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Running head: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND TEACHERS' POLICY PERCEPTION

The Influence of School Leadership on Teachers' Perception of Teacher Evaluation Policy¹

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Abstract

The understanding of teachers' perception of new educational policy is crucial since this perception shapes the policy's implementation. However, quantitative research in this area is scarce. This article draws on empirical data to investigate whether the school leader might influence his teachers' policy perception of new teacher evaluation policy. The conceptualization of teachers' perception consists of three policy characteristics: practicality, need and clarifying function. Our results indicate that school leadership influences teachers' perception of new teacher evaluation policy. More specifically, the structure a school leader provides in a school and the amount of trust teachers have in the school leader, have a significant impact on teachers' perception of the practicality of the new teacher evaluation policy.

The Influence of School Leadership on Teachers' Perception of Teacher Evaluation Policy

Introduction

Educational policy has been evaluated in many industrialized countries leading to a multiplication of reforms (Hopkins and Levin 2000) all with similar characteristics (Leithwood 2001; Levin 1998). One of these characteristics is the focus on accountability. This accountability movement led to the creation and sustainability of teacher evaluation systems (Ovando and Ramirez 2007). Because the initiative to implement teacher evaluation often comes from governments rather than from local school actors, the implementation process in schools is often problematic (Timperley and Robinson 1997). However, research about this problematic implementation of teacher evaluation is scarce. Peterson and Peterson (2006) pointed out that teacher evaluation is a complex issue. Principals have to face the accountability demands of school boards and parents who expect to have good teachers in front of the classroom. Leithwood (2001) stated that there is a professional standards movement which implies responsibility for the monitoring of accountability by principals. They have to set expectations and create conditions for professional growth for teachers. Teacher evaluation is seen as a task of the school principal. Hence, many authors (Coldren and Spillane 2007; Davis, Ellett and Annunziata 2002; Sinnema and Robinson 2007) agree on the need to study the principal's actions when implementing and conducting teacher evaluation to improve teaching and learning in schools. Furthermore, Ovando and Ramirez (2007) recognize a second need in the teacher evaluation literature: teachers' perceptions in relation to the development of teacher evaluation have not been addressed sufficiently. This study wants to contribute to the teacher evaluation research by attending these two needs.

With our study, we want to acknowledge the key role of the principal by measuring the influence of school leaders on teachers' perception of the new educational policy on teacher evaluation in Flanders. In this article, we begin by explaining the situation of teacher

evaluation in Flemish education. Then, we address the importance of the school leader for the implementation of teacher evaluation. Next, we explore the importance of teachers' perception for the implementation of teacher evaluation. Finally, we then present the results of our regression analyses.

Flemish Teacher Evaluation Policy

In this study, we will focus on the new educational policy on teacher evaluation that was issued by the Flemish government (Belgium) in 2007. This policy obliges schools in Flanders to evaluate all their teachers every four years, starting in September 2007. In 2004, the Flemish minister of education stated he wanted to work on a human resource management in schools that pays attention to the appraisal and improvement of teachers (Vandenbroucke 2004). Therefore, he developed a new policy in which teacher evaluation measures were taken. The teacher evaluation procedure will take four years for every teacher and follows a three step program. First, the teacher evaluation process starts with the appointment of two evaluators per teacher. These evaluators have to be higher in rank than the teacher. In practice, this often means they have to be the teacher's principal or assistant principal. The first evaluator is the person that actually executes the evaluation. The second evaluator is installed to make sure the evaluation procedure is performed well. A second step in the teacher evaluation process is the agreement on a job description for the teacher. This is an individualized document that describes which tasks a teacher has and how he is expected to fulfill these tasks. The job description is the basis for the further evaluation process. In this evaluation process, regular feedback has to be provided to the teacher and if necessary, the teacher has to receive help to improve his performance. Finally, every evaluation period is concluded with a performance evaluation by the first evaluator of the teacher. This performance evaluation has to result in an evaluation report in which a final conclusion (sufficient or insufficient) is drawn.

The Flemish teacher evaluation procedure sets broad rules for schools to follow. It doesn't offer an elaborated instrumentation for schools to use and thereby places the responsibility with the school. This is an international trend. Current teacher evaluation policies are not very specific and place a high responsibility with the school leader to implement and conduct teacher evaluation (Coldren and Spillane 2007; Ovando and Ramirez 2007).

Theoretical Framework

The Importance of School Leadership for the Implementation of Teacher Evaluation

The responsibility for policy implementation in schools rests mainly with the principal (Hope and Pigford 2002). He/she is held accountable for creating conditions to facilitate policy implementation: interpreting the policy, translating it into action, and leading his teachers towards implementation (Forsyth and Tallerico 1998; Retallick and Fink 2002). The active support of the principal for the policy is necessary since the principal influences his teachers' attitude towards the policy (Brown and Anfara 2003; Fullan 2001).

The responsibility for teacher evaluation also rests with the principal (Beerens 2003). He/she is ultimately responsible for the teacher evaluation system used in his/her school (Middlewood and Cardno 2001). Even if the quality of a teacher evaluation system is outstanding, it has little meaning if the principal is unsupportive (Davis et al. 2002). Teacher evaluation is a challenge for the principal because it is not easy to serve both individual (e.g. teachers' professional development needs) and organizational needs (e.g. holding teachers accountable). Accordingly, teacher evaluation may be a very satisfying experience on the one hand or a threatening control tool on the other hand. As an alternative to these two extremes, in some schools teacher evaluation is not more than a formal procedure with little impact on school practice (Cardno 2001).

From the 1980s on, educational research identified two major leadership models for principals: instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Hallinger 2003). Instructional leadership clearly incorporates the evaluation of instruction. As Leithwood (1994) stated, instructional leadership is about control: when the goals of a program are clearly stated and agreed upon, it is easy to supervise if the teaching practice leads to this desired program. This aligns with the focus on accountability in teacher evaluation. On the other hand, transformational leadership assumes an understanding of the needs of individual teachers. This perspective helps teachers to develop, try out, and refine practices. Motivation and commitment are central (Leithwood 1994). In the field of teacher evaluation, this enrichment was noticed too: the focus on professional growth and improvement of teachers was added to the focus on accountability (Stronge 2006). We can elaborate on this parallel between leadership styles and teacher evaluation: as there is no one best style to lead (Hallinger 2003), there is no good teacher evaluation that merely focuses on accountability or merely on improvement.

Although the importance of the principal for the implementation of educational policy on teacher evaluation is widely recognized, research on the role of the principal when implementing and conducting teacher evaluation is limited. Waldman, Bass, and Einstein (1987) noticed a lack of research concerning the leadership styles and behavior's effect on teacher evaluation. Also, there should be more research regarding the school leaders' actions when implementing teacher evaluation in schools (Ovando and Ramirez 2007). Leithwood (2001) pointed out the need of more empirical research to identify productive leadership practices that result in high levels of policy implementation in schools if this policy serves the best interests of the students. Teacher evaluation definitely has the potential to benefit students by improving instruction (Sinnema and Robinson 2007).

As we mentioned before, the two most frequently used models of leadership in the past decades are instructional and transformational leadership. Instructional leadership is more directive and focused on curriculum and instruction. Transformational leadership is more supportive and seeks to build the organization's capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning (Hallinger 2003). As Hallinger (2003) and Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), we believe that effective leadership includes basic elements from both models. Both instructional and transformational leadership indicate that vision is a key dimension in school leadership. Also, both models stress that school leaders must provide support for their team members. At the same time they must set standards, raise high expectations, and clarify what is expected of the teachers. Leaders must facilitate and be flexible on the one hand, but they must provide structure and monitor performance on the other hand (Hoy and Tarter 1997). Finally, performance evaluation creates stress and resistance among teachers. Therefore, it is important that teachers can work in a climate where they feel safe. Teachers who trust the school leader will be more positive about performance appraisals. To conclude, we selected vision, support, structure, and trust as key dimensions of school leadership which may influence teachers' perception of teacher evaluation policy.

Vision. Brown and Anpara (2003) referred to visionary leadership as 'the capacity to create and communicate a view of desired state of affairs that clarifies the current situation and induces commitment to an even better future' (p.16). This definition illustrates that school leadership is important in promoting shared vision and norms around instruction which foster opportunities for instructional improvement. Hence, constructing a school vision is considered to be crucial for instructional innovation (Blase and Blase 1999; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond 2004).

When implementing and conducting teacher evaluation, a clear vision of the principal is essential. Colby, Bradshaw, and Joyner (2002) stated that strong educational leaders possess the knowledge and dispositions to make teacher evaluation work effectively in their school.

We believe the principal's vision can have an impact on the way teachers perceive teacher evaluation. A clear vision, adequately translated in performance standards, can improve teachers' perception about the clarity of a reform policy on teacher evaluation. Also, a vision that is shared by the teachers can nurture an open attitude towards a system of teacher evaluation.

Support. Social, emotional, and material support for teachers is important for the successful implementation of policy (Zembylas and Barker 2007). Evans and Teddlie (1995) stated that in effective schools a supporting work environment is created by principals. Principal support entails practical support (e.g. time) and intellectual support (e.g. professional development opportunities).

Since teacher evaluation should stimulate the professional growth of teachers, it is crucial for principals to be strong instructional leaders who interact with their teachers about their teaching (Colby et al. 2002). In this regard, the instructional support provided by a school leader is crucial. Ovando and Ramirez (2007) report that successful school leaders analyze teacher's instruction and provide elaborated feedback to teachers which nurtures their development. Hence, the school leader has to support teacher learning in contrast to controlling it (Bredeson and Johanson 2000). In this sense, the support provided by the school leader increases the trust between the teacher and the school leader.

Structure. Successful principals make sure their attitudes and expectations are clear to the teachers. This task oriented behavior of principals also includes defining clear standards of performance (Hoy and Tarter 1997).

Good teacher evaluation enables teachers to improve their practices and leads to school improvement in general (Stronge 2006). This can only be achieved if a good teacher evaluation system is used within the school. As Wheeler and Scriven (2006) described, a good evaluation system should build upon clear criteria and standards of performance. A job description for teachers can help principals to communicate these standards to their teachers. Furthermore, it is very important that teachers can participate when defining standards of performance. Stronge and Tucker (2003) argued that a constructive school climate is necessary to be able to establish a good teacher evaluation system.

Trust. Next to the above-mentioned dimensions, a fourth aspect of school leadership, trust, is important. Louis (2007) found that the relational trust of a teacher in the school leader is essential for the teacher's experience with change. She recommends to evaluate the level of trust before implementing change to be sure a solid base is available, especially when the change directly affects the teacher. This is definitely the case with teacher evaluation.

Hence, trust is of major importance for teacher evaluation. First, it is necessary for teachers to trust their principal to achieve meaningful teacher evaluation. Being honest and open about your beliefs as a teacher is only possible if there is a relationship based on trust with the school leader (Nolan and Hoover 2008). Secondly, teachers will be more likely to react on feedback provided by their principal if they believe their principal is credible (Colby et al. 2002).

Teachers' Policy Perception

The new Flemish policy on teacher evaluation was installed to appraise and improve teachers. However, policy makers are often not aware of local actors' concerns or interpretations of the new policy as they intend it. Accordingly, the intended policy is often very different from the policy in use (Ball and Bowe 1992; Halverson, Kelley and Kimball 2004; Smit 2005). Recent research explained this difference as a result of the construction by

local actors of a personal system of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in relation to their job. This construction of a personal meaning shapes their further professional behaviour, including their way of dealing with policies (van den Berg, Vandenberghe, and Slegers 1999; Kelchtermans 2007). Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) identified this as ‘the cognitive framework of implementation’. They argue that research needs to pay more attention to the implementing agents’ understanding of policy.

In the case of the Flemish policy on teacher evaluation, we are interested in the policy perception of teachers and the way this perception is influenced by the school principal. Our focus on teachers’ perception reflects the importance of teacher participation in teacher evaluation. Although the responsibility for implementing and conducting teacher evaluation rests ultimately with the principal (Beerens 2003; Middlewood and Cardno 2001), many authors (Beerens 2003; Nolan and Hoover 2008; Stronge and Tucker 2003) prescribe a greatly expanded role of the teacher in the teacher evaluation process. Peterson and Peterson (2006) explain the importance of teacher participation as follows: “When teachers see good evaluation to be in their interest, (...), they are more likely to add the time, insight, and initiative to the efforts of their principals. Increased teacher involvement adds respect to the activity, improves data quality, furnishes needed perspectives, and results in expanded use of the results.” (p.20). Accordingly, we believe it would be too narrow to see the school principal as the only implementing agent and thereby, neglecting the perception of teachers. However, we can not neglect the influence of the school leader on this perception since school leaders most likely influence their teachers’ perception on policy outcomes (Leithwood, Steinbach and Jantzi 2002). Systematic research about if and how principals influence teachers’ perception is scarce (Coburn 2005).

Teachers’ policy perception is a broad concept which is hard to measure. Therefore, we put forward the theory of Fullan (2001) which identifies ~~four~~ policy characteristics that

affect policy implementation: the policy's need, clarity, and practicality. The first characteristic is the priority *need* of the policy. It is important that teachers comprehend the need of the new policy. Teachers must agree with the importance of the policy and acknowledge that the policy is appropriate for their school (Floch, Zhang, Kurki, and Herrmann 2006).

Second, the policy's *clarity* is important. Teachers have to be able to understand the goals and means of the policy. In other words, the policy should be clear for teachers so they are able to put it into practice (Fullan 2001). Information about the reform is important for the decision making in the school, but information should be structured clearly so the reform nurtures more support (Datnow 2000).

Third, the policy has to be *practical*. Doyle and Ponder (1977) viewed practicality of change as a threefold concept based on the instrumentality, congruence and cost of change. Instrumental content consists of a procedure to put a change in practice. It is important the change is congruent with the teacher's personal beliefs. Finally, a teacher will be critical about the investment needed for the change in comparison to the change results in order to calculate the cost of the change. Providing materials and other resources to schools to implement the policy can stimulate practicality since the perception of teachers on new policy is influenced by the structural working conditions in the school (Kelchtermans 2005). If these working conditions cause concerns for the teachers, teachers might perceive the changes caused by the policy as negative, even when they subscribe the policy agenda (Zembylas and Barker 2007).

Purpose of study

As explained previously, this study wants to study the importance of school leadership for new policy implementation. In order to do this, we focus on four leadership dimensions: vision, support, structure and trust. Since teachers' policy perception is vital for the policy's

implementation, we put forward three policy characteristics perceived by teachers as dependent variables: need, clarity, and practicality.

Methods

Sample

We carried out this research with teachers of Flemish secondary schools. A total of 37 schools participated in the research. These schools were selected randomly from a list of 956 secondary schools provided by the Flemish Ministry of Education. We stratified schools for region and educational network. In this sample, there are 9 public schools, 5 subsidized public schools, and 23 subsidized private schools. This division mirrors the proportion of each educational network in the population. In each school a questionnaire was administered to 20 teachers, chosen randomly. Hence, a total of 740 teachers received our questionnaire. 610 teachers filled out the questionnaire, so the return rate was 82%. This sample included 42% of male respondents and 58% of female respondents. The average length in service of these teachers is 16.1 years, varying from 0 to 39 years. 74.3% of the respondents are tenured teachers. These numbers are proportionally representative for the Flemish teacher population.

Instruments

We administered a questionnaire to teachers including a cover letter which explained several teacher evaluation related terms (e.g. job description) to encourage a general understanding of these terms. Our research instrument contained seven scales to measure the dependent and independent variables. All scales can be found in appendix.

In previous research, Tuytens and Devos (2009) analysed teachers' perception of the new Flemish policy on teacher evaluation through factor analysis. They developed three scales to measure the policy characteristics which Fullan (2001) described as important, namely need of the policy, clarifying function of the policy and practicality of the policy. Hence, to measure teachers' perception of the new educational policy on teacher evaluation,

we used three scales. The need of the policy scale measures the perceived usefulness of performance evaluation. The scale on the clarifying function of the policy explores the perception about job descriptions for teachers. The practicality of the policy was measured by a scale that analyses teachers' perception on resource availability in the school for the policy. Each scale contains four items. These three scales all showed a good internal consistency with a cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.80 for need of the policy, 0.71 for clarifying function, and 0.86 for the practicality of the policy.

Additionally, we used four scales to measure the dimensions of school leadership we identified earlier as important. First, to explore whether the principal has a clear vision on what he/she values within the school and for the future, we used the visioning scale of Cavanagh, Reynolds, MacNeill, and Romanoski (2004). This scale has five items. Second, the degree of support provided by the principal was measured through the scale of Ebmeier (2003) on principal support of teaching. We chose this scale because it highlights the instructional support provided by the principal. Ebmeier's scale contains four items. Third, the task oriented behavior of the principal was analyzed with the initiating structure scale of Hoy and Tarter (1997). This scale consists of five items that focus on structure provided by the principal and the organization of work within the school. The fourth scale we used, is the scale on confidence in the principal of Ebmeier (2003). This scale measures with five items the trust teachers have in the competence, communication skills and overall satisfaction with their principal.

These four leadership scales also showed good internal consistency with a cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.88 for the vision scale, 0.91 for principal support, 0.84 for initiating structure, and 0.93 for confidence in the principal.

All items of these scales were scored by the teachers on a range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Analyses

First, we conducted a confirmatory factor analyses to verify the factor structure of our measures. Next, we performed descriptive analyses of the measured variables. Third, three regression analyses were performed to measure the influence of the school leadership on teachers' perception on the new policy. We analyzed the effect of each leadership dimension (visioning, support, initiating structure, and trust) on each perception scale (need of policy, clarifying function of policy, and practicality of policy). We used SPSS 15 to conduct these analyses.

Results

Confirmatory factor analyses

We used confirmatory factor analyses in Amos 17 to test whether our hypothesized factor structure fits the data well. We used three fit indicators: the IFI, CFI (both critical value: $> .90$) (Bentler and Bonnett 1990), and the RMSEA (a fair fit: $.05$ to $.08$) (Browne and Cudeck 1993). We can conclude that our model shows a good fit ($\chi^2 = 1416.071$, $df = 413$, $CFI = .92$, $IFI = .92$, and $RMSEA = .063$ with a 90% interval of $.060$ and $.067$). The one-factor model (with all items of the different scales loading on one factor) shows a poor fit ($\chi^2 = 4195.246$, $df = 434$, $CFI = .70$, $IFI = .70$, and $RMSEA = .119$ with a 90% interval of $.116$ and $.123$). This indicates we can use our seven scales as separate variables during our study.

Descriptive analyses

Overall, mean scores (Table 1) for the perception variables show that teachers perceive the new policy on teacher evaluation as positive. Two perception variables in particular, need and clarifying function, have a high score. The perceptions teachers have of their principal on the several leadership dimensions are all positive.

< insert table 1 here >

Regression analyses

In order to explore the effect of school leadership on teachers' perception on the new Flemish teacher evaluation policy, we conducted three multiple regression analyses with the three perception factors (need, clarifying function, and practicality of the policy) as separate dependent variables and the leadership dimensions (structure, support, vision, and trust) as independent variables. Multicollinearity was assessed for all variables prior to the regression analysis which showed good Tolerance and VIF measures. Table 2 presents the proportions of variance accounted for by the three models and the significance of the models.

<insert table 2 here>

We can conclude that the amount of variance explained by the leadership dimensions is most notable for the practicality of the new policy. Here, the leadership dimensions explain 44.2% of the variance. For the other perception factors, the variance explained by the leadership dimensions is very small, although the three models are significant at the 0.001-level. Table 3 shows the results of the regression analyses for the predictor variables.

Teachers' perception of practicality is mainly influenced by the confidence in the principal. Additionally, the vision of the school leader and the structuring behavior have a certain impact. Only the support of teaching provided by the principal does not have a significant effect on teachers' perception of policy's practicality.

The way teachers perceive the need of the new policy is only affected by the principal's vision. However, the effect of this variable on the perceived need is negligible. As for the teachers' perception of policy clarity none of the leadership variables are significant.

<insert table 3 here>

Discussion and Conclusion

The implementation of teacher evaluation is just as problematic as the implementation of any other policy reform. Retallick and Fink (2002) noticed the wide agreement in the change literature about the importance of leadership in the school. However, quantitative research about this topic is scarce. Our study addresses this problem by studying the influence of school leadership on teachers' perception on a new teacher evaluation policy in Flanders. We took into account four leadership dimensions: vision, support, structure, and trust in the principal. To measure teachers' perception on the new policy, we built upon the theory of Fullan (2001) which indicated several important policy characteristics for the success of policy reform: need, clarity, and practicality of the policy.

We conducted three multiple regression analyses. A first regression analysis revealed a significant effect of three school leadership dimensions (vision, structure, and trust) on teachers' perception on the practicality of the policy. Our analysis also indicated that leadership in general has a very high impact on the perception of this policy characteristic. A second regression analysis showed that the vision of a principal significantly influences teachers' perception of the need of the policy. However, the effect of this variable was very low. A third regression analysis indicated that teachers' perception of the clarifying function of the policy was not significantly influenced by any of the school leadership dimensions. The three analyses showed that the support leadership dimension did not significantly influence teachers' perception of any of the policy characteristics we measured.

We can draw several conclusions from these results. First, the importance of structure provided by the principal for teachers' perception of the policy's practicality is not surprising. Retallick and Fink (2002) found in their qualitative research that the most successful

principals when implementing change were those who were able to use effective organizational and managerial strategies to mobilize their teachers. Furthermore, the importance of providing structure as a principal has been stressed frequently in teacher evaluation literature. Good teacher evaluation systems show clear performance standards. These standards make sure teachers are more open towards the system since they make the system more objective and trustworthy (Beerens 2003).

Second, we can explain the strong significant influence of the trust teachers have in their principal on their perception of the policy's practicality. Many authors (e.g. Colby et al. 2002; Peterson and Peterson 2006) have stressed the necessity of trust in the evaluator for good teacher evaluation. Also, Fullan (2001) identified trust in the principal as an important indicator for the willingness of teachers to go along with a reform. Our study confirms this statement and shows that if teachers trust their principal, they react also more positive towards the practicality of the new teacher evaluation policy.

Third, vision seems to be one of the more important leadership dimensions for teachers' perception on the new policy since it significantly effects teachers' perception on two policy characteristics: need and practicality. In their study, Retallick and Fink (2002) confirm the importance of visionary leadership: a principal has to be able to provide meaning and stimulate identification in the school. Nevertheless, they noticed that being visionary is not enough to be able to establish systems or strategies for reform. This is confirmed through our analyses by the smaller effect of vision we found in comparison to the other effective leadership dimensions.

Fourth, we find it surprising principal support does not significantly effect teachers' perception. This may be due to the scale we used to measure principal support since this scale mainly analyzed the instructional support provided by the principal. We chose this scale because one of the goals of good teacher evaluation is professional growth of teachers. To

stimulate this, principals should be supportive for teachers when they want to improve their classroom practice (Beerens 2003; Colby et al. 2002; Stronge and Tucker 2003). However, Littrell and Billingsley (1994) stressed the multidimensionality of the concept of principal support. We recommend that further research that explores the effects of principal support on teacher's policy perception should incorporate this multidimensionality of the support concept. Furthermore, Day, Elliot, and Kington (2005) conducted qualitative research that indicated the importance of a supportive environment for teachers when they make a commitment to a reform. They found that for example supporting peers and positive feedback from colleagues are important school context factors. The teachers they interviewed, did not mention a specific supportive role of the principal. Many authors (e.g. Fullan 2001; Leithwood 2001) mentioned, next to the importance of the school leader, the importance of a supportive professional community for policy implementation. Leithwood (2001) explained how the professional approach to accountability that encompasses teacher evaluation is limited by its focus on the capacities of individual professionals. He claimed that the collective effort of professionals should also be taken into account. Accordingly, Fullan (2001) claimed that the principal is important to stimulate a school wide professional community that is supportive for the teachers.

Fifth, our study showed that the variance in teachers' perception of the policy's practicality can be explained for a large amount (44.2%) by the leadership dimensions. This shows the importance of the principal for the practical implementation of a policy in his/her school. Waugh and Godfrey (1993) explained that teachers need to be sure there will be sufficient resources to implement the reform in the school's practice. Leithwood (2001) identified mobilizing resources and acquiring knowledge as important qualities of the principal to ensure successful policy implementation. For the other two dimensions of teachers' perception (need and clarifying function), the explained variance by leadership is

very small. We believe the larger amount of explained variance by the leadership dimensions for the perceived practicality of the new policy is logical. The scales for need and clarifying function measure more the teachers' perception of the government's intentions with the new teacher evaluation policy, while the practicality dimension measures the teachers' perception of the expertise within the school for the new teacher evaluation policy. Accordingly, our research suggests principals mainly influence their teachers' practicality perception of the new teacher evaluation policy.

As a suggestion for further research, we would recommend to study whether the positive appreciation of teachers for the policy might facilitate a successful implementation of this new policy in Flemish schools. In this regard, it might be interesting to analyze the effects of teachers' perception on a school level: do schools where teachers regard the policy as positive have more chances to successfully implement and conduct teacher evaluation than schools where teachers are more reluctant?

Finally, we want to conclude with two limitations of our study. A first limitation concerns the single leadership perspective we used in our study. This contrasts the importance of distributed leadership that is stressed in school leadership literature (Harris 2005; Hartley 2007; Timperley 2005). Leithwood (2001) stressed the importance of a distributed orientation to leadership when trying to understand the leadership effects on reform. However, taking into account a distributed perspective of leadership when it comes to teacher evaluation is not evident. Several authors (e.g. Goldstein and Noguera 2006; Spillane 2006) agreed that teacher evaluation is traditionally the domain of the principal and both teachers and principals want to keep it that way. This is also the case for Flanders, where Hulpia, Devos, and Rosseel (2009) found in their study that the principal is the main actor for supervising teachers. Furthermore, the Flemish legislation on teacher evaluation obliges the evaluators to be higher in rank than the teacher. In many schools this means that only the principal can take the role of teacher

evaluator. Accordingly, our study did not take into account the distribution of leadership, but analyzed the effect of the principal on teacher's perception of the new teacher evaluation policy since both research and Flemish legislation indicate that the principal still remains the main evaluator of teachers. In further research, the distributed leadership perspective could be taken into account by analyzing the characteristics and task division of the first and second evaluator of a teacher. Also, especially for beginning teachers the importance of mentors, next to evaluators, could be analyzed: who are the mentors and what are their tasks?

A second limitation of our research is the abstraction we make of variables that influence school leadership (e.g. school culture, teacher resistance to change). Hallinger and Heck (1996) stated that on the one hand, principal leadership influences these variables, but on the other hand, principal leadership is also shaped by these variables. They recommend longitudinal research to be able to analyze the dynamic relationship between these variables. Despite these limitations, our study contributes to the understanding of the influence a school principal has on teachers' perception of new teacher evaluation policy. Our findings can help principals to evaluate the actions they plan to undertake to stimulate policy implementation in their school. By taking into account their teachers' perceptions on new policy, they might be able to take more appropriate measures for their school and their teacher team, especially related to the practicality of the new policy.

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Appendix

Scale	Item
	1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)
Clarifying function of the policy Authors, in press)	<p>I think job descriptions for teachers are useful in our school.</p> <p>I think of a job description as a constructive and positive policy instrument.</p> <p>I think job descriptions should make clear what is expected of teachers.</p> <p>I think performance evaluation should be based on job descriptions.</p>
Need of the policy Authors, in press)	<p>I think a performance evaluation for tenured teachers is useful in our school.</p> <p>I think a performance evaluation for non-tenured teachers is useful in our school.</p> <p>I think of a performance evaluation as a means to improve the functioning of teachers when necessary and to support teachers.</p> <p>I think of a performance evaluation as a means to modulate the teacher in the future by setting new objectives.</p>
Practicality of the policy Authors, in press)	<p>I think our school has suitable instruments to formulate job descriptions for teachers.</p> <p>I think our principal has suitable knowledge and skills to formulate job descriptions.</p> <p>I think our school has suitable instruments to carry out performance evaluations with teachers.</p> <p>I think our principal has suitable knowledge and skills to carry out performance evaluations with teachers.</p>
Initiating structure Hoy and Tarter,	The principal asks that faculty members follow standard rules and regulations.

1997)	<p>The principal makes his or her attitudes clear to the school.</p> <p>The principal lets faculty know what is expected of them.</p> <p>The principal maintains definite standards of performance.</p> <p>The principal schedules work to be done.</p>
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Principal support of teaching	My principal is very supportive of my attempts to become a better teacher.
Ebmeier, 2003)	<p>My principal is very helpful to me as I attempt to improve the instruction in my classroom.</p> <p>My principal sincerely cares about helping me improve my teaching techniques.</p> <p>I have a great deal of trust in my principal and believe he/she really cares about my continued improvement as a principal.</p>

Confidence in the principal	<p>I have confidence in the principal.</p> <p>I am satisfied with the trust I have in my principal.</p>
Ebmeier, 2003)	<p>I am satisfied with the professional competence and leadership of my principal.</p> <p>There are open lines of communications between faculty and the principal.</p> <p>Decisions in this building are predictable and fair.</p>

Visioning	The principal clearly explains to others what he/she values within the school.
Cavanagh,	The principal informs teachers of his/her vision of the school's future.
Reynolds,	The principal ensures the school vision statement is reviewed.
MacNeill and	The principal encourages teachers to express their own expectations of the
Romanoski, 2004)	<p>school's future.</p> <p>The principal presents teachers with scenarios of the school's future.</p>

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of the measured variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Initiating structure	3.85	0.74	610
Visioning	3.75	0.81	610
Support	3.63	0.94	610
Trust	3.84	0.96	610
Need of the policy	4.26	0.65	610
Practicality of the policy	3.51	0.80	610
Clarifying function of the policy	4.06	0.63	610

Table 2. Proportion of variance and significance for each model

	Practicality	Need	Clarifying function
F(4,610)	121.737**	7.221**	6.588**
Adjusted R ²	.442	.039	.035

**p<.001.

Table 3. Regression Analyses of the effects of school leadership dimensions on teachers' perception of need, practicality, and clarifying function of new teacher evaluation policy

Variable	Need of the policy				Practicality of the policy				Clarifying function of the policy			
	df	B	SE B	Beta	df	B	SE B	Beta	df	B	SE B	Beta
Initiating structure	4	-0.67	0.062	-0.077	4	0.169	0.059	0.156**	4	-0.053	0.061	-0.062
Visioning	4	0.022	0.059	0.028**	4	0.135	0.055	0.136*	4	0.041	0.057	0.054
Support	4	0.144	0.050	0.209	4	0.079	0.046	0.092	4	0.083	0.048	0.124
Trust	4	0.027	0.054	0.040	4	0.291	0.050	0.347**	4	0.060	0.052	0.092

*p<.05. **p<.01.