most direct intersection of the domains of principal and teacher practice and constitutes what I consider the most important aspect of instructional leadership. The value of this function entrusted to principals is enshrined in the first part of Section 20 of the School Act which mandates that

A principal of a school must:

- a) Provide instructional leadership in the school;
- b) Ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act;
- c) Evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;
- d) Evaluate the teachers employed in the school.... (Doctor, 2007)

It is imperative, therefore, to identify the elements of effective teacher supervision as such efforts will provide principals with a guideline of effective strategies to employ so as to improve teacher practice

Statement of Purpose

Despite the paucity of research in this area there is growing consensus regarding characteristics exhibited by effective, supportive administrators. In this project I focused on comparing the characteristics elaborated in the literature with the manner in which

they are manifested in practice. In particular, I focused on characteristics of effective administrators as elucidated by Brandon (2008) in his research. Through this study my intention was to either support or refute Brandon's findings using an independent sample of administrators. I will find patterns in the conceptualization of (i.e., the purpose of supervision; assumptions related to the process), and strategies and practices constituting effective supervision, and I will elucidate those practices that constitute supportive supervision.

Background

For each of the three cycles of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) thus far I have worked with teachers to help them improve various aspects of their teaching. With each subsequent cycle my level of involvement with teachers varied. In cycle one, as a classroom teacher implementing a brain compatible learning focus to lesson delivery, I worked with teachers within my school to encourage them to adopt brain compatible pedagogical strategies. My efforts were met with mixed reviews because teachers were divided into two camps: those willing to try to adopt new strategies and those content with their existing strategies. Even administrative support seemed unable to encourage some teachers to adopt strategies that were supported by educational research. During the second AIS cycle (2003-2006) (Alberta Education, 2010), I worked with all the schools in a northern Alberta school division to encourage teacher collaboration and growth through participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Although this focus was a divisional mandate, again I encountered teachers who were willing adopters and continually refined their craft and those who were unwilling to make changes in their educational practice. Discussions with site-based

administrators who were interested in promoting PLCs in their staffs reflected my experience: encouraging some teachers to adopt new strategies, regardless of how well those strategies were supported by research, proved a daunting challenge. These discussions also revealed a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes effective supervision and evaluation for teachers and a lack of confidence in the processes of supervision and evaluation to effectively change teacher practice.

Despite lack of consensus about strategies that were able to effect teacher growth, some site-based administrators were able to galvanize support among their staff for efforts to improve teacher pedagogical practice. Such administrators were able to encourage teacher growth through a number of strategies and processes that they initiated and which continue to flourish in affected schools. I was intrigued by the strategies implemented by such successful administrators. I became interested in discovering whether there exists significant similarity in the philosophy, perception, preparation, and strategies employed by those administrators who demonstrated the ability to promote effective professional growth among members of their respective staffs.

In my current context as member of a site-based administrative team, I continue to be interested in the challenge of effectively promoting teacher growth. Despite being involved in an Assessment for Learning (AfL) project during this most recent AISI cycle, some teachers in my current school remain grounded in traditional practices and have been reluctant to change their practice despite volumes of research documenting the efficacy of different assessment practices and their impact on improving student achievement. Distilling the experiences and strategies employed by site-based administrators who have succeeded in encouraging members of their staffs to adopt new

strategies and grow in their professional practice becomes even more important in my current situation.

Assumptions

One of my assumptions is that teachers are willing to improve their instructional practice and require support from administrators for such improvement to occur. Further, I assume that evidence of change in teacher practice in the cases studied is attributed to some degree to efforts undertaken by the administrators in charge of teacher supervision. I also assume that those administrators identified by their peers and colleagues as effective practitioners of supportive supervision conducive to teacher growth spend time reflecting on the process of supportive teacher supervision and can help elucidate specific perspectives, practices, and skills conducive to effective teacher supervision.

Literature Review

Academic educational research has recognized the instructional function of school leadership “throughout most of the 20th century, [but] it was not until the 1980s that an instructional perspective began to inch its way onto the centre stage of the profession” (Murphy, 2004, p. 66). Yet, “for more than 30 years, research has described the principal [or administrator]” as one who must serve as the “instructional leader” (DuFour, 2002, p. 12). Unfortunately, the concept of instructional leadership would remain nebulous for some time thereby preventing the elaboration of specific strategies conducive to helping one effectively serve as an instructional leader.

Historically, instructional leadership has taken a backseat to managerial functions associated with leadership (Murphy, 2004; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

According to Tyack, during the early development of public schooling in North America

the prevailing idea was that the expertise of administrators resided in their mastery of administrative skills as opposed to their pedagogic knowledge (Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). These historical antecedents, manifested by an early focus on management, initially marginalized the role of instructional leadership among administrators. Indeed, this focus on the managerial aspect of administration manifests itself as “the management of the structures and processes around instruction” without impinging on “teachers working in isolated classrooms” (Elmore, 2000). Focus on the managerial aspect is seductive as it focuses on structures, policies, finances, and other factors that are easy to measure and whose interrelationships are easily discernible (DuFour, 2002). As a result, even though the importance of instructional leadership is accepted as being vital to effective schooling, this concept and effective manifestations thereof are elusive. Many administrators grapple with what constitutes effective instructional leadership. Contributing to the difficulties such administrators face is resurrecting and defining instructional leadership in concrete terms while emerging from being mired in a managerial-oriented milieu.

Rise of Instructional Leadership

The significance of instructional leadership began to find support as a result of the *Effective Schools* movement of the 1980s (Murphy, 1990). The antecedents of this movement appear in the searing indictment of the Coleman Report that states:

Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities

with which they confront adult life at the end of school. (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 71)

For Coleman, schools do not exert an effect on children's academic performance independent of their home environment and socioeconomic status. The sentiments Berliner and Biddle (1995) express echo those the document entitled *Nation at Risk* (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) espouses. As a result of the publication of this document research in education aiming to prove the positive effect schools and schooling could have on student achievement was increased.

In response to this indictment of the ineffectiveness of schools and pedagogy, a number of researchers did focus their attention on determining the characteristics of effective schools—those schools in which the majority of students achieve academic success in spite of their socioeconomic status. Effective schools research that began to dominate the educational research landscape during the decade of the 1980s reveals a number of common attributes. The correlates of effective schools defined by Lezotte (1992) and the characteristics the 90/90/90 schools share as elaborated in research undertaken by Reeves (2004b) both indicate strong instructional leadership is one of the most significant factors present in effective schools. This factor, however, was only one of a number of other factors conducive to student achievement. Unfortunately, over the next 20 years the focus would shift away from investigating the processes that produce effective schools to uncovering and replicating the structures associated with some of those schools. The administrator's role “became more focused on management” and educational programs for administrators, “often adaptations of business management models modified for the educational context, tended to focus on leadership and change

management at the expense of viewing the principal as educational and instructional leader” (Alberta Education, 2008, p. 4).

Struggle to Maintain Focus on Instructional Leadership

As a result, the era from 1994–2004 bears witness to a struggle to keep the focus of improving schools on instructional leadership. Conspiring to shift this focus has been the ascendancy of management principles and an interest in changing organizational structures as issues key to school improvement strategies. Site-based decision making, the rise of school councils, the decentralization of school boards, the rise of learning consortia, and credit enrollment units (CEUs) have moved school leadership away from an instructional leadership focus to more of a managerial one (Bennett, 2008). This shift results from a focus on the characteristics effective schools share combined with the desire to replicate those characteristics. Frequently, however, these characteristics are achieved through several processes and progressive incremental improvement. As Fullan (2008) suggests, focusing on the characteristics effective schools possess is short-sighted as it confuses the processes required to attain the characteristics of effective schools and the concomitant student success with the characteristics that are the result of such processes. The processes a school requires to reach this designation may remain indiscernible as a result of focusing on characteristics that such schools acquire after they achieve the criteria necessary for being effective.

Focus of Instructional Leadership Studies

Those studies that did persevere in defining instructional leadership did proceed along four main lines of investigation that were (a) “uncovering and illuminating the concept in school improvement literature,” (b) “analyzing and explaining the striking

absence of attention to learning and teaching in the profession,” (c) “creating frameworks on which to hang research findings,” and (d) “analyzing the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological limitation in the instructional leadership literature” (Murphy, 2004, p. 66). Recent studies, however, illuminate the concept of instructional leadership in a much more practical and detailed fashion. Such studies provide insight into specific practices in which principals may engage that improve student achievement. One key behaviour administrators can practice that improves the quality of instruction in their building is effective professional interaction with teachers, henceforth deemed supervision. Currently, teacher supervision is viewed as an integral part of the principal’s mandate to provide instructional leadership. However, for the purposes of this study, I have extended teacher supervision to include any administrators (principals, vice-principals, or assistant principals) who actively engage in teacher supervision in their buildings.

The Importance of Teacher Supervision

Alberta Education defines teacher supervision as the “ongoing process by which an administrator supports and guides teaching” (Alberta Learning, 2003). Many school policies further refine the definition of teacher supervision. However all these refinements clearly indicate the new consensus about the purpose of supervision. According to research presented by Glanz and Neville (1997), the consensus among most scholars is that “the facilitation of learning and growth should be the number one responsibility of an educational leader” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 14). Nettles and Herrington, citing the work of Deal and Peterson, contend that the evolution of the role of the principal results in the emergence of the concept of instructional leadership as a “way to categorize the activities and responsibilities of principals in relation to classroom

instruction” (Deal & Peterson, 1990 cited in Nettles & Herrington, 2007, p. 725). Despite the numerous examples in recent literature supporting the “importance of effective instructional leadership on school performance...consensus on the definition of effective school leadership is far from being reached” (Nettles & Herrington, 2007, p. 726).

Brandon and Supportive Supervision

Recent research into educational leadership produces a much more nuanced view of the practices involved in effective supervision. For instance, research by Brandon into supervisory practice reveals a number of characteristics of effective supervision.

According to Brandon (2006), the literature describes effective supervision as

- varied and informed instructional support that
- differentiates according to: pedagogical styles, developmental stages, learning needs evident in the learning community;
- uses data from multiple sources: classroom visits; pedagogic dialogue; staff development; professional reading; action research;
- seeks to improve: learning; teaching; shared instructional leadership.

(Brandon, 2006, p. 5)

Research Supporting Brandon’s Traits

There is abundant support for these traits identified by Brandon (2006). Pajak (2003) for example, asserts the importance of recognizing the different stages of teacher professional growth and implementing supportive strategies that are commensurate with and appropriate to a particular teacher’s developmental stage. Leithwood (2005) also supports this contention by advocating the need for individualized support.

Effective supervision also requires strategies judiciously selected for the learning needs evident in particular learning communities. While for many administrators the mission should focus on academic development, such development should be “appropriate to the need of this particular school population” (Hallinger, 2005, p. 226). The principal’s awareness of context is prerequisite to “raising [staff] to more mature levels ... [providing] opportunities for each follower to self-actualize and attain higher standards” (Bass & Avolio [1994], cited in Leithwood, 2005, p. 191). The work of Danielson and McGreal (2000), Glickman (2002) and others illustrates the need for differentiated supports.

The efforts of educational researchers to unveil further details of effective supervision provide ample description of the diversity of data secured by administrators in their quest to provide effective supervision. Classroom visits, pupil achievement data (Gu, Sammons, & Mehta, 2008) along with pedagogic dialogue are some sources of data used by administrators. Effective supervision requires that such data are used to craft an “increasingly strategic approach to professional development” (Penlington, Kingston, & Day, 2008, p. 74). Administrators can employ strategies like “providing individual support and building individual capacity” for one-time support during a crisis, for short-term support during a process of school and staff transformation, or as an ongoing support for development (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006, p. 374). In any of these cases, there is intentionality to the strategies chosen and a careful alignment of those strategies.

Along with the constellation of strategies outlined thus far is the use of distributive leadership as a part of an effective supervisory process. Effective supervisors

are aware of the power and potential of learning communities and strive to establish “in-school networks...[to provide] support for instruction” (Leithwood, 2005, p. 184). The establishment of these learning networks as part of the supervisory process reflects the ardent desire to improve learning for all members of the learning organization.

Other Manifestations of Effective Supervision Supported by the Literature

In addition to the characteristics outlined by Brandon (2006) in his research, other manifestations of effective supervision emerge. Clarity of communication in articulating goals and high expectations are important contributors to effective supervision (Blasé, 1993). Consistent clarification and reinforcement of expectations and congruence between strategies and goals also provides an effective framework for supervision (Blasé, 1993). Visibility of the administrator is also essential to effective supervision as is providing support (Blasé, 1993).

Research Question

The main research question I sought to answer in this project is: How is effective supervision perceived and practiced by a cohort of administrators in two Alberta school divisions? The criteria I used for the selection of the participating administrators included growth among their staff members. Moreover, the growth that their teachers demonstrated had to have been attributed to the supportive supervision practices of these administrators. Given the complexity and multifaceted nature of this question, I broke it down into a number of more focused questions and subquestions. In this way, I facilitated the data collection and subsequent analysis.

Limitations

Having worked exclusively with rural school divisions, I have restricted my focus to the context of medium sized (300-600 students) rural schools. I have also chosen to explore supportive supervision through primarily qualitative means as this method complements the purpose of this study. As Cresswell (2008) suggests, qualitative studies should be undertaken to discern how and why, to describe what is going on, to delve into a topic that requires exploration and, in so doing, present a detailed view of that topic. Therefore, I chose to interview five principals; at least one from each of the four grade divisions. This sample of five is small enough to require caution in generating generalizations from this study.

Delimitations

In reflecting on strategies they implemented and past practices, participants are subject to selective memory (Cresswell, 2008). That is, their recall of events may be tainted by their own expectations, beliefs, and may lead to the misconstruing of cause and effect relationships. While I will exert efforts to minimize participant distortion of data, I will be cognizant of the biases inherent to data that is self-reported.

Significance of Study

Engaging in this study serves many useful purposes. Discussions with several administrators reveal the discomfort and unease surrounding successfully implementing effective instructional leadership. In particular, many administrators feel uneasy about what constitutes effective supervision. Surveying the literature will determine if the criteria cited by Brandon (2006) still represents what is viewed by current research as those factors contributing to effective supervision. Interviews with administrators

perceived as employing effective supervision practices will help to enumerate specific strategies current administrators can employ to help develop an effective supervision practice. Moreover, administrator-training academies, which many school divisions are currently developing, will find the information elucidating effective supervision practices informative and beneficial.

Revealing administrator practices necessary to effective teacher supervision will find ready application to the school improvement plans crafted by administrators. Supervision is a process that has direct impact on student achievement and depends on effective interaction with teachers. The current climate of accountability necessitates the application of effective supervisory practices by administrators to foster continual growth and improvement of teaching practice. Although the existing literature on the topic provides many ideas to aid in the development of an individual's working definition of effective supervision, actual descriptions would be more beneficial to administrators than rhetoric. If principals could help identify specific structures, processes, and strategies that they feel have enhanced teacher practice, the information such a study unearths would be beneficial to all administrators.

The current era of accountability in education fosters the development of evaluative tools. Currently, the Principal Quality Practice Standard (PQPS) (Alberta Education, 2010) is a model describing the dimensions of effective school leadership. This document may eventually form the basis of an administrator evaluation rubric. One of the dimensions described in this document is instructional leadership. Many administrators contend this is a nebulous concept and find it challenging to devise specific strategies to improve their performance in this area. Effective supervision is one

of the cornerstones of instructional leadership (Brandon, 2008). Elucidating behaviours conducive to implementing an effective supervision practice would prove enormously beneficial to administrators regardless of their experience.

Methodology

Method

To fully explore how administrators perceive and practice effective supervision, I chose a mixed-method design consisting of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In so doing, I hoped to offset the potential weaknesses inherent in one methodological type with strengths found in another (Cresswell, 2008). In this manner, a greater degree of understanding about the issue of effective practice would unfold.

Participation in the interviews was voluntary and each interview proceeded according to what Cohen and colleagues describe as the “interview guide approach” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 353). This approach allows some degree of latitude to the interview process. Although I made the topics and issues clear beforehand and a set of core questions was explored, the sequence in which the questions were discussed depended on the flow of ideas. These interviews maintained a conversational tone and were guided by the concepts that arose in each of the ensuing discussions.

Participants

To determine how administrators effectively carry out their supervisory duties I interviewed a referred sample of administrators. The sample consisted of five principals; this sample represents each of the four grade divisions. Principals for this study consisted of a reputational sample referred by members of the superintendency or divisional office staff from four school divisions. Criteria for inclusion in the study included

recommendations supported by data demonstrating improved teacher professional development and staff professional growth resulting from the efforts of the chosen administrators. In particular, recognizable transformational development in the form of documented changes in teacher practice as a result of purposeful interaction with an administrator did constitute part of the data supporting inclusion of an administrative candidate in this study. To avoid conflating effective supervision practices with changes that accompany the arrival of a new administrator, participants were in their current positions for a minimum of three years.

Setting

I conducted interviews during visits with the subjects in their respective schools and at times determined by the interviewee. By having the participant interviewed in her/his working environment and allowing the interviewee to choose the time of the interview I hoped to minimize the stress and distraction that may otherwise have ensued. Participant comfort and familiarity with the environment will have increased the likelihood of a better interview and may generate more reliable and valid inferences (Krueger, 1994). I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder to facilitate subsequent analysis.

Instruments

To begin with, I gave administrators selected for participation a questionnaire to help them focus their reflection on the issue of effective instructional and supervision practices (Appendix A). These questionnaires consisted of forced choices and helped elucidate the word choice and language used by administrators when they engage in discussion with teachers during supervisory visits. I used a subset of questions to

determine how often administrators choose a directive approach in these discussions as opposed to a more collaborative approach. While these questionnaires assisted participants in focusing their ideas on the issue of effective supervision practices, questionnaires are inadequate tools to probe this issue in depth or tease out the nuances and idiosyncratic implications for those engaged in the practice of effective supervision (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Therefore, after I electronically emailed these questionnaires to participants I followed up by interviewing each individual one week later.

Procedure

Administrators voluntarily participated in the interview process and each interview proceeded according to what Cohen and colleagues describe as the “interview guide approach” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 353). This approach allows some degree of latitude to the interview process. I ensured that I clarified the topics and issues before commencing the interview and I employed a set of core questions which I explored with the participants. I resorted to a core set of questions in order to alleviate the potential weakness of this approach that “[i]mportant and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 353). I conducted the interviews during visits with the subjects in their respective schools and at times determined by the interviewee. I hoped that having the participants interviewed in their working environment and giving them the ability to choose the time of the interview minimized the stress and distraction that may otherwise have ensued. I included these conditions as part of the study because I recognized that participant comfort and familiarity with the environment will increase the likelihood of a better interview and would generate more reliable and valid inferences

(Krueger, 1994). I recorded the interviews using a Sony ICD-UX91 digital recorder to facilitate subsequent analysis. The average length of each interview was approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.

During the interviews, I asked participants to discuss their views of effective supervision and link specific behaviours in which they engage to their perceptions of effective supervisory practices. To help the participants connect their perceptions with their practices, I began the interview with general questions related to awareness of the PQPS document and the dimensions described therein. I then asked interviewees to describe how they viewed the purpose of supervision as well as the dimensions and the relationship between them. Specific supervisory practices were the focus of the next set of questions I posed to participating administrators. Additionally, I queried them as to how these practices fostered their perceived purposes of teacher supervision. This process enabled participants to clarify and elaborate on responses provided in their questionnaires. During the interviews, I provided participants with the opportunity to clarify responses and urged them to provide specific examples of effective supervision practices. Each interview was unique. The responses on the questionnaires and answers to questions during the interview process helped guide me in determining the nature of my subsequent questions. After the interview I invited each participant to discuss the responses they provided and review the notes taken during their interviews. I encouraged participants to refine their responses and to ensure that the notes that I took did indeed reflect the responses they had intended. As a follow-up to the study that would enable participants and other interested administrators to participate and profit from the discussion, I invited participants and others to take part in a *wiki* discussing the topics of

effective instructional practice and behaviours that constitute effective supervision. This *wiki* is a medium for extending understanding and sharing of best practices among administrators and is, therefore, not a formal part of this study. Monitoring the exchange of ideas between administrators I garnered even more detail regarding effective supervision.

Data Analysis

During each interview I took great effort to jot down notes and questions to help interviewees elaborate on specific areas related to the topics discussed. As a result, my note taking process did not detract from the interview itself. I recorded all interviews using a Sony MP3 IC recorder. These digital sound files were then stored on laptop and I subsequently transcribed them verbatim. On average, the interviews occupied about 30 kilobytes of information and consisted of approximately 6,500 words. I subjected the notes and recordings I collected during the interview process to two different methods of analysis. First, I read the data collected several times to identify specific words, phrases, and ideas that were used during each interview. I then subsumed the key terms, phrases and ideas I highlighted into the larger categories and themes that emerged from the various responses. Thus, I first studied the data I collected and then coded it to identify specific trends and patterns apparent in participant responses. I analyzed the interview data using a combination of Spradley's (1979) domain analysis and the content analysis method of Weber (1990).

I also subjected the data I collected to analysis using the "constant comparison" method elucidated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). After each interview, I jotted down postinterview notes highlighting specific themes, relationships between ideas and

idiosyncratic terms whose meanings I could link to more familiar terms in educational jargon. I then transcribed interview data using *One Note* software. After I transcribed the data, I grouped participant responses for each question into separate sections using *One Note* software. Using this software, I subjected participants' responses to each question to searches for key terms and phrases (Appendix G). I flagged these key terms and phrases and tabulated the frequency of key terms relating to perception and practice. I also determined the frequency of key terms by subjecting each participant's response to a particular question to Wordle, an Internet program that produces word clusters based on the words entered. In these word clusters, words that have a greater frequency have a larger font and occupy a more prominent place in the word clusters created (Appendix H). I found that by determining their frequency, the categorization of key terms and ideas was facilitated.

Furthermore, I also analyzed the linkage between these key terms. When I discerned linkages between key terms that participants used I subsumed them into larger domains of meaning for each interview. Once I established these emergent relationships, I reapplied them to the narratives and, in so doing, I discerned a model or emerging structure. I repeated this procedure for each subsequent interview. After subjecting data from each interview to individual analysis, I aggregated interview data into a single data file and subjected it to additional analysis. This analysis consisted of enumerating existing categories and relationships and the further categorization of ideas common to all interviews.

My analysis was primarily qualitative as this method lends itself to the more open-ended nature of the interviews. Quantitative analysis of interview data, according to

Cohen and colleagues, requires greater formality and structure to the interview process (Cohen et al., 2007). I maintained the anonymity of participants by employing pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

Questions and Subquestions

In order to provide a detailed and rich response to the larger research question, the questions I hoped to answer are the following:

1. How do participants view the practice of supervision?
2. What specific practices do participants employ to ensure effective/supportive supervision?
3. What traits are necessary to ensure effective/supportive supervision?
4. How does supervision relate to the dimensions of leadership and the day-to-day activities of administrators?

Subquestions that emerge include:

1. What data do principals use to determine the quality of instructional practice?
2. How do principals define effective instructional practice?
3. What does effective instructional practice look like to principals?
4. What are the skills necessary for teachers to engage in effective instructional practice?
5. How can principals coach, instill, facilitate the development of such skills in teachers?

Results

Interview Results: Key Themes

Despite many similarities and themes emerging from the five administrators responses and despite the minor differences in details, the main underlying consensus pointed to a conscious effort to devise an effective supervisory practice. My analysis of the responses that each interviewee supplied provided insight into practice of effective and supportive supervision. In particular, the insights helped provide me with information on the various questions and subquestions I posed in this study. I have summarized the themes emerging from the responses garnered in the following sections. The themes that I have addressed are: supervision and its relationship to other dimensions of leadership; participants' view of the practice of supervision; relationship between instructional leadership and teacher supervision; administrator reflections on their effectiveness as instructional leaders; fostering an effective supervision practice; strategies, structures, and initiatives employed in effective supervision; preparing for the role of instructional leader; key characteristics of administrators as instructional leaders; rewards and challenges.

Theme one: Supervision and its relationship to the other dimensions of leadership and the day-to-day activities of administrators. All participants agreed that the qualities outlined in the PQPS document and the descriptors attending each standard adequately captured the day-to-day activities encountered by administrators. While the standards and descriptors were reasonably effective at capturing the essential duties and providing a skeleton or framework outlining the duties of an administrator, they did not adequately capture the complex relationship existing between the standards and

descriptors. All respondents indicated the relationship between the duties were quite complex and required shifting seamlessly among the various dimensions. Furthermore, during particular times of the school year, some dimensions were a greater priority and demanded more attention from administrators than at other times. For instance, when budgets had to be completed and other planning documents had to be written, administrators gave more time and attention to the managerial dimension at the expense of the other dimensions.

While it was commonly acknowledged that the relationship between the dimensions was a complex one and always in flux, interviewees found it difficult to describe the relationship between the dimensions. The consensus supported by the administrators' responses was that all the dimensions were important and the exclusion of any one at any time would be detrimental to their ability to effectively move their schools and staffs forward. While they were described by one participant as "separate entities that come together in a person," the emphasis would continually shift. This sentiment was echoed by another respondent who described the dimensions as "horizontal" and that movement between the dimensions depended on not only "the needs of your staff [but also] where you are [in your career] and where they [staff] are." Only one respondent claimed that relationship building was foundational and therefore may be more important than the other dimensions. This, however, was interesting in the light of the number of times every administrator interviewed used terms associated with and highlighted the importance of forming positive relationships with members of their respective staffs.

Theme two: Participants' views of the practice of supervision. Consensus regarding the practice of supervision included it being a professional obligation of critical import and vital to supporting development and growth in schools on a variety of levels. Early on in their administrative careers these individuals recognized the need to focus on this aspect of their professional mandate and also recognized that effective relationships lay at the foundation of changing teacher pedagogy through supportive supervision. The administrators did not view this practice as something that could be relegated while managerial tasks took primacy; rather, they viewed teacher supervision as a practice that had to continue in spite of the other demands of the job. Working with teachers to improve their craft was, for these administrators, the most important function they performed. From the perspective of the school as an organisation, supervision helps to provide organisational purpose; it helps teachers continue to move forward in a predetermined direction. As one respondent indicated, she felt it her duty as the “keeper of the direction” consensually determined by the staff to use the practice of supervision to keep teachers focused on the path to achieving school goals. This sentiment was echoed by other statements which invoked the imagery of a journey with supervision functioning to ensure all were moving forward in the direction prescribed by the school plan. Thus, terms like map, plan, and goals were all used as reference points for the practice of supervision.

Supervision not only serves the collective but also the individual teachers in a building as, in its most intimate manifestation, it involves a single administrator–teacher pairing. According to one respondent, “[y]ou have to grow the individuals within your school but you also have to grow your school.” However, it was at the individual teacher

level that administrators felt they exerted the greatest effect. The terms used to describe the purpose of individual teacher supervision most often included growth and support. Moreover, descriptions and phrases identifying the need to increase teacher awareness illustrate that administrators interviewed see individual teacher supervision in terms of a servant leadership perspective. One administrator eloquently defined his role as one that “facilitate[s] an environment and facilitate a structure ... that allows teachers” to grow. In this context, the job of the administrator is to provide encouragement, growth, and support to help teachers improve. In describing this portion of the supervision practice, administrators expounded on the need to raise teachers’ awareness and help them view and reflect on their practice in the classroom. This ability to help and encourage teachers to move forward was unanimously seen as the main way to achieve traction in moving any school forward.

Theme three: Relationship between instructional leadership and teacher supervision. Teacher supervision, according to the PQPS, falls under the auspices of instructional leadership. Hardly surprising therefore was the similarity in terms administrators used to describe instructional leadership and evaluate its importance. While respondents were reluctant to rate the importance of instructional leadership as being any higher than the other dimensions, they often employed terms like “critical” and “essential” when discussing the importance of this dimension. Several echoed the sentiment of one of their colleagues who described instructional leadership and teacher supervision as “absolutely entwined.”

While teacher supervision was an intimate one-to-one relationship for the most part, instructional leadership is much more encompassing. Respondents concur that the

focus of instructional leadership is providing the context for teacher growth. Thus any endeavour to manipulate the environment that would increase teacher learning, understanding of their context and ability to work collaboratively to garner support is conducive to the practice of instructional leadership. Participants classified these efforts into those focusing on the organizational structures conducive to teacher growth and those that focused on the individual teachers in a building. It is through focus on individual teacher growth and changing the organizational structure to make it more conducive to teacher growth that this focus emerged as an essential component of instructional leadership. All administrators identified this strategy as having the benefit of helping teachers to think their way through the changes desired of them while two added a similar sentiment indicating the need for administrators to support and build with teachers the new practices deemed necessary.

While the terms used to describe instructional leadership were varied (as is expected given the nebulous nature of the term) trust and credibility were seen as essential components of successful instructional leadership. The consensus was that this trust and credibility were earned through administrators actively teaching students in classes of their own. One administrator went so far as to assert, “[y]ou have to be a good teacher first, an excellent teacher first; I think you can’t be an effective principal unless you are an extremely effective person in the classroom.” If their administrators taught classes of their own teachers would view the suggestions of those administrators as being more laudable than if coming from an individual with limited classroom experience. In addition, teaching classes, according to these administrators, afforded them deeper insight into the challenges and frustrations that emerge in daily teaching. Some of these insights

could be unique to particular segments of the teaching staff. For instance, the challenges of implementing new curricula as was faced by social studies teachers recently or adapting to a new math program, can prove challenging for those teaching these subjects. It was through awareness of the specific daily challenges that administrators indicated trust and credibility was earned from their teachers. The necessity for administrators to model the behaviours they seek in their teachers was reinforced by the majority of the respondents. Thus administrators felt that they needed to participate in the professional development activities they arranged and encouraged their staffs to attend. Respondents also indicated that efforts to stay current with research on pedagogy and curriculum would further increase an administrator's credibility and procure purchase with teacher growth initiatives, but due to demands on the time of administrators, this proved to be a challenge.

Theme four: Administrators' reflections on their effectiveness as instructional leaders. While all administrators interviewed recognized what actions were required to produce effective instructional leadership in their buildings, they were all reluctant to praise themselves. This was in part due to the complexity and multitude of tasks associated with instructional leadership and their awareness of the constantly shifting context in their schools. Additionally, they each were aware that this dimension, in particular, describes a process that continually requires reflection, data collection, and learning. Their modesty in this respect sharply contrasts the accolades these individuals received both from members of their staffs and their immediate supervisors in their respective division offices. In spite of, or perhaps because of their feelings that instructional leadership was a growth area for each of them, all of the administrators

interviewed spent a great deal of time and effort to improve their capacity in this dimension. Several indicated while they saw themselves as effective they continued to strive to “be better,” to “change and do different things on a yearly basis” but that “there was always more, always more” that can be improved upon.

The impetus for improving their efficacy as instructional leaders came early in the administrative careers of each of the administrators interviewed. Each recognized that staff development lay at the heart of school improvement and that teacher supervision, although part of the instructional leadership mandate, was too restrictive to achieve maximum impact on teacher effectiveness. All interviewees realized that part of instructional leadership involved modeling the ethic of learning and improvement through learning that they wished their teachers to inculcate. Invariably, over their careers as administrators they grew into this facet of administration and continue to focus time and energy to ensure continued growth in this dimension.

Theme five: Fostering and developing an effective supervision practice.

In their quest to develop an effective supervision practice all administrators interviewed followed a similar path. Each administrator identified a significant portion of time allotted to researching an appropriate context to solicit and engender participation of teachers in the supervision process. Avenues contributing to growth in this area included the work of Hulley and Dier (2005) and Fullan (2008) and workshops provided by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Research included visiting other schools to see other models within which a supervision framework could be supported, attending workshops and conferences on effective school practices, and learning from experienced

administrators through informal and formal discussions. However, laying a strong foundation upon which an effective supervision practice could be built was essential.

All administrators interviewed conceded that the current state of their supervisory practice was the result of a process of evolution. Four of the administrators indicated that, over the course of their administrative careers, they had shifted their focus from a managerial one relying on issuing directives and relying on regimentation in supervisory practices to a coaching or mentoring approach. To make this shift it was necessary for these administrators to focus their energy on changing the culture and atmosphere in each of their respective schools. Teachers had to be encouraged to see themselves as capable of defining their own areas for improvement. Prior to this change in perspective teachers had become comfortable with the managerial approach that some administrators practiced. In this managerial approach, the areas that teachers would focus their energies on developing were clearly outlined by their administrators. It required a great deal of time and effort on the part of administrators to convince some teachers that through reflection, introspection, and dialogue they could identify their own areas for growth and improvement.

Surprisingly, only one administrator indicated that work towards his Masters of Education degree was beneficial in helping him move toward the creation of an effective supervisory practice. In the majority of cases creating the context for an effective supervision framework was aided by a catalyst which provided the impetus for spurring teacher growth. This catalyst took the form of a new building in one case, while in others it was due to the influx of capital and a new focus for an AISI project.

Despite the variety of manifestations of the research process, all administrators distilled the information gleaned and, as more than one suggested, acted as a “blender to mix the different conceptions and ideas” into a vision that would work for their particular context. Part of fostering the development of this conception was discussions with staff to help them visualize and understand the process and purpose of supervision. Important in this process was making the ideas of supervision and teacher and school growth more concrete and less nebulous to teachers. While not all administrators interviewed were comfortable with the term “supervision,” they were transparent with their staffs about the purpose and process. The skills they identified as beneficial to this endeavour were the ability to distil and create a framework teachers could visualize, understand and appreciate. This crystallizing of the objective was viewed as an essential part of securing teacher understanding and willingness to participate in the process and was described by three of the administrators as empowering the teachers. This empowerment was seen by all to be essential to the underlying purpose and success of the supervision process.

Underlying each of the administrators’ efforts to craft an effective model of supervision in their respective schools was the unwavering belief in the value of their teachers. From citing Reeves’ research (2004a) indicating that teacher effectiveness is a significant predictor of student achievement to recognizing that due to policies and regulations limiting the ability to remove ineffective teachers, administrators were unanimous in the belief that working effectively with the teachers currently in each school was necessary and that waiting for those marginally involved in school improvement efforts to become more active participants was irresponsible. Thus all the administrators interviewed viewed teacher growth and building the capacity of all

teachers in their schools as being critical. These administrators, therefore, focused on improving their understanding of how to effectively improve teacher pedagogy by seeking out and engaging in professional development opportunities that would help them improve their teacher supervision practice. For each of them, frequently observing teachers in their classes and “finding time to meet with teachers to discuss observations” made while observing these teachers was essential. According to the administrators, more often than not, the supervisory process they relied on most heavily were informal in nature and depended on trust as a foundation. Despite being very busy these administrators made this a major priority in their administrative lives by carving out time for classroom visits and meetings with teachers. In these meetings, specific reference was made to observations collected during the classroom visit. Often, the purpose of the conversation was to encourage teachers to reflect on their practice as evidenced by the observations collected. Such discussions led to formulation of goals for individual teacher improvement and reflection on how those goals related to the school improvement goals identified.

Perhaps related to their willingness to work with teachers to improve teacher practice is the perception of assessment, curriculum, and their relationship that these administrators share. Each of the administrators interviewed were proponents of assessment for learning practice and recognized the importance of providing specific feedback to aid in learning. In addition, some indicated that for student learning to be enhanced, feedback should focus on specific elements of the curriculum. This document should serve as a guide for what students would learn in a particular discipline. Similarly,

the administrators' responses suggested that their role in supervising teachers was to provide such feedback to enable teachers to improve their craft.

Theme six: Strategies, structures, and initiatives employed in effective supervision. Given the unique context of each school, there was variety in the structures and initiatives employed by the administrators interviewed. In terms of the overall strategy, however, there emerged a consensus regarding the general method employed. To begin with, each administrator emphasized the need to “clearly communicate” areas for teacher and school improvement. Whether these target areas found their origin in research outside the school or were part of a document outlining a teacher effectiveness framework, the improvement targets were clearly identified. The consensus among the administrators was that working with teachers to “identify growth areas and targets [was] preferred” but that administrators reserved the right to suggest or encourage growth in a particular area.

The administrative cohort interviews identified a number of strategies that would support teacher growth. These ranged from establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within the school, establishing grade-level teams or multigrade teams. Moreover, these administrators secured many and varied professional development opportunities for their staff and gave preference to those learning occasions that were embedded in the practice of teaching. These included working collaboratively on assessments, peer observation and article study. Providing this variety ensured that the wide spectrum of teacher needs in the building would be addressed. Administrators would suggest activities appropriate to each teacher's needs and could observe teacher participation in such groups.

By identifying goals with teachers and providing numerous opportunities for growth based on the goals identified by teachers, administrators explained that they could, given these structures, have conversations with individual teachers that focused on the growth area for that particular teacher. Moreover, specific goals could be used to generate specific criteria that provide useful feedback for teachers after supervisory visits. According to the administrators interviewed the most beneficial portion of the supervisory process was the rich discussion that followed such visits. Most often, these visits were rather informal in nature and unannounced.

The administrative cohort interviewed was voracious when collecting data about their school and the achievement of its students. They willingly shared the information they amassed with their staffs and used this data to help them adjust either the strategies they were employing, the structures they were providing to support teacher growth or to determine which initiatives should be started and supported to encourage teacher growth. The data they collected consisted of surveys administered by the division, school-developed surveys, provincial surveys, and student achievement data. This was also combined with data collected during classroom visits. Data amassed during such visits included student on-task behaviours, student engagement, and methodologies the teacher employed to ensure student learning.

While there was diversity in the strategies, structures, and initiatives that the administrative cohort employed, for each administrator there was tight, clearly articulated coherence between each of these elements and the goals sought by the respective administrative teams. Often, the areas targeted for improvement were few and tightly

focussed. In addition, each administrator emphasized the need to carve out time for classroom visitations and jealously guarded that time against other intrusions.

Theme seven: Preparing for the role of instructional leader. When reflecting on the key concepts they had to learn and skills they had to acquire on their journey to becoming an effective instructional leader, the administrators interviewed identified developing supportive, effective relationships as key. The nature of the relationship described by all the administrators interviewed, however, was one that focused on the professional aspect of the relationship. While it was important for administrators to view their teachers as individuals, they focused on viewing their teachers as individuals who were willing and capable of improving their craft. Even the informal conversations these administrators engaged in with their teachers moved towards improvement and school goals. Many acknowledged that building effective relationships was one of the most challenging and beneficial parts of their journey to effective instructional leadership. In particular, they stressed the importance of listening, “really listening,” to the concerns of their teachers and helping those teachers identify the essence of their concerns when faced with exploring new practices and implementing new pedagogy.

None of these administrators were averse to delivering difficult messages to their teachers about teacher performance but did identify finding appropriate ways to deliver such messages that respected the individual teacher’s efforts and satisfied both divisional and Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) protocol required some learning on their parts. Thus attending workshops on the protocol surrounding discussing difficult issues with teachers was part of the learning process for each of these administrators. Moreover, the idea of evaluating colleagues was a novel one for administrators early in their

administrative careers. This required practice in identifying the key competences associated with strong teacher performance. Once these were identified, all administrators admitted having to spend time devising adequate means of measuring or observing their teacher's manifestations of effective teaching practice and recording this information for subsequent discussion. Framing the discussion that followed teacher observation was a skill that each of the administrators found evolved over several years of their career.

Another skill that required a great deal of time for each of the administrators to acquire was the means of changing the cultures of their respective schools. While each recognized that changing school culture could have a significant impact on the manner in which supervision was viewed, finding the appropriate way to significantly improve school culture in a desirable direction required time and observation. While strategies for changing teachers' views regarding supervision and encouraging their participation in activities conducive to improving their craft were abundant, finding the ones that conferred the greatest impact depended on the unique context in each school. As a result, the administrators shared that finding the strategies that yielded the greatest impact required time and attention.

While each of the administrators interviewed conceded that keeping abreast of the research into effective pedagogy was time consuming and critical it was more important for them to learn how to synthesize this research and find ways of presenting it in a concrete fashion to their teachers. In this way, they could help distil the information into immediately applicable strategies for their teachers. To avoid overwhelming their teachers with the latest educational innovations, all of the administrators spent a great deal of time reflecting on the research they read and how it applied to their individual

context. Learning how to apply what they viewed as important to their particular context and how best to implement change in their schools required time. Acting as a filter, a term used by three of the administrators interviewed, in determining what information to present to their staffs and how best to present it in a concrete fashion was a skill that administrators agreed took years to learn. Another challenge for the education of the administrative cohort was not only becoming aware of the changes in the larger educational context but also deciding what commensurate changes in their buildings would be demanded by these more global changes in education.

Theme eight: Key characteristics of administrators as instructional leaders.

When asked to reflect on the key characteristics necessary for principals to be effective leaders the desire to have a mechanism or strategy to, as one principal put it, “get a pulse on what’s out there” emerged as central. Manifestations of such strategies included teaching, which was favoured by the majority of the respondents for several reasons (some of which will be elaborated on later), coaching teams, being participants on teacher learning teams, to informal walkabouts in their respective schools. In all cases, the purpose of these activities was to get as many different perspectives on the activities in the school as possible. These individuals were all hungry for information about their schools, how students and teachers in their building performed and how staff, students, and the community perceived their schools.

The desire for knowledge was not restricted to information about their schools; instead, all administrators interviewed demonstrated a passion for improving their schools. This translated into voracious reading and research into current educational research and pedagogy. Among the many words and phrases used to describe their

passion for learning, the terms “avid reader” and “constantly reflecting” frequently emerged. Perhaps this drive to learn more about the school improvement process was driven in part by a perception on the part of the administrators that their approaches to and strategies for improving the performance of teachers in their buildings could be improved. All interviewees recognized that their current approach to supervision of teachers was reached through many years of experimentation but none were completely satisfied with the current manifestation of this process in their buildings. These administrators were aware of the constantly changing context in which they worked and were always looking for ways to improve the process to meet anticipated changes in their educational contexts.

Each administrator identified good, clear communication about expectations as another key characteristic of effective instructional leaders. Clear communication should, according to all the administrators interviewed, lead to transparency in the processes that will guide each teacher toward improved practice. This clear communication also should entail, according to the interviewees, a willingness to engage in difficult conversations with their teachers as needed. As one respondent indicated, not being afraid to ask the difficult questions is important. Communication was also an important tool for offering support to their teachers as good listening skills, encouragement, and optimism were also touted as being valuable. These skills were viewed as important aspects of the ability to develop and foster positive relationships with staff members.

Underlying all of these characteristics was the ability to develop a clear vision, purpose, or direction and work relentlessly towards that end. Although not all administrators interviewed used the term strategic, each described the need for a

cohesive, well-thought out set of practices to support and encourage movement of teachers towards identified school goals.

Theme nine: Rewards and challenges. In describing the rewards and challenges associated with effective supervision, the responses provided by administrators exhibited remarkable consistency. In fact, exploration of this theme produced the greatest consistency in the content (i.e., ideas) and language employed by administrators. Every administrator identified seeing growth in their teachers as one of the greatest rewards. Often such growth was as gratifying as the pride engendered in teachers who grew as a result of the supervisory practices of their administrators. An improved perspective of the supervisory practice among teachers in their schools was also viewed favourably by administrators. Finally, the improved climate and atmosphere in each of their schools as perceived by both staff and community members was uplifting to the administrators interviewed.

Every administrator interviewed agreed that teachers who are unwilling to attempt to improve their practice or become involved in school improvement initiatives posed the greatest challenge. This even overshadowed the time constraints that each admitted contributed to the pressure associated with school administration. Such teachers not only placed greater demands on the time and energy of the administrative cohort interviewed but they also caused these administrators to focus on developing a variety of methods to support and encourage the growth of reluctant teachers. In most cases, the administrators interviewed identified the need to learn the appropriate protocol for dealing with such teachers in shifting from supervision to evaluation.

Results Summary

The administrative cohort interviewed demonstrated a strong desire to continue improving the performance of their teachers as an integral part of improving their schools. While they set achievable standards for their staffs and schools on a yearly basis, they were always seeking improvement in terms of student achievement and staff involvement in school improvement efforts. The data they used to determine whether they were moving towards their goals consisted of student achievement, student and parent surveys (school-based or from the provincial government), and teacher observation and discussion. All of the administrators demonstrated a desire to accumulate as much information as possible about all aspects of their schools. None of them relied only on externally constructed surveys but they were each involved in designing, administering, and interpreting a number of other instruments designed to collect information about their schools. The nature of the data collected was both qualitative and quantitative but all cautioned against too great a focus on quantitative data. Further, there existed among the administrative cohort a definite bias towards data that they had collected themselves or data collected by instruments they had helped to develop. Thus, many of the administrators spent a great deal of time devising methods to acquire a variety of data. The means for acquiring such data were not only cursory visits, but also visits that they documented using coding systems that helped them quickly draw out themes for later discussion with their teachers. While the coding system and the forms developed for classroom observations differed in their focus, they were all seen as a means of focusing the data on a few selected themes for further discussion with teachers at a later date. In each case, they shared the data amassed with teachers during a post-

observation discussion. The mass of data represented different perspectives on school and teacher improvement and there was a concerted effort to sift through the data to interpret and draw reasonable conclusions.

Administrators indicated that early in their administrative careers they viewed teacher supervision as the vehicle for effecting greatest improvement in their buildings. However, each acknowledged that there was a specific impetus or galvanizing force that helped them to engage teachers in improvement efforts. For some this took the form of a new AISI project and school or divisional focus. The influx of funding and the pressures to measure the effectiveness of expenditure of moneys helped focus the efforts of some members of the administrative cohort on demonstrating increases in key measureable outcomes in their buildings. This often translated into improving teacher performance and they adopted strategies and structures to aid in improving teacher practice. For other administrators the impetus took the form of a physical change to their building or a change in its grade configuration. These factors enabled administrators to engage their teachers in dialogue with a specific purpose or focus. Administrators viewed this as an important first step in engaging teachers' efforts and interests in a specific direction.

None of the administrators interviewed felt their current teacher supervision practice represented the pinnacle of achievement. Each administrator frequently reflected on the types of questions they would pose to teachers after observations to encourage reflection and growth. They constantly looked for specific information, professional development activities, or research that would appeal to the specific teaching assignments or interests of various teachers to engage them in a dialogue that focused on teacher improvement. Many found professional development that focused on crafting effective

conversations with teachers to be helpful. Of note among these were workshops on cognitive coaching or coaching conversations. For each administrator, effective supervision practice evolved and required constant attention. Movement towards the current state of their supervisory practice was slow and incremental despite exposure to new approaches to and ideas concerning teacher supervision. Interestingly, all of the administrators interviewed made effective supervision a focus long before the PQPS document appeared on the educational horizon. Thus, development of people in their buildings was a pre-existing mind set and not a result of an external mandate to work with teachers to help them improve their craft.

While all members of the cohort received training in at least one of these coaching approaches, all expressed familiarity with Susan Scott's (2004) idea of fierce conversations and were not reluctant to engage in such conversations as a last resort. Each of the administrators could vividly recount conversations in which they had to resort to more directive approaches to move teachers forward. Despite recognizing and acknowledging certain teachers' unwillingness to comply with teacher growth initiatives, the administrative cohort focused on identifying the impediments to teacher cooperation. The responses of the administrators interviewed displayed sensitivity to circumstances in a teacher's life that could make cooperation with initiatives a challenge. It was only after a concerted effort to understand the teacher's context and reasons for not complying with professional development initiatives that these administrators would employ more directive conversations. Even after such conversations, the administrators communicated a strong desire to maintain a positive relationship with such teachers.

In addition to the challenge of staying current with research in educational pedagogy, the administrators interviewed also indicated the challenge of acting as a filter or synthesizing the volume of relevant information and presenting it in a manageable, concrete fashion to their staff. Each administrator interviewed could cite specific resources they were currently reading or engaged with that continued to shape their approach to teacher supervision. While modeling learning has become an overused expression applied to teachers and administrators, the administrative cohort interviewed really exhibited a passion for learning. In particular, their learning focused on leadership related ideas, motivation, and research into learning styles and student achievement. They were not content merely to focus on learning the managerial aspects of school administration. However, this did take time as all indicated being aware of this shift from an approach that focused more on the managerial aspects of administration to the teacher supervision and leadership facets. All indicated that this shift was accompanied by, and perhaps found its impetus in, the realization that school improvement was dependent upon effective teacher supervision. In all cases, they modified the material they interacted and adapted this material to suit their current contexts. Despite intensive training and research into specific approaches to teacher supervision, the current process each administrator undertook was a unique mixture of methods that reflected their administrative style and experience.

Discussion

The approach to supervision epitomized by this cohort consisted of tiered strategies and the skill set they worked to acquire complemented the array of strategies employed. They used large-group teacher sessions to clearly outline to all members of

their staff what specific targets they were trying to achieve. They were very clear about the criteria that would indicate movement towards established goals. Further, they all were adept at involving staff in direction setting discussions and were aware that such steps were essential to secure ownership in the supervision-school improvement process. In these large group discussions, administrators viewed their role as that of synthesizer and eye-opener. They had to synthesize vast amounts of educational research and present their findings in concrete ways that teachers could relate to and find immediate understanding and applicability to their classrooms. In this manner, administrators worked on connecting teachers with current educational research. Administrators were unanimous in their contention that this was a vital first step for if teachers could not see the implications or have a strong vision of the concrete manifestations of expectations, goals, and direction they would not be able to contribute to efforts to move in the specified direction. Much of the time administrators spent in establishing their supervision practice focused on defining in specific and tangible terms the direction they would expect their respective staffs to move and in stipulating behavioural criteria that would indicate movement towards goals. While the goals and criteria may come from the Teaching Quality Standard, a rubric describing teacher effectiveness, a teacher effectiveness framework, a rubric describing effective, engaging use of technology or otherwise, each teacher had a clear understanding of what specific direction teacher growth in that school would translate into and what precise behaviours that would lead teachers in that direction would look like. This initial step involved a great deal of time with teachers as a large group, effecting teacher understanding and securing consensus among the teaching staff. It was during this time that effective administrators were able to

gauge when staff had reached the tipping point at which the majority would be willing to adopt specific direction and strategies. Administrators were also aware of which staff would be able to encourage other staff members to accept a particular direction and were strategic in determining when to implement their supervision practice to improve both teacher practice and school performance. These were also the occasions in which collaborative decision making skills, building consensus and establishing distributive leadership structures were most effective.

The second level related to teacher supervision employed by effective administrators was to create structures to help support teacher growth. While it may not be seen as part of a formal supervision process, all the administrators interviewed agreed that improvement in teacher pedagogy along predetermined paths was the goal of teacher supervision. They conceded that in such a journey, individual teachers could learn more, receive more support and encouragement from their colleagues than an administrator or even an administrative team could provide. Thus, creating structures that reduced teacher isolation and promoted teacher reflection were important supporting strategies. Effective administrators participated with teachers in these groups as equals with the intent of determining which teachers were in need of greater support and encouragement. In addition, these administrators identified resources for teachers needing greater support through participation in such groups. In addition, they could organize effective professional development that would cater to the specific needs of a team of teachers in a building. Often these structures took the form of teacher teams that were occasionally based on grade level, discipline taught, or specific pedagogical practice implementation. Regardless of the nature of the teams established, this cohort of administrators viewed the

creation of and teacher participation in such teams as an essential component of their supervisory practice. They viewed these teams as the support groups in which teachers could garner the skills, knowledge, and supports required to improve their practice. Although they actively helped create the structures conducive to teacher growth, these administrators were actively engaged in the processes and participating in the structures they helped create.

Interestingly, despite being viewed as leaders by other administrators, division office personnel and their own staffs, most of the administrators interviewed did not participate in a large number of administrators' committees or work groups. They did, however, participate in professional development that enhanced their effectiveness when working with teachers. Some of this reluctance to serve on committees may have come from their self-effacing nature and quiet disposition. None of the administrators interviewed were particularly outspoken or gregarious in meetings with other administrators. Rather, the vast majority had a quiet, pensive disposition. Another possible reason for the reluctance of these administrators to serve on committees not directly related to their schools was that they immersed themselves in efforts to improve their staffs and schools. As a result, this did not leave much time for participation in other committees. These administrators displayed a high degree of self-awareness and remarkable self-discipline. They used these attributes to build a successful supervision program around their skills, improve in growth areas and find other talented individuals to help support them in their growth areas.

What all the administrators interviewed did spend a great deal of time on was involving their staff members in creating a vision, a direction in which the staff would

move. As stated earlier, this was described as the most time-consuming and painstaking part of the supervision process. It required a great deal of time and effort combined with an awareness of how many and which particular staff members had to be convinced of the legitimacy and efficacy of the direction outlined. This task also required knowledge of what specific strategies would secure the commitment of specific staff members. For some staff members, research would provide the impetus for securing their commitment while for others actually visiting other schools and seeing what the initiative should look like was more motivating. The paths to securing the commitment of specific staff members were varied but the administrators interviewed had a large arsenal of differentiated professional development strategies on which they could draw. A large part of securing teacher commitment, therefore, relied on having this large repertoire to draw on and also recognizing which strategies would prove most effective for individual teachers. This skill required patience and discernment on the part of the administrators.

Their intent focus on the development of individual members of their staffs underscored the equating in the minds of the administrators interviewed of school improvement and individual teacher development. Supervision for these administrators was an essential part of teacher improvement. This was not a process that they could leave to fate; instead, it required their constant monitoring and nurturing. Much of the imagery used by administrators in describing the importance of supervision described parenthood and nurturing the development of learners as well as weeding a garden. Each administrator was adamant that all teachers wanted to improve their craft and that even those who appeared reluctant to do so were not being exposed to the right circumstances that would elicit their participation. Supervision then was the act of creating those

circumstances conducive to individual teacher growth and then actively helping teachers to improve. This process required frequent (all indicated daily) classroom visits and follow-up discussions. During these discussions these administrators elaborated on specific observations in an effort to encourage teachers to reflect on their practice and the effectiveness of specific practices for teacher and school improvement.

Among their colleagues, the administrators interviewed were not unique in describing the importance of teacher supervision. What did set these administrators apart, however, was the well-constructed, strategic, holistic manner in which they approached the task of teacher supervision. As the preceding discussion indicated, these administrators did a lot of preparatory work prior to even entering a classroom to conduct supervisory visits. They identified securing consensus of the majority of the staff, defining goals, clarifying criteria and strategies as essential prerequisites to successful teacher supervision. Once these administrators successfully laid this groundwork, it became the touchstone, the prism through which data collected during classroom observations were analyzed. The administrative cohort interviewed regarded the supervisory process as one of connecting teachers with the larger educational landscape and of providing teachers with another perspective on their classroom performance. It provided the administrators an opportunity to help teachers reflect on how their pedagogical practice helped individual teachers improve their craft. Moreover, it helped teachers to understand how their improvement efforts would translate into improved student achievement and school improvement. Once the process was started, the data gleaned from supervisory visits were used to determine what other structures needed to

be added to support teacher growth, what other professional development activities would be beneficial to teachers.

Always the touchstone, the gauge against which progress would be measured was a clearly articulated vision that was consistently referred to in teacher conversations. It was this delineation of where the staff and school wanted to move towards, what they wanted to become that required the greatest amount of time and effort to establish. In this respect, the administrative cohort followed the adage of investing a lot of time in the initial stages of supervision and teacher growth to ensure smooth and continuous growth later at subsequent stages of the process. Setting the direction, as it were, required two distinct types of professional learning for these administrators. On the one hand, there was the requirement to research the new trends in education, the pedagogy, the research-based strategies that would both promote teacher growth and translate into improved student learning. The other focus was on acquiring skills that made them better able to communicate, motivate, and coach their staff members. With regard to the types of research-based initiatives they built structures supporting their supervisory process around, there was a great deal of variety in the literature they explored and the direction they choose for their respective schools. The skills they focused on acquiring that would help them to become more effective when dealing with their staff members, however, showed remarkable consistency. Members of the cohort either focused on cognitive coaching models, Covey's (1989) work or transformational leadership research.

In all cases, the supervisory model created depended heavily on clear communications and effective, supportive relationships based on honesty and trust. While none of the administrators interviewed mentioned the concept of servant leadership

overtly, when describing the type of relationships they sought to foster that would encourage and support teacher growth, they described some of the characteristics of servant leadership as outlined by Spears and Lawrence (2004). For each of the administrators, listening was important. Spending time really listening to the concerns of their staff members and learning about them as individuals helped create a greater understanding of some of the concerns teachers may hold. The impetus for creating time to dialogue and listen to their teachers was a feeling of empathy for each of their teachers. There was a strong belief in the value of each individual and their importance to the school as a whole. As some administrators indicated, their job was to grow individuals and, in so doing, grow their institutions. They equated progress with the growth of individual members of their respective organizations. The basic assumption among all administrators interviewed was that each teacher came into their building each day striving to perform to their best. Daily circumstances and individual teacher beliefs would affect how that desire manifested itself. Thus, even when individual teacher behavior or performance was not acceptable they were still viewed as valued members of the teaching staff. At times of subpar performance or undesirable behavior, persuasion based on relationships and not on positional authority was always the first resort. Only after completely exhausting this avenue would this administrative cohort move to evaluation to help teachers move forward. All but one indicated that even when moving to this option and teachers decided to leave their buildings, the relationships were still cordial and professional with those exiting teachers.

Conceptualization, foresight and stewardship were also well-supported by the responses of the administrative cohort. This group was able to visualize and garner

support for a vision supported by data related to their current context as well as educational trend data. Further, they were able to balance this vision with great insight and awareness of their current context. Then they were able to strategically change existing structures in their building to alter the developmental trajectory of their respective schools.

Limitations of Current Study

The cohort I interviewed consisted of five administrators. To elicit well-supported generalizations, a study with a larger number of interviewees should be conducted. Further, all of the administrators interviewed had spent their entire careers in rural school divisions. This experience may have significantly affected their perceptions and impacted the aspects of their work as administrators that they thought were more important. Relationships, for example, may play a more prominent role in both their professional and personal psyches because of the smaller communities in which they live. Also, to further support the characteristics of effective teacher supervision, a comparative study should be established in which administrators who are acknowledged as having employed effective teacher supervision practices are compared with those who have not yet sufficiently developed in this capacity. Such a study, for many reasons, would be a difficult one to undertake but would provide valuable insight into those characteristics, strategies and perceptions that are unique to effective supervision practices.

Conclusion

My initial purpose for this study was to identify and analyze effective supportive supervision. Interviews of candidates identified as exemplars of such practice did much to shed light on the nature, perception of, preparation for, and practice of effective

supportive supervision. After spending in excess of an hour with each member of the study group, it became clear to me that their identification as effective and supportive supervisors of their respective staffs was well deserved.

Responses I gleaned from the respective interviews did, upon analysis, provide me with a wealth of interesting information. These were readily subsumed into larger categories and provided direction for key generalizations that elucidated facets of effective supportive supervision. Uniqueness in responses was limited to strategies employed and were contingent on the particular environment in which they were to be employed. Not surprisingly, the overall approaches each administrator described were remarkably similar.

What was surprising was the amount of time and energy these administrators placed on developing an effective and supportive supervision practice and their recognition that an effective supervision practice was predicated upon being supportive to the teachers one supervises. These administrators invested a great deal of time and effort in finding an appropriate vision to motivate the teachers to improve their practice. This motivation found its impetus in a specific vision of education that was supported by volumes of educational research. The research upon which the direction was predicated was not only found by searching through literature on the topic and presenting that information to teachers, but more importantly by involving teachers in finding such information for themselves. Often, this information was acquired through either literature study or investigating and visiting schools that were recognized as being exemplars of the particular pedagogy or innovation desired. The patience and ability to guide the process,

while not directing, was inspiring. Furthermore, the amount of effort required early in the process was significant.

Once the direction was decided the singular focus of the majority of the administrative cohort interviewed was overwhelming. The direction or vision became the touchstone against which all school efforts were measured. Interestingly, as this focus became adopted by more and more staff members, the need for a single administrator or administrative team to move teachers forward in their practice diminished. More ownership was taken by members of the teaching staff in determining how to help realize the school vision and in so doing improve teacher practice. Deciding on the vision, engendering an appreciation and a desire to achieve that vision by the teachers had the effect of removing the teachers' focus on the process of supervision and focused it instead on identifying ways of improving their craft to improve their respective schools.

Another surprising finding was how strategic and coherent these administrators employed the supervisory processes. These administrators did not rely on the cursory supervisory visits of short duration; rather, they employed a constellation of strategies to monitor teacher performance. As they progressed through their careers, their constellation of strategies grew more complex and, like a web, reached and connected disparate members of the school staff. Moreover, this group of administrators were successful at seamlessly integrating all the divisional requirements for teacher lesson plans, teacher growth plans, and the school plans to meet divisional initiatives. What may be seen as disparate and tenuously related elements in other schools were part of a holistic, mutually reinforcing group of strategies.

Although it was not surprising that this group of administrators viewed supervision as vitally important, it was surprising how much time on a daily basis they invested in this practice. Other aspects of their work would be put off to ensure the visitation and subsequent discussions about teacher performance occurred. Inevitably, this resulted in much of their working day most of the time revolving around teacher supervision. Thus much of the other administrative tasks were relegated to before or after teaching hours.

Interestingly, many of the administrators did not identify graduate work as contributing significantly to the expertise they gained in teacher supervision. Rather, most pursued graduate work to satisfy a perceived direction in current trends in administrative requirements in the province. They also exhibited very focused and driven self-directed learning strategies that were tailored to their particular needs. In many cases, the learning they were engaged in led them to consider graduate work as a way of receiving some recognition for efforts they had been engaged in for some time.

Perhaps most significant was the finding that, although not articulated by the administrative cohort, the process they developed to promote effective supportive teacher supervision incorporated many assessment for learning (AfL) strategies. The framework they used with their teachers to support their growth greatly resembled the constellation of strategies employed by effective teachers who adeptly incorporate AfL pedagogy in their classes. Further, their philosophy of learning mirrored that of teachers who based their practice on constructivist principles of learning. Often, this included the need to differentiate the type of learning for individual teachers.

Thus while reaffirming many of the notions held prior to engaging in this study, many of the subtle nuances associated with developing an effective supportive supervision practice were elucidated. Interviews with the administrative cohort were uplifting and intellectually very stimulating. The depth and breadth of knowledge amassed by these individuals was considerable. Furthermore, much of it was refined by the fires of experience and polished by the wisdom of years.

Recommendations

Focusing merely on acquiring skills that would improve administrative leadership and the performance of teachers can reinforce the feeling of overload and disjointedness. Instead, what is required is a systemic approach to improving performance at the leadership and classroom level. As Fullan (2008) admonishes, never a checklist, always complexity, or, in this case, a framework for promoting growth and change. This framework requires new learning and new approaches to the changing contexts of education. A framework facilitating such change, therefore, must focus on learning and creating contexts to motivate, define specific content to be acquired, monitor the learning process, facilitate continued learning, and evaluate the impact of the new learning on performance. Current research suggests that the greatest gains in learning result from employing an AfL framework. This then will form the scaffolding for a model to foster growth in leadership as well as teacher performance.

Changes conducive to improvements in learning include: “understanding and articulating in advance of teaching the achievement targets that their [teachers] are to hit” (Stiggins, 2002, p. 74); establishing clear objectives against which [teacher] achievement can be measured which is of paramount importance in assessment for learning (Marzano,

2000; McTighe, 1996; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). These objectives or standards must be clear both to facilitator (supervisor) and learner (teacher being supervised).

Meaningful evaluation can be compromised due to a lack of a clear goal. Administrators and teachers must be clear on the purpose of each assessment to which learners are being subjected (e.g., formative-for learning or summative-of learning). Once these objectives are clear, criteria for the learning targets should be established and exemplars should be used to further clarify the learning targets (Stiggins, 2002). Strategies can then be identified and implemented to help learners achieve these objectives. Each teacher, therefore, should be part of the process clarifying their learning and performance objectives and this process should be a collaborative one between the teacher and supervisor. In this manner, not only would teachers have some input into the direction of and purpose for their professional development, but they would be invested in the process. This would be in stark contrast to those situations in which particular professional development activities or initiatives are mandated.

Next, the objectives must then be rephrased as criteria for assessing whether the desired outcome has been achieved (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). It is crucial that the objectives and the criteria be stated in terms that are understood in the same way by both the facilitator of learning and the learner. If facilitator and learner do not share a common understanding of either the expectations or the criteria by which certain goals will be measured, there is a danger that facilitator and learner will have differing conceptions of successful learning. Further, it is essential that these descriptions be specific and rich in detail so as to recognize them in those achieving a particular standard. The criteria can even be elaborated to be incremental or progressive in that they describe different degrees

to which a particular objective has been met. For instance, a learner can adequately meet a specific criterion or perform at a level that may be considered exemplary in regard to the specified criterion. In addition, criteria should be precise in that they relate to each of the objectives being assessed.

Designing or finding effective rubrics to measure performance is also important in this process. Rubrics are scoring guides composed of evaluative criteria, quality definitions, and a scoring strategy which may either be analytic or holistic (Popham, 1997). To clarify the objectives and criteria further, examples depicting various levels of achievement should be provided. The criteria on which the rubric is based would be dependent on the particular focus of the school-based professional development or the individual needs identified by the teacher and their supervisor.

Unlike summative assessment, the process does not end with the performance or the product. Instead, the rubric, evaluation criteria, and the assessor's perception provide fodder for a dialectic between learner and evaluator. The intent of the feedback is to provide specific insights and suggestions aimed at helping students to improve (Stiggins, 2002). Rubrics, therefore, serve both the learner and the teacher. From the learner's perspective, valuable information about skills that need to be refined in order to meet the criteria is provided. For the teachers, a rubric can help diagnose areas of weakness for students and highlight specific skill deficiencies. Rather than focusing on the inputs (teaching) and outputs (product) this process concentrates on the vital area between the two extremes. As Stigler and Heibert state, "[a] focus on standards and accountability that ignores the processes of teaching and learning in classrooms will not provide the

direction that teachers [or students] need in their quest to improve” (cited in Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 10).

Adding to the dialectic are explicit discussions of strategies intended to enhance performance once weaknesses have been identified. Such discussions help students take responsibility for their own learning and engage in metacognitive inquiry (Stiggins, 2000). This constitutes a portion of an ongoing process of assessment, providing feedback and adjustment by both administrator/supervisor (in incorporating new and different instructional strategies) and the teacher/learner (employing new learning strategies) (McTighe, 1996/1997).

To determine the effectiveness of this approach for enhancing learning, effective supervisors need to turn to and become well-versed with reading and interpreting research. The meta-analysis conducted by Black and Wiliam concludes that such an approach does indeed result in increased student learning and “[t]ypical effect sizes of the formative assessment experiments were between 0.4 and 0.7. These effect sizes are larger than most of those found for educational interventions” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 12). At the low end (0.4), these effect sizes would be equivalent for equating a learner’s achievement with the top 35% of those not involved in such an approach (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The other end of the range (0.7) would translate to moving a nation scoring in the middle of the pack of all 41 countries participating in an international exam like the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) to one of the top five (Black & William, 1998).

While the evidence is overwhelming that such an approach enhances learning, such practices are not utilised to a great extent either by classroom teachers evaluating

their students or by administrators when assessing or evaluating the performance of their teachers. In many cases, the preconditions for implementing such practices are absent. According to Chappuis and colleagues, these include “supportive school and district policies, clear communication systems, and most important, assessment-literate teachers and administrators” (Chappuis, Stiggins, Arter, & Chappuis, 2005, p. 5). The means for improving learning and achievement are made abundantly clear through the efforts of many educational researchers. Now the challenge is to create effective means for disseminating and facilitating teacher confidence with these approaches (Popham, 1997).

Such a framework which employs specific criteria, well-defined levels of performance and a genuine, motivating reason for the desired change would engender growth-oriented dialogue. In this manner teachers and their supervising administrators could engage in a meaningful, authentic, purposeful professional conversations that would be conducive to teachers improving their professional practice. This would, however, require that administrators wanting to develop an effective supportive supervision practice would need to be very well grounded in AfL philosophy. Thus one facet of the professional development for aspiring administrators should be the need to not only learn AfL pedagogy but also to model its use. This would be one important element in a skill set necessary to provide effective supportive supervision.

Developing such an approach to teacher supervision poses many challenges. Primary among these is the time required to design and implement such a practice. To provide more time for what this cohort of administrators agreed was the vitally important function of effective teacher supervision, more supports are needed to help administrators deal with the more managerial aspects of administration. This many entail a move back to

a more centralized decision-making model for some school divisions. Such a move would see more managerial issues such as budgeting, staffing and student transportation to name a few addressed by division office personnel. At the very least, more division office support should be directed to helping administrators deal with these time consuming duties so they can interact more effectively and supportively with their teachers.

Another challenge posed in developing an effective supportive supervision practice is that many of the administrators felt uncomfortable with the idea of teacher supervision as an entity divorced from other elements of school improvement. While they were all good teachers, much of their good teaching was instinctive and they were not able to articulate why exactly they were as effective as they were in the classroom. What these administrators did was to reframe teacher supervision and attach it to efforts to move the entire school personnel in a predetermined direction. To provide new administrators with the time and information necessary to help identify areas of improvement for their schools and possible initiatives that would help them move the teachers in that school in a particular direction, administrators need time to immerse themselves in the milieu of their schools. Such efforts are often confounded by steep learning curves and the need to complete a host of managerial tasks. What would be beneficial would be for new administrators to be apprenticed to effective administrators where they could either learn how to deal effectively with the managerial aspects of school leadership instead of having a host of seemingly unrelated tasks to learn at one time. Further, they should be supplied with whatever data they require prior to moving into a particular school and should be supported by individuals outside the school who could help them collect further data new administrators feel they need to become more

effective in their new schools. The individuals interviewed were effective because they invested huge amounts of time and effort to be so. A programme developed with specific supports could help many more administrators reach this level of effectiveness without compromising their personal lives. Interestingly, most of these effective administrators began to feel more comfortable with their performance in their jobs as infringements on their time outside school (due to children and family commitments) diminished.

Expecting administrators to learn and develop as effective supportive supervisors in isolation incurs a significant expenditure of their time and energy.

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Appendix A

Letter to Superintendent

Dear Madam/Sir:

I am a graduate student enrolled in a Masters' programme at the University of Lethbridge. As part of my research for my thesis I wish to interview a number of administrators about their perceptions and practice of effective teacher supervision. In particular, I hope to learn how administrators that are viewed as effective in engendering teacher growth through supportive supervision practices view and implement teacher supervision. To help me in my research I wish to ask your permission to interview a number of your administrators.

Included with this request is the consent letter describing the study which I will ask all participants to sign. If after having read the consent letter you still have questions or concerns regarding the participation of your administrator in this study please feel free to contact me. I hope that after having read the consent letter you would be willing to allow me to request the participation of some of the administrators in your school division in my research project.

In particular the individuals I wish to interview are: _____

If there are other administrators that you feel provide excellent support to their teachers and encourage their growth through effective supervision practices, I would welcome your recommendation.

Should you have any questions regarding this request please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to your reply and the opportunity to interview some of the administrators in your division.

Thank you for your time in this matter,

Narsh Ramrattan
nramrattan@chinooksedge.ab.ca
403.227.1135 (home)

Appendix B

Consent Letter / Invitation to Principal

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a study which focuses on how administrators can contribute to teacher growth through the supervision process. With your consent, I would like to have you participate in the study along with seven other individuals whose portfolio includes teacher supervision. The purpose of the study is to gather information on the perceptions of administrators engaged in teacher supervision about the purpose and philosophy of effective teacher supervision. In particular, I wish to understand how these administrators see this process as relating to their work as administrators. That is, I wish to ascertain how administrators perceive the relationship between the instructional leadership dimension as outlined in the Principal Quality Practice Standard (PQPS) document and the other dimensions elucidated in the PQOS. In particular, I wish to determine what specific teacher supervision practices can be implemented to effectively support teacher growth. As a result of this study, I hope to ascertain whether any consensus exists regarding perceptions of supportive supervision and the practices implemented to establish a supportive supervision process.

The process I have chosen to help me investigate supportive supervision entails:

- a) Responding to a questionnaire
- b) Participating in an interview which would last approximately 45 minutes.

In order to facilitate analysis of the data I gather, I would like to record our conversations. These conversations will be recorded using a digital recorder. I assure you that your completed questionnaires, the recordings of our conversations and any other material emanating from our exploration of this topic will be kept secure and confidential. Further, pseudonyms will be used to identify the source of the data and, thus, your identity will be concealed and the source of the information I receive will remain known only to the source and myself. To ensure this anonymity, any information pertaining to location of work, name, specific information regarding school demographics will not be included in a discussion of results.

If you have any further questions regarding the nature of my investigation, please feel free to contact me. If you wish to participate in this study with me and you are comfortable with the process I have outlined, please indicate your willingness to participate by appropriately completing and signing the consent form. If you could fax or courier your completed consent to me by July 5, 2009, it would be greatly appreciated. If at any time during the study you wish to withdraw your participation, you may do so without prejudice.

Thank you for your time in reviewing this request. If you have any concerns that have not been addressed in this missive, please feel free to contact me. My supervisor for this

study has also expressed a willingness to provide details about the nature of this study. Should you wish to contact her, she can be reached at the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge or by email at naitken@uleth.ca. General information about the nature of research studies involving human subjects can be obtained from the chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subject Research Committee. The chairperson is _____ and he can be reached at _____.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter,

Sincerely,

Narsh Ramrattan

nramrattan@chinooksedge.ab.ca ; ph. 403.227.3244 (work); 403.227.1135 (home)
University of Lethbridge Master of Education Student

Appendix C**Consent Form**

For participation in the study:

ASSESSING ADMINISTRATORS PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICE OF
SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION

I, _____, willingly participate in the completion of
the questionnaire and consent to participate in the interview related to this study.

I, _____, am willing to be recorded as part of this
study.

My preferred dates and times for participating in the interview (approximately 45
minutes) are:

(signature) _____

(date) _____

Appendix D

Clinical Dialect Preference Survey

Honoring Diverse Teaching Styles: A Guide for Supervisors, Edward Pajak, pp. 95-99
Directions: Read the statement in italics and each of the pairs of items that follow. Circle the response from each pair that you would most prefer to have happen. You may not completely agree with either choice, but choose the one you would prefer to occur.

In a discussion with another person about teaching, I would prefer to:

1. a. Spend a little time chatting before getting started.
 b. Focus on the topic as quickly as possible.
2. a. Discuss how well my lesson plan worked.
 b. Come up with some new ideas that I can try.
3. a. Keep the conversation factual and exact.
 b. Look at the “big picture.”
4. a. Consider “pros” and “cons” of different instructional alternatives.
 b. Talk about how I feel about things as they come up.
5. a. Maintain professional objectivity.
 b. Be warm and friendly.
6. a. Talk about facts.
 b. Talk about ideas.
7. a. Talk about values and beliefs.
 b. Use evidence and reasoning.
8. a. Interpret the meaning of what happened during a lesson.
 b. Talk about what was actually seen and heard during a lesson.
9. a. Get objective information about teaching.
 b. Get affirmation for what I am doing in my classroom.
10. a. Describe observable behaviors first, then identify the patterns.
 b. Discuss a general idea first, then work out the details.
11. a. Get a quick overview of key ideas.
 b. Thoroughly understand the details.

12.
 - a. Talk about values
 - b. Talk about standards of achievement.
13.
 - a. Consider a lesson in its entirety.
 - b. Consider each part of the lesson separately.
14.
 - a. Make decisions based on what I feel is right.
 - b. Make decisions based on logical analysis.
15.
 - a. Raise challenging questions.
 - b. Maintain a positive relationship.
16.
 - a. Get some practical ideas that I can use in my classroom.
 - b. Get ideas that broaden my understanding of teaching.
17.
 - a. Talk about what could possibly happen.
 - b. Talk about what actually did happen.
18.
 - a. Keep the discussion friendly and personal.
 - b. Keep the discussion objective and professional.
19.
 - a. Identify goals and purposes.
 - b. Express my feelings.
20.
 - a. "Fine tune" my teaching.
 - b. Develop an understanding of teaching.
21.
 - a. Be logical.
 - b. Find out what we agree about.
22.
 - a. Talk about principles.
 - b. Talk about facts.
23.
 - a. Consider the influence of alternative instructional practices on students or other people.
 - b. Keep the conference brief and concise.
24.
 - a. Talk about specific examples from lessons observed.
 - b. Talk about future lessons.
25.
 - a. Rely mostly on logic and analysis.
 - b. Spend time talking about things that are personally important.
26.
 - a. Talk about what is concrete and real.
 - b. Consider original ideas and theories.

Appendix E

Instructional Leadership Beliefs Inventory

Forced Choices

Glickman, C. D. (2002), *Leadership for learning: How to help teachers succeed*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, pp. 46-51.

Directions: Circle either A or B for each item. You may not completely agree with either choice, but choose the one that is closest to how you feel.

1. A. Leaders should give teachers a large degree of autonomy and initiative within broadly defined limits.
B. Leaders should give teachers directions about methods that will help them improve their teaching.
2. A. It is important for teachers to set their own goals and objectives for professional growth.
B. It is important for leaders to help teachers reconcile their personalities and teaching styles with the philosophy and direction of the school.
3. A. Teachers are likely to feel uncomfortable and anxious if the objectives on which they will be evaluated are not clearly defined by the leader.
B. Evaluations of teachers are meaningless if teachers are not able to define with their leaders the objectives for evaluation.
4. A. An open, trusting, warm, and personal relationship with teachers is the most important ingredient in supervising teachers.
B. A leader who is too informal and friendly with teachers risks being less effective and less respected than a leader who keeps a certain degree of professional distance from teachers.
5. A. My role during conferences is to make the interaction positive, to share realistic information, and to help teachers plan their own solutions to problems.
B. The methods and strategies I use with teachers in a conference are aimed at our reaching agreement over the needs for future improvement.
6. *In the initial phase of working with a teacher...*
A. I develop objectives with each teacher that will help accomplish school goals.
B. I try to identify the talents and goals of individual teachers so they can work on their own improvement.
7. *When several teachers have a similar classroom problem, I prefer to...*
A. Have the teachers form an ad hoc group and help them work together to solve the problem.
B. Help teachers on an individual basis find their strengths, abilities, and resources so that each one finds his or her own solution to the problem.

8. *The most important clue that an inservice workshop is needed is when...*
 - A. The leader perceives that several teachers lack knowledge or skill in a specific area that is resulting in low morale, undue stress, and less effective teaching.
 - B. Several teachers perceive the need to strengthen their abilities in the same instructional area.
9.
 - A. The formal leadership staff (i.e., school-based administrators) should decide the objectives of an inservice workshop because they have a broad perspective of the teachers' abilities and the school's needs.
 - B. A committee of teachers and the formal leadership staff (i.e. school-based administrators) should reach consensus about the objectives of an inservice workshop before the workshop is held.
10.
 - A. Teachers who feel they are growing personally will be more effective in the classroom than teachers who are not experiencing personal growth.
 - B. The knowledge and ability of teaching strategies and methods that have been proven over the years (i.e. best practices) should be taught and practiced by all teachers to be effective in their classrooms.
11. *When I perceive that a teacher might be scolding a student unnecessarily...*
 - A. I explain, during a conference with the teacher, why the scolding was excessive.
 - B. I ask the teacher about the incident but do not interject my judgments.
12.
 - A. One effective way to improve teacher performance is to formulate clear behavioral objectives and create meaningful incentives for achieving them.
 - B. Behavioral objectives are rewarding and helpful to some teachers but stifling to others; also, some teachers benefit from behavioral objectives in some situations but not in others.
13. *During a pre-observation conference...*
 - A. I suggest to the teacher what I could observe, but I let the teacher make the final decision about the objectives and methods of observation.
 - B. The teacher and I mutually decide the objectives and methods of observation.
14.
 - A. Improvement occurs very slowly if teachers are left on their own; but when a group of teachers works together on a specific problem, they learn rapidly and their morale remains high.
 - B. Group activities may be enjoyable, but I find that individual, open discussion with a teacher about a problem and its possible solutions leads to more sustained results.
15. *When an inservice or staff development workshop is scheduled...*
 - A. All teachers who participated in the decision to hold the workshop should be expected to attend it.
 - B. Teachers, regardless of their role in forming a workshop, should be able to decide if the workshop is relevant to their personal or professional growth and, if not, should not be expected to attend.

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Demographic Data:

Name:

Number of Years of Administrative Experience:

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11 or more

School Grade Distribution:

Number of FTE Staff:

1. In your opinion, do the dimensions outlined in the Principal Quality Practice Standard (PQPS) accurately capture the essential duties of a site-based administrator? If no, what might be missing?
2. How are the dimensions related to each other(i.e., hierarchical, nested, overlapping domains)?
3. What is the purpose of teacher supervision?
4. What specifically does the supervision process look like in your school?
5. How do the strategies you implement as part of the supervision process further the purpose of supervision?
6. Are there any other strategies you have implemented to facilitate /aid teacher supervision?
7. Are there any structures you have established to help support teacher supervision and its intended goal/purpose?
8. Are there any initiatives that you have started that help/support the teacher supervision process?
9. How do you promote individual teacher professional growth?
10. How do you ensure your own growth in this area?
11. What key characteristics should be displayed by principals as instructional leaders?
12. What is the purpose of curriculum?
13. What is the purpose of student assessment?
14. What types of strategies have had the biggest impact in teacher growth? Individually, small group, or the whole faculty? Within each type, can you offer specific examples of such a strategy? How do you know the examples you cited have had the biggest impact?
15. Can you briefly summarize some of the rewards and challenges you have encountered while practicing teacher supervision?

Appendix G

Sample Screen Shot of One Note Analysis

In the screen capture below, the responses of the administrators to question 10 was placed into a single notebook. The contents of that notebook had the term “growth” identified and highlighted. In addition, the search was expanded to all of the questions for each individual interviewed and the resulting portions of each interview that used this term have been identified and listed in this segment of the interview.

The screenshot shows a Microsoft OneNote window titled "Question 10 (Compatibility mode) - Microsoft OneNote". The main content area displays the text of "Question 10" with the word "grow" highlighted in several instances. The text is organized into sections labeled "TC" and "SB".

TC
 In our model that we set up, basically we have set up these teacher teams or quads but also we have arranged so the school. That's going a lot further than my little visits and my expert advice. When they are working with a peer teachers that are sharing an applied 20 class and a Bio 30 class. They are just going to work together and are going more at O High School. The structure of administrators saying you are teaching at this time and stuff, I'm trying to you do that that supervision goes to the next level. As you say to your teachers here is the objective of what we want them know that they have the freedom to go places with their students and to try different things with their colleagues supervision is going to go way better.
 If you can set up the quads it helps the teachers move themselves forward.
 Other strategies would include team teaching and we have a technology focus. I've hired a technology coach. If I have different needs not was always something I had trouble with so I hired a teacher and individual full time to help them deliver a lesson. In the classroom it's a nonthreatening relationship, they are a coach. I help that person find that helps. The teachers, they know where to find her. As well she goes into the teachers' classrooms. If they didn't want to cover a certain thing in technology or go a certain place with technology, the coach would take that been very good investment; probably the best money I've spent in terms of supervision.

SB
 Goal for supervision -- make the teachers the best they can be in their classrooms, to offer rich lessons. Always the best so sometimes you may go into a classroom and see a teacher that is lacking self confidence or something like you stand in front of a group of students they know pretty quickly where you're coming from, what you're doing they can go, how much they can grow. Kids are not little vessels we are going to dump information into, they're going in there and help teachers so that they are confident, they do know their materials, they do know how to engage creativity. Sometimes, I find a lot of teachers aren't as creative as they could perhaps be. And that's hard because but as an administrator you can sometimes help them with some ideas on how to make it more hands on, change questions; you challenge teachers by, if a teacher is just giving worksheets for example, I'll say to her can you try to try to do a lot of those coaching conversations because I do not think it's my job to go in and say you're a lousy teacher will say it but I want them to grow personally. So if they're just doing worksheets I'll talk to them about what was handed out, what other activities have been done with your children, what other discussion took place, how did engagement was, did you notice how many kids were actually engaged? Those kinds of questions, open-ended questions own practice instead of me telling them. So yeah, it is a challenge.

The search pane on the right shows the following results for the search term "grow":

- Q#3 Purpose... 11/11/2010
I do see it as a growing professional skill and I do see it as professionals who let and foremost ha...
- Q#2 11/11/2010
...learning and the culture of a school, teacher growth and so on. Honestly, I haven't looked at this ...
- Question 1 11/11/2010
...em. I wondered when I was doing my professional growth is there someplace I'm not sure where to incl...
- Well you can m... 11/8/2010
...em. I wondered when I was doing my professional growth is there someplace I'm not sure where to incl...
- November, 2009
- OneNote lec... 11/19/2009
...Competitor Analysis for Their market share > is growing. (Mark Items Draftready Mar 5 Final June 5 Mo...
- October, 2009
- Top Uses 10/21/2009
...rom: http://ne.s fabricemzed Volcano Activity Grow? Paste from ftdsh.i center and Volcano Act...

Appendix H

Sample Wordle File

