

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE THE CLASSROOM PRACTICES OF TEACHERS

By Stephen M. Paske

For many school principals, their work involves working with teachers in a way that they hope positively influences teaching practices. Principals hope that by influencing a teacher's classroom practices, they can have a positive impact on the achievement of the students in their school. Frequently, however, principals struggle to influence teacher practices in the way that they intend.

In this phenomenological study, ten Wisconsin principals from varying levels, regions, and community sizes were interviewed in order to better understand this phenomenon. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the researchers set out to answer questions about principals' beliefs related to their experience working with teachers and what they believe constitutes success as it relates to this work. The information from these interviews was then formally coded and categorized in order to develop themes that could be used to interpret the data.

The data analysis discovered seven main themes related to principals' work with teachers. Of these themes, the relationship between the time pressures principals face due to mandated evaluation systems and the idea that principals believe that it is when teachers drive their work that success is most likely to occur, seem to be of most consequence.

In recent decades legislative acts, created by politicians influenced by organizations with a neoliberal educational agenda, have played a large role in determining how teachers in schools are supervised and evaluated. The results of this study show that school principals, those charged with implementing such systems of evaluation, believe these systems may detract from their ability to positively influence the classroom practices of teachers. This should give us reason to reflect upon whether the current systems of evaluation in place in many schools are actually in the best interest of students.

Keywords: teacher evaluation, teacher supervision, neoliberalism, classroom practices, principals, instructional leadership

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by

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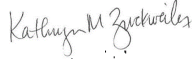
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To Megan

Your patience throughout this process has been a blessing. I love you.

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Chapter I

School principals are expected to be instructional leaders who positively impact student achievement by helping teachers improve their instructional practices (Mette et al., 2017; Rigby et al., 2017; Tucker, 2001; Wieczorek et al., 2019). Federal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, Race to the Top (RttT) of 2011, and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, have resulted in a number of reforms that put pressure on principals to positively influence teacher effectiveness (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Mette et al., 2017; Zepeda, 2016). A number of research studies suggest that school principals have a considerable impact on student achievement and school performance (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2003). One result of the increased pressure on principals to impact student achievement is that many principals feel they cannot keep up with the daily management of the school building while simultaneously demonstrating the skills requisite of being an expert in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Moran & Larwin, 2017). Many principals have a strong desire to positively influence classroom instructional practices, but a variety of barriers appear to interfere.

In the United States, much of the work done by principals to try and influence teachers' instructional practices is through the merging of the tasks of supervision and evaluation (Mette et al., 2017). Evaluation is a summative process, often mandated by a state or local school district, where principals formally collect data through observations, conversations, or other means so that evidence-based decisions can be made regarding employment status, compensation, or tenure (Mette et al., 2017; Wieczorek et al., 2019; Zepeda, 2016). Supervision, by contrast, is more formative in scope and is intended to focus on teacher growth and development in the classroom (Mette et al., 2017; Wieczorek et al., 2019; Zepeda, 2016). Often the supervisory and

evaluative aspects of a principal's job are difficult for teachers to distinguish from one another, which has the potential to produce tension in the relationship (Mette et al., 2017; Wieczorek et al., 2019).

Mette et al. (2017) say that how principals navigate the overlap of supervision and evaluation can have a profound effect on their ability to improve teachers' classroom practices. Supovitz et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on teacher perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors and found that certain principal behaviors do appear to correlate with improved student performance. In their analysis, Supovitz et al. found three factors with a positive impact on student performance were most common: the role principals play in focusing the mission and goals of the organization, how principals encourage an environment of collaboration and trust, and the extent to which principals actively support instructional improvement (p. 34).

As principals work to supervise and influence teachers, they often encounter barriers that make the task of influencing a teacher's instructional practices a challenge. Salo et al. (2015) note that teacher autonomy is a delicate issue and that teachers may be resistant to suggestions from their principals regarding instructional practices. Printy (2010) says "to change and sustain teachers' practice requires constant and intentional effort by teachers and support from principals. Many times, teachers retreat to superficial or perfunctory performance of reform routines" (p. 124). A variety of factors internal to the teacher, such as the nature of schooling, insufficient depth of content knowledge, and poor pedagogical understandings, may inhibit a teacher's willingness and ability to change (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006).

According to Tucker (2001) approximately 85%–95% of America's public school teachers would be classified as competent. Berliner (2018) estimates the number of competent

teachers to be closer to 97%. The presence of the 3%–15% of teachers considered ineffective, coupled with the aforementioned barriers, indicates that no matter how well intentioned a principal is in their general supervisory practices, there is still more to learn about how to positively influence teachers' classroom practices. Little has been written on the perceptions of principals regarding their ability to influence the classroom instructional practices of teachers. Therefore, a goal of this study will be to explore this phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem

For many principals, their work involves working with teachers in a way that they hope positively influences teaching practices. Principals hope that by influencing a teacher's classroom practices, they can have a positive impact on the achievement of the students in their school. Frequently, however, principals struggle to influence teacher practices in the way that they intend.

Purpose of the Study

A body of research exists that explores teacher perceptions about what leadership behaviors most effectively influence teacher practices in the classroom. A gap in the literature is in the exploration of principals' perceptions regarding their ability to influence teachers' classroom instructional practices. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to better understand principals' perceptions about their efforts to influence teachers.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Pressures and Demands on Principals

In the United States, school principals face intense pressure to positively impact student achievement (Printy, 2010). Kraft and Gilmour (2016) say “new teacher evaluation system reforms have greatly expanded principals’ instructional leadership responsibilities by requiring principals to work one-on-one with teachers to evaluate and improve their classroom practices” (p. 717). Recent legislative acts such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RttT), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), allocated large sums of federal money to schools that implemented reforms to teacher evaluation systems (Derrington & Campbell, 2017; Dodson, 2017). As a result of such reforms, many principals now devote an extensive amount of their time to directly working with teachers through the process of teacher supervision and evaluation (Derrington & Campbell, 2018; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Mette et al., 2017).

Kraft and Gilmour (2016) say that modern evaluation systems have greatly increased the demands on principals’ time and the role of principals as instructional leaders. McCaffrey et al. (2015) state that the new generation of standardized classroom evaluation protocols seek to “evaluate constructs of instruction and classroom interactions that theory and empirical research find to be associated with effective teaching, going beyond simple checklists of the last generation of observation tools” (p. 34). Often these new systems require multiple observations using complex rubrics, followed by extensive written feedback and/or a follow-up conversation (Danielson, 2007; Stronge, 2005).

Many of today's evaluation systems attempt to use a combination of teacher behaviors observed through such protocols coupled with standardized test data from students in order to produce a final evaluation score. Items such as standardized test scores that are tied to teacher evaluation are called value added measures (VAMs), (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Meyer (2012) says "value-added measurement provides one way to help determine the effectiveness of teachers and schools at the k-12 level and in postsecondary institutions." Meyer also says that VAMs allow schools to make apples to apples school comparisons more easily.

Darling-Hammond (2015) notes that VAMs are intuitively appealing because in theory they are a way to more accurately measure a teacher's individual contributions to a student's academic performance. Though there is disagreement regarding the validity of VAMs, these evaluation scores are often used to make high-stakes decisions about employment, compensation, or tenure (Bell et al., 2018; Paufler & Clark, 2019; Paufler et al., 2020; Zepeda, 2016). There appears to be controversy regarding whether VAMs are a reliable tool to use when measuring teacher effectiveness.

Darling-Hammond (2015) says that principals across a large number of school systems express reservations about the use of VAMs for making personnel decisions. "They (principals) often perceive the VAM metrics as "inflated" or "deceptive" and feel pressured to make their observation ratings align with value-added measures they see as inaccurate" (p. 134). Darling-Hammond (as cited in Meyer, 2012) also warns that VAMs are potentially valuable for larger scale studies, but that they are seriously flawed as a method of evaluating individual teachers. Kraft and Gilmour (2016) state that in a number of states, principals are given full responsibility for determining teachers' overall summative evaluation ratings. It stands to reason that given

such a significant amount of responsibility, principals feel a significant amount of pressure to both evaluate fairly and accurately, while also promoting teacher growth and development.

Evaluation Versus Supervision

Mette et al. (2017) note that teacher evaluation meets the organizational need for a school district to determine and document a teacher's performance over time. Typically evaluation is a cyclical process where either the teacher meets the standard and the cycle begins again, or, the teacher's performance is deemed unsatisfactory and an improvement plan is developed or employment actions such as dismissal takes place (Mette et al., 2017). Some scholars, such as Hanushek (2009), see evaluation as a means of increasing teacher accountability and as a mechanism for improving the profession by removing ineffective teachers. Others, such as Berliner (2018), are skeptical about whether high-stakes evaluation systems have any value in improving teacher performance, and would prefer to see more time, money, and energy put into providing teachers with improved professional development opportunities.

The formative portion of the evaluation process that often incorporates professional development aspects, is often referred to as supervision (Mette et al., 2017; Wieczorek et al., 2019; Zepeda, 2016). Glickman et al. (2014) say that supervision's purpose is to indirectly support student achievement by helping a teacher improve instruction. Zepeda (2016) states "supervision is a formative process that positions teachers as active learners" (p. 29). Sullivan and Glanz (2013) define supervision as a collaborative process that encourages teacher reflection for the purpose of improving both a teacher's instructional practices and student learning. In most U.S. schools, the building principal is charged with carrying out both supervisory and evaluative tasks as part of their job duties (Mette et al., 2017; Wieczorek et al., 2019).

Zepeda (2016) notes that teacher evaluation is both formative and summative in nature. Range et al. (2011) say that when summative evaluations are not combined with formative supervision practices, that these evaluations have limited impact on instruction. Tension is an inevitable byproduct of a principal's job duties including both the formative goal of working to provide a teacher with feedback to improve their performance, and the summative goal of holding the teacher to organizational accountability standards (Mette et al., 2017; Zepeda, 2016). Peterson (1995) says that many evaluation systems put principals in the conflicting position of being both "supporter and summative judge" (p. 214). Mette et al. (2017) say that tensions arise between the two functions:

Supervision is needed to coach teachers and help them reflect on personal instructional goals, however it is a time-consuming process that also needs to show results if teachers are not meeting the needs of students. Evaluation is needed to produce high-quality school systems and retain quality teachers, however it is often a litigious process that negatively impacts the climate and culture of school buildings and districts. (p.712)

Research on Leadership Behaviors and Achievement

How a principal approaches the task of instructional leadership and supervision appears to impact the level to which they are able to influence teachers' instructional practices (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Supovitz et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2003). A meta-analysis conducted by Supovitz et al. (2010) on teacher perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors found that certain principal behaviors correlate with improved student performance. In their analysis, Supovitz et al. found three factors with a positive impact on student performance were most common in the literature: the role principals play in focusing the mission and goals of the

organization, how principals encourage an environment of collaboration and trust, and the extent to which principals actively support instructional improvement (p. 34).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) also found a strong correlation between specific principal behaviors and student achievement in their own meta-analysis of studies conducted between 1980 and 1995. School goals, school structure and social networks, people, and organizational culture were several items that they found to have a positive impact on achievement if principals chose to focus on them. Additionally, Hallinger and Heck say “the principal’s role in shaping the school’s direction through vision, mission, and goals came through in these studies as a primary avenue of influence” (p.187).

Waters et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that focused on leadership’s relationship to student achievement. They identified behaviors of leaders that correlated with positive outcomes as well as behaviors that correlated with negative outcomes. “When leaders concentrate on the wrong school and/or classroom practices, or miscalculate the magnitude or “order” of the change they are attempting to implement, they can negatively impact student achievement” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 5).

Salo et al. (2015) state that principals have their greatest impact on student outcomes when they participate in teacher learning and development as co-learners. They note that successful principals have frequent conversations with teachers, use evidence to influence decision making, and organize professional learning around cycles of inquiry and knowledge creation. Blase and Blase (1999) identify two effective practices of principals as “principals talking with teachers in order to promote reflection, and teachers’ professional growth” (pp. 359-363) as well as collaboration, coaching, and encouraging teachers to inquire into their teaching practices.

Leithwood et al. (2010) conducted a study exploring the influence of leadership through four pathways: rational, emotions, organizational, and family. According to this study, each path contains multiple variables each with more or less powerful effects on student learning. The results showed that variables on rational, emotional, and family paths all demonstrated the potential to significantly impact student achievement. Only variables on the organizational path demonstrated no correlation.

Leithwood et al. (2010) found that the emotions path includes feelings, dispositions, or affective states of staff members both on an individual and collective level. “Variables on the rational path are rooted in the knowledge and skills of school staff members about curriculum, teaching, and learning” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 673). The conception of the family path used in the study included only those family variables that are potentially alterable by the school such as helping with access to technology in the home, or helping parents feel welcome and more connected to the school.

Kyriakides and Creemers (2008) claim that as much as 50% of the variance in student achievement across schools could be due to family-related factors. Leithwood et al. (2010) state that Hattie reported a 0.58 effect size for parent expectations. When considering a principal’s potential impact on the Family Path, Leithwood et al. studied factors that they considered “alterable” by school principals. Two specific factors: access to adult support in the home and access to a computer, were studied in particular (p. 682). Leithwood et al. say a principal’s ability to impact alterable items on the family path did appear to correlate with increased student achievement.

Classroom observation followed by either written or verbal feedback is a common technique that many principals employ as part of their effort to influence teacher behavior (Rigby

et al., 2017). Rigby et al. say the research regarding the effectiveness of observational feedback on influencing teacher performance is mixed. In 2010, Shin and Slater found little or no relationship between a principal's time spent on supervision and evaluation in the classroom and changes in student performance (Rigby et al., 2017, p.480). Conversely, studies in the area of educational psychology and organizational behavior have suggested that the observation and feedback model can positively influence a teacher's practice (Rigby et al., 2017).

Kraft and Gilmour (2016) state that cycles of observation, reflection, dialogue and feedback, and goal setting, can help support teachers in their professional development. A key assumption, however, "is that teachers are both willing and able to improve their practice by actively engaging in the evaluation process" (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016, p. 715). "No amount of feedback will result in professional growth if a teacher is unwilling or unable to co-construct and enact changes" (p. 715). These statements suggest that what influences a teacher's instructional behavior may be highly individualized.

Similarly, what principals believe about the purpose of evaluation and how they carry out the task seems highly individualized and has the potential to impact their influence on teachers' classroom behaviors. Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) note that principals' beliefs about the purpose of evaluation and their confidence in carrying out the observation and providing feedback impacted the practices they employed. Kraft and Gilmour (2016) say that the varying beliefs of principals regarding evaluation practices lead to inconsistencies in the implementation of evaluation tools that are meant to be standardized. Bell et al. (2018), state "if the administrator is trying to justify why the teacher will receive a certain score, the observation tool will be used in a way that is consistent with that goal" (p. 233).

Teacher Competency as a Possible Barrier to Growth

A number of experts estimate that 85%–97% of America’s public-school teachers would be classified as competent (Berliner, 2018; Tucker, 2001; Yariv, 2004). Though this represents a large majority of the teaching workforce, this means there remain a large number of teachers who would be classified as needing improvement. Though the aforementioned research discusses some principal behaviors that correlate with improved outcomes, it would seem important to explore whether behaviors that appear to effectively influence teachers more generally, also influence teachers considered ineffective.

Range et al. (2012) say that many school leaders identify incompetent teachers as a significant problem in schools. As school leaders, principals are charged with supervising, evaluating, and removing ineffective teachers from the profession (Range et al., 2012, p. 303). Principals also have an obligation to coach all teachers in professional growth and build their capacity to deliver effective instruction (Range et al., 2012, p.303).

Principals often express frustration with the demands associated with trying to move “marginal teachers” forward in their practices (Fuhr, 1990; Range, 2012). Marginal teaching has no set definition, but many attempts have been made to describe it. Bridges (1985) describes the marginal teacher as having recurring and persistent difficulties with things such as subject matter mastery, imparting knowledge to students, and developing a rapport with students. Fuhr (1990) described the marginal teacher as someone who is a “fence rider” and as those that do “just enough to get by” when being evaluated (p. 3). A majority of the definitions of marginal teaching researched for this study, mentioned some variation of teaching that was on the edge of being just good enough to get by.

According to Ehrgott et al. (1992) substandard teaching ranges along a spectrum from grossly incompetent, up to marginal and on the cusp of acceptable. A grossly incompetent teacher is defined as a teacher who lacks the skills, ability, or fitness to even meet the legal qualifications for performing the duties of a classroom teacher. Fuhr had perhaps the most succinct distinction between an incompetent teacher and marginal teacher when he wrote “a marginal teacher is one whose performance borders on incompetency, but who is not incompetent (Fuhr, 1990, p.1).

Ehrgott et al. (1992) recommend that principals use intervention plans focused on rehabilitation, as opposed to dismissal, when working with marginal teachers. Ehrgott et al. note that time is frequently cited by principals as a major reason for difficulty in working with marginal teachers. Due to the time needed to effectively coach marginal teachers and the variety of different intervention types that may be needed, creative use of both internal and external resources to help with this task is recommended.

Possible Institutional Barriers to Influencing Teacher Behavior

Several institutional barriers have been suggested as possible impediments to improved teacher practice (Hazi, 1994; Rigby et al., 2017; Zepeda, 2016). There has been a historical precedent in teacher evaluation that often separated classroom instruction from school administration (Hazi, 1994; Rigby et al., 2017). Zepeda (2016) says that many teacher evaluation systems have failed to provide teachers with the feedback or professional development that they need to improve. Weisberg et al. (2009) say “73 percent of teachers surveyed said their most recent evaluation did not identify any development areas, and only 45 percent of teachers who did have development areas identified said they received useful feedback to improve” (p. 4).

Another potential barrier identified by Rigby et al. (2017) is that the high-stakes nature of modern evaluation systems have caused some administrators to focus more on instructional practices that will lead to short-term success on standardized tests versus practices that are better for increasing students' conceptual understanding. Berliner (2018) says "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor" (p. 9). Berliner says that as a result, we can expect that both teachers and administrators will game the system to get the scores that they need to be judged competent.

A third potential barrier is that there appears to be no consensus with regards to the reliability and validity of the evaluation systems many principals are mandated to use as part of their supervisory practices. Bell et al. (2018) note that "almost all of the evidence on the accuracy and reliability of raters on observation tools has come from research studies, wherein raters are hired and supervised by researchers" (p. 229). Kraft and Gilmour (2016) note that principals' own perspectives on evaluation shaped how they choose to implement evaluation systems. Casabianca et al. (2015) say that "rater reliability appears to be a persistent problem with ratings of instruction from classroom observation" (p. 312). If neither principals or teachers can agree whether common systems of evaluative feedback are reliable or valid, it is reasonable to speculate that principals may struggle to influence a teacher's classroom practices if the feedback that they provide stems from the use of such a system.

A fourth possible barrier to principal influence is that many principals are not provided with extensive training in the area of giving feedback to teachers on their classroom performance. Wieczorek et al. (2019) state that principals are challenged to provide teachers with consistent, timely, and meaningful feedback. In a study on the ability of principals to promote

teacher development, Kraft and Gilmour (2016) cite a high school principal who said “you’re told to give feedback, but I don’t think that there’s been a lot of training and resources provided on what that looks like and how to do it well” (p. 735). Many principals who transitioned into administration directly from the classroom noted that the only option for learning how to give feedback was “learning on the job” (p. 735).

The purpose of this study is to better understand principals’ perceptions about their efforts to influence teachers. As instructional leaders, principals are expected to positively contribute to student achievement in their schools. Having knowledge about what principals experience as barriers to influencing the classroom practices of teachers has the potential to guide a principal’s thinking as they plan their work with teachers. Access to this knowledge may allow principals who familiarize themselves with this work to better reflect upon their work with teachers and may contribute to research in the field.

Chapter III

Methodology

Overview

A wide body of research explores how the leadership behaviors of school principals impact student achievement. Supovitz et al. (2010) studied this phenomenon through the lens of teacher perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors. Hallinger and Heck (1998) explored the phenomenon by conducting a meta-analysis of studies related to direct effects, mediated effects, and reciprocal effects of principals' actions. Waters et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis that started with over 5,000 research studies on the topic of how leadership behaviors impact student achievement.

The results of the many studies on principal leadership point strongly to the idea that principals have an indirect ability to impact student achievement through their influence on the school environment and on teachers. Supovitz et al. (2010) state that there is a significant amount of literature that supports the idea that principals tend to influence student performance indirectly through their influence on teachers. Hallinger and Heck (1998) note that in direct-effects studies, those studies that explore how a principal's actions directly impact student achievement, a finding of no significant relationship is most common. Conversely, Hallinger and Heck say that in studies using a mediated-effects framework, a framework that hypothesizes that leaders achieve their effect on school outcomes indirectly through their influence on others, the most common finding is that principals can have consistent positive effects through indirect means.

If, as the research suggests, principals can have a positive impact on student achievement through their influence on teachers, then it is important that principals understand how to

influence teachers' classroom practices most effectively. Studies such as those done by Supovitz et al. (2010) have explored this idea from the perspective of teachers. Where there appears to be a gap in the literature, however, is examining the perspectives of principals on how to influence teachers' classroom practices most effectively. Due to this gap, the purpose of this study was to better understand principals' perceptions about their efforts to influence teachers in the classroom.

Research Questions

Based upon this focus, I developed a set of five research questions to help guide the study:

1. What are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?
2. How do principals decide what to focus upon when working with teachers?
3. How do principals recognize when their work with teachers is successful?
4. How do principals characterize the experience of supervising teachers?
5. What factors do principals identify as leading to greater or less success when working with teachers?

Rationale for a Phenomenological Approach

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that phenomenological studies describe the common meaning for several individuals as it relates to a shared experience. "This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 13). According to van Manen (1990), the purpose of phenomenological research is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. In van Manen's view, phenomenology is both a descriptive and interpretive process in which a

researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of lived experiences. In contrast to van Manen, Husserl (1970) states that pure phenomenological research seeks to describe, rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free of preconceptions.

Valentine et al. (2018) say that Husserl was concerned that the sciences of his time did not do enough to ground themselves in human experience. Transcendental phenomenology was Husserl's early attempt to push back against the idea that objective science best represented reality and to offer a better way to understand the world. "Descriptive phenomenological research methods, inspired by Husserlian philosophy, attempt to identify the essence of a phenomenon or experience" (p. 464).

For this study, the phenomenon being explored was the perceptions of principals regarding their influence on the classroom practices of teachers. In my experience as a school administrator, I have found that it is frequently a challenge to influence teachers in ways that change their classroom practices. Furthermore, in conversation with other school administrators, I frequently encounter similar experiences. My own personal experience, coupled with these conversations leads me to believe that school administrators do often struggle to influence teachers' classroom practices. As a result, it seems evident that a large number of school principals share the common experience of struggling to influence teacher classroom practices.

Whether you prefer the phenomenological philosophy of Creswell and Poth, van Manen, or Husserl, all agree that phenomenology is concerned with exploring the shared experience of a phenomenon within a group. The fact that many principals appear to share the experience of struggling to influence teacher classroom practices, indicated that a phenomenological approach was likely a strong qualitative research option for studying the topic. A more quantitative approach was not selected due to the reasons outlined in the following paragraph.

The complexity of a school environment and all of the various factors that might influence a research study meant that a more quantitative approach to looking at how principals influence teachers' classroom practices would likely have struggled to explore the breadth or essence of the phenomenon in question. There are an enormous number of variables to consider when considering the influence of principals on teachers, and the possibility of extraneous variables impacting the aim of a quantitative study was high. A large enough sample size such as those in some of the meta-analysis studies mentioned earlier might have alleviated some of this concern, however, it still may not have allowed for the broader analysis of the experience afforded by a more qualitative approach such as phenomenology.

Phenomenological research seeks to explore the shared experiences of a group experiencing a phenomenon. Additionally, phenomenology aims to better understand the essence of that experience. School principals share a common experience of trying to influence teacher classroom practices within the complex ecosystem of a school environment that would have been very challenging to study through a quantitative lens. Therefore, a phenomenological approach to study was selected.

Sample Recruitment and Selection

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that phenomenological research is commonly used in the field of education and typically has a philosophical component to it. Typically this type of research involves a heterogeneous group of 3-15 individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (p. 76). Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) recommends a group of 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Usually, data collection procedures

involve interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, though other types of collection such as observations, surveys, and documents are sometimes used (p. 79).

For this study, semi-structured interviews with ten principals from the elementary, middle, and high school levels were used to explore the phenomenon in question. The study of this many principals provided an opportunity to collect a significant amount of data regarding principals' experiences working with teachers to try and influence their classroom practices. Through an analysis of this data, I explored whether common themes emerged regarding what principals saw as being helpful or a hindrance as they worked to influence teachers' classroom practices.

Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that in phenomenological studies, data collection procedures typically involve interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. For this study school principals from elementary, middle, and high schools were interviewed, as their day-to-day work frequently involves the type of instructional leadership activities that are part of the phenomenon in question.

Participants for this study were recruited using an email sent to school principals in the Oshkosh, Fox Valley, and Green Bay regions of Wisconsin, asking for potential volunteers. Participant emails were found by using the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's school directory. The email included the study's purpose, a general overview of the study's setup, and information about who to contact if interested in participating. Additionally, prospective participants were informed that they would have the ability to ask further questions about the overall scope and sequence of the study prior to volunteering.

The areas of Green Bay, the Fox Cities, and Oshkosh were selected due to both their proximity to the researchers as well as for their demographic variety. Schools in these regions are

made up of rural, suburban, and urban schools, which provides potential opportunities for follow-up studies using similar or contrasting demographics. Due to a failure to procure enough participants following the initial email to schools, a second set of emails was sent out to schools within a larger radius in order to meet the minimum participation requirement needed to conduct a credible phenomenological study. The following table breaks down the rough demographic information of the schools for the principals who participated in the study.

Table 1

Demographics of Participating Schools

Community Size	Rural	Mid-Sized	Large-Sized	Urban
	< 10,000	10,000-50,000	50,000-100,000	> 100,000
School Level				
High School	2			1
Middle School	1	1	1	
Elementary School	1	3		

Information regarding qualifications for the study was included in the recruitment letter. For potential participants to be eligible for the study they needed to meet the following qualifications:

- Participants were in the role of principal for at least five years.
- Participants were directly responsible for supervising and evaluating teachers as part of their job duties.
- Participants were willing and able to spend approximately one hour answering interview questions on the research topic either through an in-person or virtual format.

Initially, the plan was for potential volunteers who expressed interest in participating being selected based on several criteria. A first consideration was to be the order in which they responded. A second consideration was to be the grade level at which they worked, elementary, middle school, or high school. A third consideration was to be the general geographic region, Oshkosh, Fox Cities, or Green Bay. An effort was to be made to select at least one principal from each of the different levels from each region. This variety of grade level and demographic diversity would have allowed the study to be generalizable to a wider audience. Due to a lack of the necessary number of volunteers, all principals who volunteered for the study were invited to participate.

Interested parties were contacted informing them of their tentative acceptance as part of the study pending the completion of an informed consent letter outlining the study in further detail. Once informed consent was obtained from a participant, interviews were scheduled via email correspondence. Demographic information about the participants is below.

Sample:

Participant 1. Participant 1 works as a middle-school principal in a mid-sized city (hereby defined for the remainder of this study as a population of between 10,000-50,000) in eastern Wisconsin. The student body of the school is roughly 500, with an estimated 35-percent of those students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. This principal is male, supervises approximately 45 staff members, and was entering his sixth year in the position at the time of his interview. One other assistant principal works in his building and splits the supervisory duties with him. Prior to becoming principal of the building this participant served as an assistant principal in the same building for two years.

Participant 2. Participant 2 works as an elementary-school principal in a mid-sized suburb of Milwaukee. The student body of the school is roughly 250 and the participant supervises approximately 35 teachers. This participant is female and was entering her eighth year in the position at the time of this interview. Prior to her time at this school, she served as an elementary principal at schools both inside and outside of Wisconsin.

Participant 3. Participant 3 works as an elementary-school principal in a mid-sized city in central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 300 students with roughly 50% identifying as white, 25% hispanic, and 25% as black or other cultures. According to the participant, more than 50% of students are part of the school's English as a second language or emerging bilingual program. The participant supervises approximately 15 core regular education teachers along with a number of early childhood teachers. The participant is female and was entering her fifth year at the school at the time of this interview.

Participant 4. At the time of the interview, participant 4 was entering his tenth year as the principal at a high school in a rural city (hereby defined for the remainder of this study as having fewer than 10,000 residents) in north-central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 1,200 and is predominantly white. The principal is male and currently supervises approximately 70 teachers, ten paraprofessionals, as well as 20-30 custodial staff.

Participant 5. Participant 5 works as a high school principal in an urban environment (hereby defined for the remainder of this study as a city of greater than 100,000) in north-central Wisconsin. The student body ranges between 850-1,000 depending on the year, and the participant supervises approximately 40 teachers. The participant is female.

Participant 6. Participant 6 works as a middle school principal in a large city (hereby defined in this study as having a population between 50,000-100,000 residents) in western Wisconsin. The student body of the school is approximately 1,000 with roughly one-third of the student body qualifying for special-education services. The participant is female and supervises roughly 30 teachers.

Participant 7. Participant 7 works as a high-school principal in a rural city in eastern Wisconsin. At the time of the interview the participant was going into his fourth year in his present position and 13th overall as a principal. The student body of the school is approximately 400 students of whom more than 90% are white. The participant supervises approximately 20 teachers.

Participant 8. Participant 8 works as a middle-school principal in a rural city in north-central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 300. Of these students more than 90% are white, roughly 20% qualify for free and reduced lunch and around 10% receive special-education services. The participant is male and supervises approximately 25 instructional staff members.

Participant 9. At the time of the interview, Participant 9 was entering her eighth year as an elementary school principal in a rural city in central Wisconsin. The student population is approximately 350 and the participant supervises approximately 50 staff members. Of these staff members, roughly 15 are certified teachers. The participant is female.

Participant 10. Participant 10 works as an elementary-school principal in a mid-sized city in central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 325 and runs up to fifth grade. The participant currently supervises approximately 25 staff. This includes both certified

teachers as well as other professional staff. The participant is female and at the time of the interview was entering her seventh year as principal of the school.

Instruments

Corbin and Strauss (2015) provide several suggestions for effective semi-structured interviews. First they note that a semi-structured interview helps a researcher to maintain consistency over concepts covered in an interview. Topics are chosen before the beginning of the research, but when and how the topics are presented is not completely structured. The same topics are covered in each interview, but participants are free to add things to the interview that they feel may be relevant to the discussion. Lastly, the researcher is able to ask further clarifying questions and delve deeper into the discussion. For this study, the guiding questions have been developed in order to help keep the topics covered consistent across interviews. Specific interview questions that are tied to the guiding questions were developed to help facilitate the interview itself (see Appendix A).

Corbin and Strauss (2015) note that it is not unusual for qualitative researchers to come across persons who agree to be interviewed but who have little to say once the interview starts. For this reason, prior to the formal research interviews, the proposed questions were vetted by two current Ed.D. students enrolled in a program through the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. One of these reviewers is a current elementary-school principal while the other is a current middle-school principal. The purpose of this exercise was to gather information regarding the effectiveness of the questions at eliciting the type of in-depth responses necessary for a meaningful data analysis. Both vetting interviews lasted between 30-40 minutes which led to the conclusion that the questions were appropriate for the study.

A single interview was conducted with each participant in the study with the length of each interview ranging from 15 to 45 minutes. The question set was designed to start generally while working up to more specific questions designed to provide context to the principal's relationship to the phenomenon as well as explore their experiences. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed for follow-up questions, but these ended up being limited to questions asking for further demographic information about the school, school district, or city in which the school was located.

Interviews took place via Zoom and were recorded using the cloud transcription feature so that the participants' answers were documented with total accuracy. Upon the completion of all of the interviews, each interview was watched again in order to ensure that the transcription recorded by Zoom was accurate. Additionally, verbal tics such as pauses, coughs, sighs, etc., were added to increase the authenticity of the final transcripts.

Participant Anonymity

Creswell & Creswell (2018) note that it is important to protect the confidentiality of individuals, roles, and incidents involved in a project. For this study steps were taken to try and protect principal confidentiality. The study received Institutional Review Board approval to ensure protection of human subjects.

To protect principal confidentiality several steps were taken. The study results did not include school or district identifying information and language used to describe the schools was kept general. For example, to explain the size of a participant's school, terms such as small, mid-sized, large-sized, or urban were used and only a range of numbers was attached to describe these sizes.

Following the interviews, transcripts were downloaded and reviewed for accuracy. Additionally, the video and audio files of the interviews were also downloaded. Any downloaded material, whether video, audio, or a transcript, was saved as a password protected file on a secure flash drive that was kept in a locked office. Additionally, videos, audio files, and transcripts were stored securely within the Zoom platform and were not shared outside of the researcher and his advisor.

Data Analysis

Ely et al. (1991) say that “whatever your approach to analysis, it seems fair to say that you, the researcher, are in charge of making meaning” (p. 143). Corbin and Strauss (2015) note that researchers work differently than one another and so no one way of analyzing data is correct. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that when analyzing your data, it is important to follow consistent steps to ensure the reliability and validity of your findings.

The first step in qualitative data analysis, and one that was used in this study, was open coding. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define coding as the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins (p. 193). Corbin and Strauss (2015) state that coding is “delineating concepts to stand for interpreted meaning of data” (p. 220). For this study, a system of open coding was used during the first reading of the raw data as a way of sorting initial thoughts.

For the first reading of the text, an effort was made to analyze the text of interview transcripts line-by-line, thoroughly analyzing single phrases and even single words. Whenever possible, *in vivo* codes – codes that use the same words or phrases actually present in the texts – were used to keep a close connection to the material. For this study, the transcripts were

uploaded into the secure open-source coding tool, Taguette, a program designed to help highlight and sort the initial codes. Using Taguette, words or phrases were highlighted and coded.

Ely et al. (1991) suggest that for many researchers it is helpful to try and establish categories once information has been given an initial code. Ely et al. say that establishing categories is useful in that it allows the researcher to discover potential links between pieces of data. For this study once initial open coding was complete, the coded data was used to develop initial categories that helped guide the analysis. Ely et al. note that making categories means “reading, thinking, trying out tentative categories, changing them when others do a better job,” and checking them until all of the meaningful information has been categorized (p. 145).

First, initial codes that might have similar or overlapping data based on the title of the code itself were grouped together. Next, the coded data within a proposed group was analyzed to see if certain words, word synonyms, phrases, or phrases with similar meanings appeared with high frequency. If no discernable patterns were found, the potential category was dissolved and left unused. These codes were considered for reuse in order to look for other patterns. If overlapping data was found, this led to a closer examination of that information.

During this closer examination an effort was made to see if links could be made between principals’ responses and a specific question or set of related questions from the interview. If links were found between high frequency words, phrases, or ideas, in combination with these questions, potential categories were created. Once categories have been established, Ely et al. (1991) recommend selecting verbatim narrative data and linking that data to the categories. This recommendation was followed, and from here the data was analyzed in further detail to look for developing themes.

Ely et al. (1991) define themes as “a statement of meaning that runs through all or most of the pertinent data” or “one in a minority that carries heavy or emotional impact” (p. 150). The open sourcing program Taguette was used to assist in the formal organization of the data in order to help look for those statements that ran through all or most of the pertinent data. Ely et al. (1991) note that they use computer software to search for overlap, redundancy, and significance in their data. By helping to sort the data into appropriate categories, Taguette assisted with identifying overlapping or redundant information which was then used to help identify potential themes. Once the computer software was used to assist in identifying potential themes, a final analysis occurred examining the results of the data provided. In addition, a last look at the overall data took place in order to see if any highly impactful or emotional themes also existed that might not have been recognized by the software.

Once key themes were identified, an attempt was made to use them to draw insights about the participant’s experiences. Wertz (2005) says that Phenomenological analysis “begins by focusing on particular situations prior to attempting general knowledge” (p. 172). An attempt is made to discover how all the various moments in the interview interrelate. “The researcher continually moves from part to part and from part to whole in order to grasp the structural organization and interdependence of parts that make up the lived experience” (p. 172). Wertz says that in the advanced stage of the analysis, the researcher goes on to “interrogate the situation in view of previously posited concepts and theories” (p. 172). For this study, once key insights were postulated, these ideas were connected back to current research and theory to see if any meaningful insight could be discovered.

This study aimed to explore principal perceptions of their ability to influence the classroom practices of teachers. A phenomenological approach was selected to examine this

experience due to the ability of this approach to better account for the complexities of an ecosystem as complicated as a school, and for its ability to provide more generalizable findings than a narrative study or case study. By conducting this study it was hoped that information might be discovered that might allow other school leaders to better reflect upon and understand their own professional practices.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter contains the results of a phenomenological study designed to explore principals' perceptions of their ability to influence the classroom practices of teachers. Five questions were used to help guide the study:

1. What are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?
2. How do principals decide what to focus upon when working with teachers?
3. How do principals recognize when their work with teachers is successful?
4. How do principals characterize the experience of supervising teachers?
5. What factors do principals identify as leading to greater or less success when working with teachers?

This chapter includes demographic information about the participants involved in the study. It also includes discussion about the process used to analyze the transcripts from the interviews in order to uncover the themes that are briefly described in this section. To conclude, the chapter discusses the various themes uncovered as a result of the data analysis.

Participants

Participant 1. Participant 1 works as a middle-school principal in a mid-sized city (hereby defined for the remainder of this study as a population of between 10,000-50,000) in eastern Wisconsin. The student body of the school is roughly 500, with an estimated 35-percent of those students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. This principal is male, supervises approximately 45 staff members, and was entering his sixth year in the position at the time of his interview. One other assistant principal works in his building and splits the supervisory duties

with him. Prior to becoming principal of the building this participant served as an assistant principal in the same building for two years.

Participant 2. Participant 2 works as an elementary-school principal in a mid-sized suburb of Milwaukee. The student body of the school is roughly 250 and the participant supervises approximately 35 teachers. This participant is female and was entering her eighth year in the position at the time of this interview. Prior to her time at this school she served as an elementary principal at schools both inside and outside of Wisconsin.

Participant 3. Participant 3 works as an elementary-school principal in a mid-sized city in central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 300 students with roughly 50% identifying as white, 25% Hispanic, and 25% as black or other cultures. According to the participant, more than 50% of students are part of the school's English as a second language or emerging bilingual program. The participant supervises approximately 15 core regular education teachers along with several early childhood teachers. The participant is female and was entering her fifth year at the school at the time of this interview.

Participant 4. At the time of the interview, participant 4 was entering his tenth year as the principal at a high school in a rural city (hereby defined for the remainder of this study as having fewer than 10,000 residents) in north-central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 1,200 and is predominantly white. The principal is male and currently supervises approximately 70 teachers, ten paraprofessionals, as well as 20-30 custodial staff.

Participant 5. Participant 5 works as a high school principal in an urban environment (hereby defined for the remainder of this study as a city of greater than 100,000) in north-central Wisconsin. The student body ranges between 850-1,000 depending on the year, and the participant supervises approximately 40 teachers. The participant is female.

Participant 6. Participant 6 works as a middle school principal in a large city (hereby defined in this study as having a population between 50,000-100,000 residents) in western Wisconsin. The student body of the school is approximately 1,000 with roughly one-third of the student body qualifying for special-education services. The participant is female and supervises roughly 30 teachers.

Participant 7. Participant 7 works as a high-school principal in a rural city in eastern Wisconsin. At the time of the interview the participant was going into his fourth year in his present position and 13th overall as a principal. The student body of the school is approximately 400 students of whom more than 90% are white. The participant supervises approximately 20 teachers.

Participant 8. Participant 8 works as a middle-school principal in a rural city in north-central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 300. Of these students more than 90% are white, roughly 20% qualify for free and reduced lunch and around 10% receive special-education services. The participant is male and supervises approximately 25 instructional staff members.

Participant 9. At the time of the interview, Participant 9 was entering her eighth year as an elementary school principal in a rural city in central Wisconsin. The student population is approximately 350 and the participant supervises approximately 50 staff members. Of these staff members, roughly 15 are certified teachers. The participant is female.

Participant 10. Participant 10 works as an elementary-school principal in a mid-sized city in central Wisconsin. The student body is approximately 325 and runs up to fifth grade. The participant currently supervises approximately 25 staff. This includes both certified

teachers as well as other professional staff. The participant is female and at the time of the interview was entering her seventh year as principal of the school.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, ten school principals from varying levels participated in semi-structured interviews in order to collect data on the phenomenon in question. All of the interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. The Zoom transcription feature was used to capture each conversation and record it to print format. These print transcripts were uploaded into the open-source tool Taguette for coding and analysis.

Once each transcript was uploaded into Taguette, a system of open coding was used as a method of initially organizing the data. Each transcript was read line-by-line, and words or phrases within the transcript were assigned a code word or phrase. Whenever possible, in vivo codes – codes that use the same words or phrases present in the texts, were used to keep a close connection to the transcripts themselves.

After initial coding was complete, initial codes were used as a tool to help develop categories. Ely et al. (1991) say that establishing categories is useful in that it allows the researcher to discover potential links between pieces of data. The following process was used to filter the data into categories from each of the codes.

First, initial codes that might have similar or overlapping data based on the code itself were grouped together. An example of this from the study would be the codes: Time, Bureaucratic, and Pressure. Next, the coded data within a proposed group was analyzed to see if certain words, word synonyms, phrases, or phrases with similar meanings appeared with high frequency. If no discernable patterns were found, the group was dissolved and left unused. These

codes could then be reused in order to look for other patterns. If overlapping data was found, this led to a closer examination of that information.

During this closer examination an effort was made to see if links could be made between principals' responses and a specific question or set of related questions from the interview. In the example of the codes: Time, Bureaucratic, and Pressure, this examination led to the discovery that most of the data that was collected in this group derived from interview questions related to teacher supervision. A closer look at the data collected as a result of these questions revealed that during the interviews principals frequently responded to questions about teacher supervision by referencing the large number of job responsibilities on their plate and how many of these responsibilities were a product of mandated tasks related to supervision. This led to the creation of a category called: Time and Mandates.

A secondary method used to develop potential categories was to look for less frequent data that was highly impactful of emotional significance. Ely et al. (1991) says that at times the use of highly impactful and emotional data may be appropriate for identifying important themes within the data. Therefore, it was considered important to look for information that potentially fit this description and use it to develop categories accordingly.

Through use of the first process mentioned, the following categories were established during the data analysis of this study: Focus Areas, Willingness to Reflect, Time and Mandates, Teacher Driven, Relationships and Conflict, and Direct and Timely Feedback. Teaching as Identity was identified as a category through use of the second process. In the following section, examples of data used to help develop each of these listed categories is provided so that the reader can better see what led to their creation.

Categories

Focus Areas. One of the questions guiding the study was *how do principals decide what to focus upon when working with teachers?* Initial codes that emerged that were related to possible focus areas included: Assessment, Classroom Management, Differentiation, Instructional Strategies, Questioning, Rigor, and Student Engagement. The significant number of categories related to potential areas of focus, coupled with a significant amount of overlapping data within participant responses, led to the formation of the category, Focus Areas.

An analysis of the data inside these codes led to the discovery that two focus items appeared most frequently within the data: classroom management and student engagement. Also of note, when discussing these focus areas, principals frequently noted that it was new teachers who received their attention in these areas. Participant 10 discussed her work with a new teacher when she said:

I had a brand new green teacher. She went through her whole first year, her cycle three, and at the end of the year, we realized that, you know, there wasn't a lot kind of happening with the classroom. (She) had excellent management, which you really don't see a lot in first year teachers, but there was not a lot of rigor. There wasn't a lot of student engagement. It was kind of out of the textbook. So the next year we focused on student engagement.

Participant 1 referenced his work with teachers in the area of student engagement when he said the following:

Uh it, typically, so we're middle school, and I don't know that this is, you know, true of every middle school, but I, typically it's student engagement. Um, so, "are the students on task, uh, in your classroom?" and so that I kind of find there's sort of those two groups

of teachers. There's the ones where you go in and there's the appearance of a hundred percent engagement and then you go in and there's the appearance of, of less than, maybe even much less than a hundred percent engagement. Um, and so the approaches are different. But I, I do feel like engagement is, is, uh, probably the first thing. And the most frequent thing we talk about.

Participant 6 was another principal who referenced the idea of working with a newer teacher on classroom management and had this to say:

Okay, I would say a time that I can think of is, I was working with a newer staff member and they, they were struggling just with some classroom management issues. And just how do we keep kids on task and engaged with different strategies?

Participant 7 said: "My staff has, has turned over in the last three years. I think I'm working a lot more with younger staff, so I'm back to the classroom management."

Willingness to Reflect. Two questions that were used to help guide the study were: *How do principals recognize when the work with teachers is successful?* And *What factors do principals identify as leading to greater or less success when working with teachers?* Some of the codes that emerged from the analysis of the interview responses related to these questions were: Attitude, Career Stage, Growth Mindset, Professionalism, Teacher Reflection, Trust, and Vulnerability. The category of Willingness to Reflect resulted when the data was analyzed and it was found that the terms *growth*, *growth mindset*, *willing*, and *willingness*, were present in an overwhelming number of the responses within these codes. Examples of data from these codes used to develop the category are cited below.

When asked about factors that were different when comparing successful and unsuccessful experiences working with staff, Participant 8 said:

I would say some of the differences between the two, um, the one staff person does not come from a growth mindset place, and the other one does. Um, one staff person uh, is, is more willing to receive constructive feedback or criticism than the other.

Participant 4 said: “I think it’s the people’s willingness to change, willingness to grow or willingness to see other people’s perspectives.”

Participant 9 said: “I think the, the biggest thing that gets in the way of, of some teachers being successful with, with coaching is their willingness to admit that they can grow in an area.”

Participant 7 said: “I think a willingness to learn and grow.”

Time and Mandates. Two questions that were used to help guide the study were: *What are principals’ beliefs about teacher supervision?* And *How do principals characterize the experience of supervising teachers?* A variety of codes emerged when analyzing interview responses related to these questions including: Accountability, Bureaucratic, In Classrooms, Perspective, Pressure, Rapid Feedback, and Time. A closer look at the data within these codes established a number of links between Bureaucratic, Pressure, and Time. This led to the creation of the category of Time and Mandates. When discussing topics related to this area, Participant 6 said:

What I think would improve it (supervision). I just think time. I think we have to start if we truly want to supervise staff, there’s just some other pieces that, that we just have to take off our plates. It’s just, it’s not sustainable because it’s very hard with the number of staff that we supervise to get in there that amount of time, and really do a good job with

it. So, to be able to meet with them before formal observation, go to the formal observation, meet with them after, and give'em that feedback, and then follow up and then get there on a consistent basis. Especially for the new staff, it just, it's very time consuming. It's a lot of people to supervise that number makes it very, very difficult.

Participant 8 made several references to the many roles and responsibilities of the principal and how this impacts his work with teachers and had this to say:

I would say, you know it's my responsibility certainly as, as the principal. Um. I would say it's not, uh, I'm not able to do as good of a job as I would like to, and there are a variety of reasons for that pressure and things. I feel like it's, it's a piece [inaudible] and in some of the instructional stuff that I'm not able to focus on as much, as much as I would like, because in my building I'm a one person show. So I'm, you know, when a student gets sent to the office that for me. When there are those behavioral challenges, that's for me, when there's a frustrated or a frustrated parent, or someone from the community who wants to come in and talk to someone that's generally, you know, me.

Participant 4 was also of the opinion the principals face extreme demands on their time.

He said the following when discussing challenges related to supervision:

Man, I'll tell you, what it comes down to one word I think, it's time. There's just not enough of it. You know, you, you get into the, you get into the day, and you think your day is scheduled the way it is on your Google calendar, or whatever, whatever means and forms you use to you know, show your day. Things happen. And things just never go the way you want them to go.

Teacher Driven. As data was being analyzed within the various codes, I noticed that when principals discussed what they perceived to be successful work with teachers, that this work was often driven by the teacher's desire to improve. By analyzing those responses that talked about success, I discovered a link between this perception of success and teachers leading the work. This led to the formation of the category, Teacher Driven. Some examples of data used to help formulate this category are as follows. Participant 9 said:

I feel like, my, I feel like my work with teachers are successful when they, when they start to take ownership of it. And they start to seek out resources. When they, when I look at their Google Docs for our goal meetings and they start to put pictures in there of things that they're trying, and they're proud and they're taking those risks, and they're, and they're excited to, for the next time, like there are times where I have to cancel a goal meeting and for some staff like, that's like, "you need to reschedule this right now, I want to meet with you right now to show you all that I've done, and all that I've learned, or what I've learned and that didn't work," you know. "I tried this, and it didn't work and not I want to, you know, move forward this way."

Participant 2 emphasized the importance of a teacher being eager to grow when he said this:

I think about the first-grade teacher of mine that we hired. She is always eager to do training. So when she was, she started out as an interventionist for me, and she did that at math a week-long training. I love watching her grow and learn. And she just takes things home. She asks the right questions when we meet. She's always very well-prepared.

Relationships and Conflict. As data was coded it was noticed that across a variety of codes principals discussed the idea of relationships and conflict. An analysis of this data led to the discovery that principals frequently discussed these ideas when discussing either supervision or their success or lack of success in working with a teacher. Some ideas that were repeated within the data were that by nature educators tend to be conflict averse and therefore hesitate to offer direct feedback, and that in order to successfully provide direct feedback, a principal and teacher must first form a trusting relationship. On the topic of relationships and conflict, Participant 2 said:

For me, it's those crucial conversations being comfortable with conflict. We did a personality kind of thing last year, activity for Compass. If you've ever looked up Compass or used that. That was huge. We did it as an administrative team. And then we did it with our, I did it with the school staff. And so it's like the North, South, East, West personalities. And we realized that 80% to 90% of educators don't like conflict.

Participant 1 added an additional layer to this area by discussing the importance of the principal/teacher relationship and its impact on the ability to give feedback when he said this:

I think the number one factor would always be starting with having a positive relationship with that person. Before we started talking about them, and their profession, and that's really hard because you can't know, personally, every, you know, a 45 people, before you need to get feedback. There's going to be people you have to give feedback, before you know them well. But in the situations where it went well, there was a positive relationship in place, and the, and the stronger the relationship, the more critical the feedback could be, and the more we could take risks and be vulnerable together.

Direct and Timely Feedback. As coded data was analyzed, it was noticed that as part of their discussion about teacher supervision, principals frequently mentioned the topic of feedback. More specifically, a significant amount of the data collected showed that if given the opportunity to redo an unsuccessful experience working with a teacher, principals felt that it would have been important to provide critical feedback in a more direct and timely manner. This discovery led to the formation of the category Direct and Timely Feedback. Examples of some of the data used to help develop this category are as follows: Participant 8 said:

I would have the conversation earlier, sooner. Um, you, you know [inaudible], the you know, the, the one I'm thinking of, there was, you know, what my gut was telling me, based on what I was seeing and hearing and feeling, and I think I waited a little too long to see if I could have more data or support to, to fit with my read on it.

Participant 6 expressed a common sentiment found among principals in the study when he mentioned the need to be more direct when giving feedback:

I think if I could go back and do things differently I would probably be more direct. I would, I would say, I would go in with the idea that if I ask a staff member to do something, they're going to do it. And then, when they don't, like, I'm kind of taken aback and, and so I think that what I need to do is, when I know that that is not being followed through even though it's busy, like, I just have to be in there and then just be much more direct. Like, "No, I asked you to do this. This is what I need you to do."

Participant 9 said: "I would have intervened sooner. I, I would have started providing more direct feedback sooner."

Teaching as Identity. A last category developed because of two responses that were deemed particularly powerful. Ely (1991) says that at times the use of highly impactful and emotional data may be appropriate for identifying important themes within the data. The category Teaching as Identity was created as a result of the following two responses.

Participant 9 said:

I think the, the biggest thing that gets in the way of, of some teachers being successful with, with coaching is their willingness to admit that they can grow in an area. And then, acceptance to that. Like teaching is so personal, like people, like you don't, you don't, like you don't work as a teacher, like you are a teacher. It's something that you are, and so when someone tells you that you need to improve something, that can feel like a direct blow to your, like, personality. To, to your very character or your very existence.

Participant 1 said: "Teaching is really, really personal. It's an identity I think and when we start asking teachers to change, we're really challenging their identity and who they are, and not just what they're doing."

Process for Identifying Themes

Once categories have been established, Ely et al. (1991) recommend selecting verbatim narrative data and linking that data to the categories. For the example of the category Time and Mandates an effort was made to review the transcribed data for any additional narrative links such as other comments by principals related to supervisory mandates or a feeling of being overwhelmed by too many job responsibilities. By further analyzing this data, themes were able to be identified. Table 2 provides an overview of the process used in this study to identify a majority of themes.

Table 2*Process Flow Chart for Theme Identification*

Step in Process	Example of Step
Transcripts Created via Interview	Transcript 1, Transcript 2, Etc.
Transcripts read for initial codes	Time, Attitude, Change, Professionalism, Growth Mindset, Career Stage, Etc.
Coded portions analyzed for frequent words/phrases within and across codes	Will, Willing, Grow, Growth, Time, Etc.
Common responses cross referenced against questions to check for overlap	
Connections between common/impactful responses and the questions are used to develop categories	Teaching as identify, Focus Areas, Relationships & Conflicts, Time & Mandates
Information within the categories is analyzed to develop themes	Teaching is deeply personal and this affects how teachers respond to critical feedback

Note. Process and examples flow from top to bottom.

A last step was to look at the overall data to see if any highly impactful or emotional themes also existed that might not have been recognized by the software. As was mentioned earlier in this section, two responses of this nature were identified within the data which led to the creation of the category Teaching is Personal. This in turn led to one of the themes listed in the following section.

Themes Uncovered:

Theme 1. *Principals face time pressures resulting from their many job responsibilities and required mandates related to supervision:* In their responses to questions about supervision, principals repeatedly referenced the idea that due to the large number of different responsibilities

on their plate, providing teachers with high quality supervision is very challenging. Many of the responses given made reference to the idea that mandates related to supervision itself contributed to the overwhelming number of responsibilities. Ironically, principals' responses seemed to indicate that the mandates related to supervision often were not helpful with regards to providing high quality supervision.

Theme 2. *Principals mostly focus on new teachers in the areas of classroom management and student engagement:* When answering questions related to areas of focus with teachers, seven of the ten principals interviewed mentioned focus work specifically related to a teacher in their first or second year in the profession. Additionally, six different principals identified classroom management as a frequent area of focus while another five specifically student engagement. Though other areas such as assessment or differentiation were mentioned in some interviews, none surfaced with the frequency of classroom management or student engagement.

Theme 3. *Principals believe that it is when teachers drive their own work that a change in practices is most likely to occur:* When discussing successful experiences with teachers, principals often told stories about teachers who initiated, facilitated, or drove the work. Six different principals mentioned teacher ownership, engagement, or other variations of teacher driven work when describing these successful experiences. According to these principals, principals who pull for support tend to engage in more successful work than those who are being pushed to do certain work.

Theme 4. *Principals believe that it is easier to influence the practices of teachers who demonstrate a willingness to reflect on their practices in order to grow in their craft:* When discussing what they perceived to be successful experiences in working to influence teachers,

principals repeatedly referenced the words grow, growth, growth mindset, will, or willingness. Eight of ten principals mentioned one of these words as part of their response when discussing their work with teachers as it relates to success. Additionally, it should be noted that frequent mention was made of the idea that teachers who are earlier in their career tend to have more of a growth mindset.

Theme 5. *Principals prefer to avoid conflict:* Principals in the study discussed being uncomfortable with conflict. This was particularly true when discussing the idea of having to provide negative or constructive feedback to a teacher. Many principals mentioned the importance of developing trusting relationships as a countermeasure to this discomfort.

Theme 6. *When teachers are not effective, principals believe that they need to be prompt and direct with feedback:* When asked about what they would do differently if given the opportunity to go back in time and work through an unsuccessful experience with a teacher again, six of ten principals referenced the idea of being more direct, clearer, or having the difficult conversation sooner. Principals did not necessarily believe that this prompt and direct feedback would have changed the outcome, but in most instances, they did indicate that it would have made a successful outcome more likely. This theme heavily intertwines with the idea that principals prefer to avoid conflict. In the study, many principals indicated that it was this aversion to feedback that either contributed to the delay in the conversation or to the relative lack of clarity.

Theme 7. *Teaching is deeply personal, and this affects how teachers respond to critical feedback:* Two principals brought up the idea that teachers identify so closely with their work, that feedback about their job duties is seen as personal rather than just professional. In their opinion, it is the result of this personal nature of teaching that makes the task of a principal

working to give feedback to an educator so challenging. If feedback about teaching practices is not provided carefully, it can be perceived as a personal attack rather than a professional practice or courtesy.

Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to better understand principals' perceptions about their efforts to influence teachers' classroom practices. This chapter includes discussion of this study's major findings and their relationship to the literature about the role of the principal as an instructional leader in schools in the United States. It also includes discussion about possible connections between the major themes as they relate to various phenomena in schools in the United States. To conclude, it will discuss possible limitations of the study, potential areas for future research, and provide a summary.

To start, it is helpful to review questions posed to help guide the study, as well as the themes that emerged from an analysis of the data:

Questions to Help Guide the Study

1. What are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?
2. How do principals decide what to focus upon when working with teachers?
3. How do principals recognize when their work with teachers is successful?
4. How do principals characterize the experience of supervising teachers?
5. What factors do principals identify as leading to greater or less success when working with teachers?

Review of Emergent Themes

The perceptions of principals in this study regarding their ability to influence teachers' classroom practices center around seven themes: (a) principals face time pressures resulting from

their many job responsibilities and required mandates related to supervision, (b) principals mostly focus on new teachers in the areas of classroom management and student engagement, (c) principals believe that it is when teachers drive their own work that a change in practices is most likely to occur, (d) principals believe that it is easier to influence the practices of teachers who demonstrate a willingness to reflect on their practices in order to grow in their craft, (e) principals prefer to avoid conflict, (f) when teachers are not effective, principals believe that they need to be prompt and direct with feedback, (g) teaching is deeply personal and this affects how teachers respond to critical feedback.

The goal of this study is to better understand principals' perceptions about their efforts to influence teachers' classroom practices. It is my belief that connections can be made between the guiding questions and emergent themes that allow for a clearer picture of the principals' perceptions in question. Table 3 is an attempt to show these connections visually. A written interpretation of the chart follows in the next section.

Table 3*Guiding Questions and Their Relationship to Emergent Themes*

Guiding Question	Related Themes
What are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?	A, B, C, D, E, F, G
How do principals decide what to focus upon when working with teachers?	A, B, C
How do principals recognize when their work with teachers is successful?	A, C
How do principals characterize their experience of supervising teachers?	A, D, E, F, G
What factors do principals identify as leading to greater or less success when working with teachers?	C, D
Emergent Themes	
A.) Principals face time pressures resulting from their many job responsibilities and required mandates related to supervision	
B.) Principals mostly focus on new teachers in the areas of classroom management and student Engagement	
C.) Principals believe that it is when teachers drive their own work that a change in practices is most likely to occur	
D.) Principals believe that it is easier to influence the practices of teachers who demonstrate a willingness to reflect on their practices in order to grow in their craft	
E.) Principals prefer to avoid conflict	
F.) When teachers are not effective, principals believe that they need to be prompt and direct with feedback	
G.) Teaching is deeply personal and this affects how teachers respond to critical feedback.	

Interpretation of the Findings

Beliefs About Supervision. The first guiding question listed for this study is *what are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?* One finding that resulted from analyzing the data, was that it appears that *all* of the themes that emerged as a result of this study help to answer this question. The first guiding question appears to serve as an umbrella question that is strongly related to the other four. Therefore, rather than starting with an analysis of this question, I will return back to it after addressing the other four questions, in order to discuss the connections. I hope that by focusing on the four other guiding questions, that I can better answer the question of *what are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision.* I did feel it important to start off this section by addressing this question, however, because it appears to be the most significant question of the five.

Deciding Upon Focus Areas. Principals in this study chose to focus a significant amount of time on new teachers in the areas of student engagement and classroom management. What data in the study did not reveal, is why principals choose to focus a disproportionate amount of time working with newer teachers in these areas. The results of previous research studies offer some possibilities that may be worthy of exploration.

Printy (2010) says that in the United States, principals face intense pressure to positively impact student achievement. Therefore, a reason principals may focus on newer teachers is that some research shows that new teachers tend to improve at a faster rate than veteran teachers. Kini and Podolsky (2016) state that teachers in their first five years demonstrate the most growth in terms of supporting student outcomes. Kini and Podolsky are careful to state that most teachers continue to grow throughout their careers, but that gains from experience are highest in a teacher's initial years. If principals' understanding of teacher growth is in line with Kini and

Podolsky's findings, it would make sense for time-strapped principals feeling pressure to increase student achievement to focus most of their energy on new teachers as it would be the fastest way to produce results.

Certainly, other possibilities exist for why principals choose to spend much of their time with new teachers. Within this study, multiple principals stated that as part of the mandated evaluation framework, new teachers are subject to more mandatory classroom observations than veteran teachers. If evaluation systems employed by districts require administrators to observe and follow up with newer teachers more frequently, then perhaps the increased work with new teachers is simply a product of the frequency with which they are required to work with newer educators.

Another reason for the focus on new teachers in the areas of student engagement and classroom management may be that these areas are more readily observable than planning, assessment, or pedagogical practices. Many principals in this study stated that in their experience newer teachers struggle with classroom management and student engagement. Lishem and Bar-Hama (2008) say "Teaching is a web of interrelated dimensions. Some are clearly observable and others are not" (p. 264).

Danielson (2007) divides her Framework for Teaching (FFT) into four domains; two which are considered "observable" components, and two which are intended to be evaluated mostly through other means. Closer examination of the FFT reveals that items in the "observable" domains include: *creating an environment of respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures, managing student behavior, communicating with students, and engaging students in learning*. These are all facets of teaching related to classroom management and student engagement, areas where principals in this study

indicated they spent a lot of their time. Conversely, *demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy, designing student assessments, designing coherent instruction*, all fall into domains classified by the FFT as being less observable.

Principals might gravitate towards new teachers because management and engagement problems quickly manifest themselves in observable ways such as disruptions that require the principal's attention, whereas a more experienced teacher's struggles with something such as formative assessment would be less visible. This tendency for new teachers to struggle with more visible aspects of teaching, could lead to time-crunched principals spending more time with newer educators than with veterans.

Though principals in this study indicated that they spend a lot of time with new teachers working on student engagement and classroom management, they certainly did not limit their focus exclusively to new educators. When time allowed, principals in this study referenced many examples where they allowed teachers of all experience levels to reflect upon and drive their work through conversations. Principals in this study expressed a desire to have more of these types of conversations, but often stated that the numerous demands of the principalship made this difficult.

This section attempts to answer the question of *how do principals decide what to focus upon when working with teachers?* In summary: (a) Principals in this study tended to focus on things that were easily observable, most notably classroom management and student engagement, (b) It is likely that principals in this study focused on these items with new teachers, because newer teachers tend to struggle with these observable components more so than veteran teachers, (c) When time allows, principals in this study worked to focus on allowing teachers the

opportunity to reflect and drive their work, because they have a belief that this often leads to teacher success in the classroom.

Recognizing Success. Principals in this study see it as important to allow teachers to drive their own reflection and work if they wish to maximize their influence. In this study principals often discussed teachers driving the conversations and projects that they considered to be the most successful. According to principals in this study, successful experiences were those where teachers identified areas of focus, sought out resources and ideas to try, and were given support by their principal to devote time and energy to these endeavors. Perhaps this is summed up best by Participant 9 when she says:

I feel like my work with teachers is successful when they start to take ownership of it.

And they start to seek out resources. When they say I want to meet with you right now to show you all that I've done, and all that I've learned, or what I've learned and that didn't work.

Blase and Blase (1999) identify several practices of principals that lead to improved school performance. These include principals talking with teachers in order to promote reflection; as well as collaboration, coaching, and encouraging teachers to inquire into their teaching practices. Supovitz et al. (2010) found that principal leadership influences student achievement indirectly through their influence on teachers' instructional practices.

Interestingly, in this study principals said very little about student outcomes as something they considered when deciding whether their work with a teacher was a success. When they did mention student outcomes, they typically did so through the lens of student engagement. For example, Participant 7 noticed more discussion happening in a classroom where he had engaged

in what he considered successful work. Participant 10 also referenced increased student engagement as a result of some successful work that she did with a teacher.

More so than student outcomes, principals in this study seemed to focus on teacher behaviors as the metric through which success was measured. Successful work was work where teachers sought out resources, tried new experiments with their classroom practices, took risks, pulled for feedback, and showed a high level of overall ownership and engagement. Principals in this study made no mention of successful work with teachers being connected to assessment results. This is interesting in the current educational environment, where many school districts recently started to connect standardized assessment results directly to teacher evaluation.

Programs that tie standardized test scores to teacher evaluation typically use value added measures (VAMs), (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Meyer (2012) says “value-added measurement provides one way to help determine the effectiveness of teachers and schools at the k-12 level and in postsecondary institutions.” He also says that VAMs allow schools to make apples to apples school comparisons more easily. There appears, however, to be some controversy as to whether VAMs are a reliable tool to use when measuring teacher effectiveness.

Darling-Hammond (2015) found that principals across a large number of school systems express reservations about the use of VAMs for making personnel decisions, stating that “Principals often perceive the VAM metrics as “inflated” or “deceptive” and feel pressured to make their observation ratings align with value-added measures they see as inaccurate” (p. 134). Darling-Hammond (as cited in Meyer, 2012) also warns that VAMs are potentially valuable for larger scale studies, but that they are seriously flawed as a method of evaluating individual teachers. Kraft and Gilmour (2016) state that in a number of states, principals are given full responsibility for determining teachers’ overall summative evaluation ratings. It stands to reason

that given such a significant amount of responsibility, principals feel a significant amount of pressure to both evaluate fairly and accurately, while also promoting teacher growth and development.

The responses of principals in this study appear to support the notion that there is little if any connection between successful work with teachers and the evaluation systems being used to evaluate a large number of these same teachers. In other words, principals are frequently being asked to evaluate their staff using a tool that does not measure the characteristics that principals believe leads to success in the classroom. Principals in this study believe that teacher ownership, engagement, and willingness to learn are all signs of success in their work with teachers. This contradiction between the tools principals are being asked to use to evaluate teachers, and the things principals believe lead to teachers being successful will be addressed later in this chapter.

The Experience of Supervision. When discussing the experience of teacher supervision, principals in this study often brought up two challenges that they perceived as being difficult to navigate. The first challenge is the balance between providing direct and timely feedback to a teacher who requires critical feedback, while simultaneously feeling a strong aversion to the conflict that might result from providing said feedback. The second challenge is balancing the implementation of the evaluation systems required by their districts while also trying to engage in the things they feel more positively impact their schools.

Zepeda (2016) says “supervision is a formative process that positions teachers as active learners” (p.29). Sullivan and Glanz (2013) define supervision as a collaborative process that encourages teacher reflection for the purpose of improving both a teacher’s instructional practices and student learning. A key assumption, however, “is that teachers are both willing and able to improve their practice by actively engaging in the evaluation process” (Kraft & Gilmour,

2016, p. 715). “No amount of feedback will result in professional growth if a teacher is unwilling or unable to co-construct and enact changes” (p. 715).

When principals in this study did encounter teachers whom they felt required critical feedback about their practices, they noted a level of discomfort with the potential for conflict that they experienced as a result. When describing their experience working with teachers whom they felt required critical feedback, participants described their feelings of unease in a variety of ways. Participant 2 discussed her need to have crucial conversations in these situations, but the discomfort she felt in doing so. Participant 9 noted how at times she danced around the feedback in order to deliver it more gently, but that this sometimes resulted in miscommunication. Participant 1 described how he often knew in his gut that he needed to have a conversation sooner, but that he felt compelled to wait until he had more evidence to support his point of view.

Principals in this study repeatedly stated that they wished they had been prompter and more direct with feedback to address concerns with teachers. Conversely, these same principals noted that one reason they hesitated to provide said feedback was their concern about the potential for this feedback to create conflict. A theme that may connect to this that emerged from this study is the deeply personal nature of teaching. Participant 9 said:

I think the, the biggest thing that gets in the way of, of some teachers being successful with, with coaching is their willingness to admit that they can grow in an area. And then, acceptance to that. Like teaching is so personal, like people, like you don't, you don't, like you don't work as a teacher, like you are a teacher. It's something that you are, and so when someone tells you that you need to improve something, that can feel like a direct blow to your, like, personality. To, to your very character or your very existence.

This theme may help explain the challenge of the balancing act that principals in this

study describe as having to engage in as they attempt to supervise and work with those teachers whom they feel are less receptive to feedback. Perhaps, these principals believe that due to the very personal nature of teaching, even very objective feedback has the potential to be received more negatively. At their core, these principals believe that the feedback is necessary in order to improve the school. Yet, they may hesitate to deliver the feedback because of an aversion to conflict they see as being more likely because of the personal nature of teaching; a conflict that they worry could have a detrimental effect on the school.

The second challenge described by principals in this study as they engaged in the supervision process was how they balanced implementing the evaluation systems required by their districts while also trying to engage in the things they felt more positively impacted their schools. In addressing the question of: *How do principals recognize when the work with teachers is successful*, the principals in this study said that successful work was work where teachers sought out resources, tried new experiments with their classroom practices, took risks, pulled for feedback, and showed a high level of overall ownership and engagement. At no point did any of the participants say that their use of the Danielson or Stronge evaluation systems, of which all participants were required to use one or the other, led to their having a positive impact on a teacher's performance.

In this study, this conflict between the time needed to implement the required evaluation systems, and what principals believe leads to school success, impacted how principals experienced the supervisory process. The principals in this study stated that they feel immense pressure having to carry out all their day-to-day responsibilities. These responsibilities include dealing with upset parents, covering classrooms if subs don't show up, handling discipline, as well as carrying out the required number of classroom observations and follow up conversations

mandated by the evaluation systems being used by their districts. This constant pressure for time coupled with doubts as to whether evaluation systems contributed to better teaching, often caused principals in this study to question the value of the evaluation systems in place.

Frequently this led to their describing feelings of frustration as they worked to try and positively influence teachers.

Participant 7 described the system used in his district as cumbersome and bureaucratic while stating he was unsure whether it made anyone a better teacher. Participant 4 said that if there is not any tangible evidence that the Danielson model or Stronge model makes anyone a better teacher, to stop wasting his time. Participant 10 described the current supervisory system as “super contrived”. Based on the previous sentiments, it seems safe to say that many principals in this study experience teacher supervision in its current form as time consuming and ineffective at developing better teachers.

To summarize, principals in this study believe that it is when teachers own, reflect upon, and drive their work that there is the potential for the most success. Simultaneously, principals in this study do not believe that the formal evaluation systems in place in their districts contribute to this work. Due to significant time pressures that are associated with the responsibilities of the principalship, time pressures that are often compounded by the requirements of evaluation systems in place, principals experience frustration while working to positively influence teachers’ classroom practices through supervision.

Additionally, when principals feel that it is necessary to provide critical feedback to teachers, principals experience many feelings of discomfort. Principals recognize the importance of being prompt and direct and addressing this issue with feedback, but simultaneously worry about the potential conflicts that may arise from doing so. This worry is compounded by the fact

that because of the very personal nature of teaching, even very objective feedback has the potential to be received negatively.

Factors Leading to Success. Throughout this chapter I have identified items that principals in this study feel lead to greater success when working with a teacher. Principals in this study believe that their work with a teacher is more likely to be successful when that teacher is reflective about their practice and shows a desire to learn, when teachers take ownership of the work and drive the process of learning, and when they were able to set the broader vision for the work but then let the teachers control the details and direction of that work. It is interesting to note the level to which the principals in this study focused on teacher behaviors as leading to success as opposed to their own.

Supovitz et al. (2010) state that principals who focus on instruction, fostering community and trust, and communicating the school mission and goals have teachers who report making the most changes to their instructional practices. Hallinger and Heck (1998) said “the principal’s role in shaping the school’s direction through vision, mission, and goals came through in these studies as a primary avenue of influence” (p. 187). The work of Supovitz et al. and Hallinger and Heck appear to be supported by the data collected in this study.

It is worth speculating about whether the level to which the teacher controls success may contribute to how principals perceive the experience of supervision. Principals in this study who tried to influence personal traits more directly, such as a teacher’s desire to learn or reflect, expressed having experienced frustration. This idea is in alignment with Supovitz, et. al. (2010) and Hallinger and Heck (1998) who identify a principal’s primary avenue for influence through their broader ability to create a vision, define building level goals, and communicate a school’s mission. It may also connect to what principals in this study described as the ineffectiveness of

the evaluation systems currently in place. Systems such as the Danielson and Stronge model tend to focus on the individual teacher and their behavior, rather than the broader vision of a school as a whole. This focus is in conflict with the findings of Supovitz et al., and Hallinger and Heck.

None of the ten principals interviewed provided any indication that the use of a mandated supervisory or evaluation tool such as the use of either the Danielson or Stronge evaluation systems, which all participants were required to use, allowed them to influence a teacher's classroom practices more easily. Instead, this study found that principals feel immense time pressures because of mandates requiring the use of modern supervision tools while not seeing a connection to improved results. In this study's interviews, many principals stated that there is a need for some type of evaluation system, but often questioned whether the time required to implement the current models was worth the cost of being able to spend time engaged in activities that they felt would do more to move student achievement. This is something that will be revisited when we return to the question: *what are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?*

In summary, principals in this study believe that there are several key factors at play when determining the level of success that they experience working with teachers. Principals in this study clearly believe that when teachers can drive their own work with the support of the principal that this leads to success. They believe that it is important for them to support teachers in their work through taking the time to have conversations where teachers have an opportunity to reflect. Additionally, principals felt that success is most likely when they have the opportunity to align the vision and mission of the school with the work of teachers.

What principals in this study did not believe led to success, was spending time completing the mandates associated with evaluation systems. Principals acknowledged that

evaluation systems of some type were probably necessary but did not see them as value-added in terms of leading to successful work with teachers. This contradiction between what principals view as leading to success with teachers and what evaluation systems measure has been a recurrent theme throughout this chapter. Therefore, it is important that we analyze this conflict when we return to the original guiding question: *what are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?*

Revisiting beliefs about supervision. The first few sections of this chapter outlined several core beliefs that principals hold as it relates to teacher supervision. First, principals in this study appear to feel strongly that it is when they can create the conditions for teachers to reflect upon, drive, and own their work that they believe they have the most influence over a teacher's classroom practices. They also believe that to help teachers with this work, it is important to take the time to have conversations with them that allow the teachers to reflect. When teachers are not being reflective, these same principals believe that to have any chance at success, they must be prompt and direct with feedback. This is often delayed, however, due to an aversion to conflict experienced by these principals; quite possibly related to the very personal nature of teaching and its impact on how feedback is received.

Principals in this study believe that the formal systems of evaluation in place in their schools hinder their ability to work with teachers in a way that most effectively facilitates best practices. Due to the large number of observations and follow-up conversations required of these evaluation systems, principals see them as eating into the scarce time that is available to work with teachers in the way that they see as most likely leading to success. Most principals in this study will admit that teacher evaluation of some type is necessary. They simply do not believe

that the evaluation systems currently being used in their schools measure the traits of teachers most likely to lead to success.

Thus, on one hand, the ten school principals in this study appear to have very similar views on what constitutes success when they work with a teacher, and simultaneously, these same principals are being asked to devote an extensive amount of their time to implementing and utilizing evaluation frameworks that they do not necessarily view as being aligned with the work that produces successful results. Confronted with sub shortages, parents showing up at the office unexpectedly, and dealing with student discipline issues, these principals are already pressed for time. Add on a large number of required observations and follow-up conversations that are part of an evaluation process that principals do not see as value-added, and suddenly you have a situation where principals believe that the current structure of teacher supervision detracts from the work that they see as necessary to move schools forward.

This sets up an interesting question for discussion: *if the principals evaluating teachers do not believe that the systems of evaluation in place help make a school more successful, why are they still in use?* As a primary stakeholder in a school's success, one would think that principals would have a significant voice in the system used to supervise and evaluate teachers. Yet, it appears that in most instances they do not. Certainly, this has implications worthy of discussion in the next section.

Also, earlier in this chapter it was mentioned that though principals are not fans of the current system of evaluation, they do believe that some type of evaluatory system is necessary. Admittedly, I am curious about what principals mean when they say this. Therefore, in the next section I think it is also important to explore the implications of this belief.

Implications:

A History of Teacher Accountability. Principals in this study often stated that some form of teacher evaluation is necessary. Additionally, they held a shared belief that the behaviors associated with influencing teachers' classroom practices did not typically align with the requirements of the current evaluation systems in place. All the principals interviewed for this study used some variation of the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT) or the Stronge Model in their schools as part of their evaluation system. Additionally, principals in this study noted that the time commitments needed to implement these systems took away from their time to spend engaging in the behaviors they believe most positively impact teacher performance.

This leads to an interesting question. If principals, the primary implementers of teacher evaluation systems, do not believe that these tools help teachers improve, then why are they currently in place? To answer this question, it may be useful to look back at the history of the teacher-accountability movement in the United States.

Malin and Lubienski (2022) state that since the 1980's education in the United States has been portrayed as being in crisis, with educators being targeted as the main problem. Conrad and Hackmann (2022) say that reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and passage of acts such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001, led to teacher evaluation processes being increasingly regulated by federal and state policy. *The Widget Effect*, a report put out by the New Teacher Project (TNTP) in 2009, characterized the U.S. public school system as having failed to differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers, which may have led to much of the drive to incentivize teacher evaluation reform as part of the Race to the Top (RttT) legislation implemented in 2012 (Kraft and Gilmour, 2017).

According to Kraft and Gilmour (2017) “RttT competition and state waivers for regulations in the NCLB Act created strong incentives for states to adopt sweeping changes to their evaluation systems” (p. 234). Weiss (2013) says that in order to obtain the grant money, states needed to apply for funding and that a points system was used to determine the winners. To obtain points, states had to commit to changes such as “developing teacher (and principal) evaluation systems that substantially rely on measures of student achievement and growth” (Weiss, Sept 12, 2013). Weiss (2013) says that states were required to develop data systems that used value added measures (VAMs) in order to earn a significant number of points.

Kettler and Reddy (2019) note that in grades three through eight, large scale achievement tests in reading and mathematics are now frequently used for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and districts. For school districts, one potential reason to implement such systems, even if principals were not directly involved in the decision making process, would have been the financial incentives offered by the government to make such shifts. Even if principals were consulted regarding potential changes to the evaluation process, districts were too financially reliant on the government funds to realistically consider not implementing the reforms. To do so would have meant significant financial hardship in an already tight fiscal environment.

Garver (2020) notes that the reforms to teacher evaluation have been contentious. One thing I find interesting considering this contention, is that broadly speaking, the implementation of teacher accountability mandates has been a bipartisan undertaking at the federal level. NCLB occurred during the Bush administration and RttT during the Obama administration. Similarly, *A Nation at Risk* came out during the Reagan Administration while the Clinton Administration encouraged outcomes-based education as part of its Goals 2000 legislation. It seems that

regardless of which political party has been in charge during the past several decades, that the idea of holding public schools and teachers more accountable to standardized metrics has been a winning political strategy. Any discord has not been between political parties and their views on education, but instead between educators and government policy makers.

Malin and Lubienski (2022) say “various motivations appear to be operative among those supporting a relatively uniform reform movement” (p. 9). Malin and Lubienski also say that this reform movement is focused heavily on reducing the size of government, lowering taxes, and privatizing services such as schools.

In his article *The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity*, Ball (2003) describes *performativity* as “a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change - based on rewards and sanctions (p. 216). Ball (2003) says that what has happened in education in recent decades is that as a greater emphasis has been placed on the use of an ever-growing amount of statistical data about schools and performance, politicians have used this to try and align the culture of public institutions with the ethics and values of the private sector. “The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as a measure of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection” (Ball, 2003, p.216).

Holloway and Brass (2018) note that NCLB used funding and punitive measures to compel the fifty states to align public education with standardized assessments. Additionally, Holloway and Brass (2018) note that RttT incentivized states to implement more rigid accountability measures and incorporate the use of VAMs as part of measuring teacher and school performance. Kohn (2010) notes that a relatively small group of people design standards, test questions, and curricula based on their personal assumptions about what it means to be well

educated, and that this information is then used to judge the system as a whole. Piazza (2019) says:

“A new breed of political organizations has recently found remarkable influence in state-level American education policymaking. Attracting considerable controversy, these groups often promote the neoliberal agenda for school improvement, which calls for distributing public goods - such as high-quality schools and teachers - through a market-oriented system that values competition, choice and high-stakes accountability” (p302).

Evolution of Modern School Accountability. In sum, this information might explain the proliferation of mandated evaluation models such as the FFT without there being much input from students, teachers, principals or other primary stakeholders in the education system. Instead of relying on the expertise of those most integrated into the system, policymakers have instead focused on a neoliberal political agenda as opposed to what is in the best interest of student learning. I suggest that the following sequence of events could potentially explain the evolution of accountability in American schools.

Table 4

A Summary of the Evolution of the Modern School Accountability Framework.

Proponents of school choice, lower taxation, smaller government seek a way to promote a neoliberal, market-driven worldview of education. (Malin & Lubienski, 2022; Piazza, 2019).
Proliferation data creates the conditions that allow for a “statistical” analysis of school and teacher performance using VAMs tied to standardized assessments. (Amrein-Beardsley & Collins, 2012; Ball, 2003; Berliner, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2015)
Groups aligned with school choice, assessment companies, proponents of smaller government develop standardized metrics which inevitably show that schools are and teachers are “failing” (Ball, 2003; Piazza, 2019)
In an effort to “improve” failing schools, accountability measures such as the FFT are put in place to weed out “bad” teachers. The narrative of failing schools and “bad” teachers is promoted heavily in the media. (Berliner, 2018; Gilbert, 2019; Malin & Lubienski, 2022)
As schools are shown to be “failing”, alternatives such as choice schools are promoted as alternatives. (Adamson & Galloway, 2019; Piazza, 2019; Munoz-Chereau et al., 2022)

Note. The table runs chronologically from top to bottom.

This model suggests that a primary reason for the implementation of new evaluation systems in schools the past two decades is not about promoting school improvement. Rather, this model would suggest that the real reason for NCLB, RttP, and other legislative acts that tied financial assistance to required school evaluation reform, was actually a systematic attempt to accelerate the proliferation of school-choice (voucher schools) by putting in place a mechanism that would easily allow opponents of the current system to highlight the failures of its weakest members. By passing blame to teachers for the “failure” of public education, policymakers can not only take the heat off of themselves for any of the system’s failures, but they also create an opportunity to promote tax-saving alternatives. Certainly, this has the potential to be a winning political recipe when communicating with a busy populace that neither has the time nor resources to seriously dig into the topic of educational policy.

Debating Evaluation's Purpose. Kraft and Gilmour (2017) state that scholars of teacher evaluation reform tend to fall into two camps. In the first camp you have scholars such as Edwards, Hanushek, and Thomas et al., who see the primary role of teacher evaluation as a means to dismiss underperforming teachers in order to improve the teacher workforce (Kraft and Gilmour, 2017, p. 234). In the other camp, you have scholars such as Berliner, Almy, and Papy, who see the role of evaluation as being “central to supporting teachers’ professional growth by providing teachers with individualized feedback and identifying areas for targeted professional support” (p. 235). It is interesting to note that the principals in this study appear to gravitate heavily toward the second camp while politicians have gravitated heavily toward the first. Perhaps Piazza (2019) was onto something when he wrote about the rise of political organizations devoted to promoting a market-driven version of education gaining significant power. Perhaps the reason why principals have not been involved in helping to develop the current evaluation systems that are in use in schools, is that to do so would mean including a group that by this study’s results would not agree to evaluative ideas that would help push the market-driven agenda of education forward.

To be fair, it should be mentioned that in some studies, principals can be found who support certain facets of the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT) or other similar systems. Lochmiller (2016) says that principals see recently enacted statewide criteria for teacher evaluation as promoting a positive change in their evaluation practice. Conrad and Hackmann (2022) referenced several examples of principals appreciating how the FFT rubrics took some of the subjectivity out of the evaluation process, which made difficult conversations with teachers easier. The study by Conrad and Hackmann (2022) also contained comments from principals

alluding to how the FFT allowed for a common language to be used around instruction in their conversations.

Worth noting, however, is that in the same Conrad and Hackmann study from 2022, principals expressed the same concerns about the impact of the FFT on a principal's time and their ability to do true improvement work with teachers that was a theme in this study. This theme suggests that the principals do not believe that it is the evaluation system itself that helps improve a teacher's performance. Rather, principals in this study believe that it is conversions, coaching, support, and allowing teachers to control their work that improves performance. That said, when discussing the topic of evaluation, the principals in this study do appear to agree that there is a need to have something in place to efficiently get rid of teachers who clearly are harmful to students.

A Possible Need for Evaluation. Range et al. (2012) say that many school leaders identify incompetent teachers as a significant problem in schools. Ehrgott et al. (1992) note that substandard teaching ranges along a spectrum from grossly incompetent up to marginal and on the cusp of acceptable. A grossly incompetent teacher is defined as a teacher who lacks the skills, ability, or fitness to even meet the legal qualifications for performing the duties of a classroom teacher. Fuhr had perhaps the most succinct distinction between an incompetent teacher and marginal teacher when he wrote "a marginal teacher is one whose performance borders on incompetency, but who is not incompetent (Fuhr, 1990, p.1).

In their research, Ehrgott et al. (1992) recommend intervention plans focused on rehabilitation as opposed to dismissal for marginal teachers. They note that time is frequently cited by principals as a major reason for difficulty in working with marginal teachers. Due to the time needed to effectively coach marginal teachers and the variety of different intervention types

that may be needed, creative use of both internal and external resources to help with this task is recommended. This recommendation coupled with the results of this study creates a paradox of sorts.

We know that time is at a premium for the principals that were involved in this study. We also know that a number of experts estimate that 85%–97% of America’s public-school teachers would be classified as competent (Berliner, 2018; Tucker, 2001; Yariv, 2004). It is here that I will suggest that the motivations of those responsible for the current accountability framework run counter to the beliefs of principals with regards to what is in the best interest of schools.

As mentioned earlier, principals in this study believe that it is when teachers drive their work and reflect on their practice that the most growth occurs. They believe that if mandated accountability frameworks such as the FFT were not in place they would have significantly more time to engage in this work. I suggest that proponents of the accountability movement believe that it is the accountability framework itself that produces improvement in teachers. In an effort to weed out the small number of teachers who are truly ineffective, accountability proponents have put in place a system of accountability that requires principals to spend copious amounts of time scrutinizing the large majority of teachers who are already effective. I argue that this inefficiency significantly detracts from the ability of both teachers and principals to do true improvement work in their schools. As a result, public schools may actually perform worse as a result of the mandated reforms, which makes less expensive alternatives such as choice schools appear more attractive to the consumer and the public at large.

Ideas to Improve Current Models. Perhaps it is still possible to create a model that takes certain elements of evaluation systems such as the FFT and successfully merge them with what principals believe will best support teachers. Mielke and Frontier (2012) note that it is not

enough to simply put evaluation systems in place as rubrics that supervisors use to rate teachers' effectiveness. They note "just as students need to be actively involved and empowered as partners in classroom assessment, teachers need to be actively involved and empowered as leaders in the formative use of the tools that will be the basis for their own summative evaluation" (pp. 11-12).

Notably, Mielke and Frontier's (2012) statement about the need for teachers to have a role in the systems used for their evaluation, aligns well with what principals in this study said helped to influence teachers' practices in a way that led to success. Principals in this study indicated that it is when teachers drive their own work and set their own goals that they are the most likely to have success. One potential takeaway from this study that might be of benefit to principals and school districts, would be for them to consider how they might take the common language and best practices from a model like the FFT, and incorporate those pieces into their evaluation systems without overburdening principals with set requirements for number of observations or follow-up conversations.

Another possible suggestion would be for districts to find ways to eliminate the use of models such as the FFT for the estimated 90% or more of teachers who are considered effective. Ehrgott et al. (1992) recommend intervention plans focused on rehabilitation as opposed to dismissal. If principals could reduce the number of observations and follow-up conversations associated with evaluation by 90% or more by limiting their use of evaluation to only those teachers from whom they see a concern, perhaps this could create the conditions to both improve the work of the effective teachers while making more time to work with less effective teachers to bring them up to the expected level of competency.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

This study sought to explore principals' perceptions of their ability to influence teachers' classroom practices. While this study was able to uncover a variety of themes related to principals' beliefs, it also was limited by a variety of factors. Some of the factors are as follows:

First, by examining only the perceptions of principals, the study ignored many other primary stakeholders whose opinions may have shifted the findings. Schools are highly complex ecosystems whose workings are impacted by a number of individuals and factors. Further research exploring the perceptions of teachers, students, district administrators, families, school board members, and community members all might have influenced the findings. Future studies certainly may wish to focus on looking at any or all of the aforementioned groups as they explore the topic of influencing teachers' classroom practices.

A second limitation of the study would be the relatively small sample size of principals interviewed as well as the geographic limitations imposed by the small-scale nature of the study. While the study's participants did include different school levels, district sizes, geographic locations, and student populations, it was not large enough to truly provide a representative sample of principals everywhere. For example, though a mix of men and women were interviewed, there was not a single person of color interviewed as part of the study. Another example would be the geographic limitations of the study. Though principals in urban, rural, and mid-sized communities were interviewed, all were in Wisconsin. Future studies may wish to incorporate a much broader variety of geographic locations across the country. They also may wish to incorporate principals from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Another area of potential interest uncovered by the study could be looking at principal beliefs about how evaluation systems should look if they are to be value added. Principals in this

study noted that while they found many elements of the current evaluations systems frustrating, particularly as it related to time constraints, they did see a need for some type of evaluation system to be in place. Research about what modifications to evaluation systems principals would recommend might serve as a catalyst for improving or replacing the systems that are already in place. It would also be worth exploring the thoughts of teachers, students, and other stakeholders with regards to this topic.

A last suggested area of potential future research could be in the area of exploring why it is that educators (principals, teachers, superintendents) appear to have had so little say in educational legislation related to teacher evaluation. Billions of dollars in grant money has been distributed as a result of NCLB, RttT, and ESSA, yet educators never seem to appear front and center when these programs are discussed. When I think of NCLB I think of Ted Kennedy or George Bush. RttT evokes the memory of Barack Obama. It seems worth exploring how so many billions of dollars could be allocated to educational improvement without collaboration with educators themselves.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand principals' perceptions of their ability to influence teachers' classroom practices. Through interviews with ten Wisconsin principals spanning a variety of levels, district sizes, and communities, seven distinct themes were identified. These themes are: (a) principals face time pressures resulting from their many job responsibilities and required mandates related to supervision, (b) principals mostly focus on new teachers in the areas of classroom management and student engagement, (c) principals believe that it is when teachers drive their own work that a change in practices is most likely to occur, (d) principals believe that

it is easier to influence the practices of teachers who demonstrate a willingness to reflect on their practices in order to grow in their craft, (e) principals prefer to avoid conflict, (f) when teachers are not effective, principals believe that they need to be prompt and direct with feedback, (g) teaching is deeply personal and this affects how teachers respond to critical feedback.

A closer analysis of the study's findings and an attempt to connect these findings to current theory and research revealed several key insights. Firstly, principals believe that a key component to influencing teacher practices is allowing teachers to reflect upon and drive their own work. Simultaneously, principals feel this task is made more difficult by having to use mandated evaluation systems that eat into the time they have to facilitate this work. Principals in the study expressed a belief that some type of teacher evaluation is necessary, but they did not see the current evaluation tools being used in their schools (the FFT and Stronge Model) as being beneficial to teacher growth and student achievement.

The principals in this study continually returned to the idea of teachers driving their reflection and learning, which suggests that they believe taking the time to have reflective conversations with staff is an effective way to influence a teacher's practice. The tendency of principals to continually return to the idea of the time pressures associated with all of their job responsibilities, suggests that this type of supervision is extraordinarily challenging within the current structure of supervision and evaluation. Unfortunately, it seems that a political environment heavily focused on teacher accountability, has resulted in systems that focus more on how to try and get rid of ineffective teachers versus how to grow more effective teachers. I have suggested that there is evidence that promotes the idea that this focus on ineffective teachers may be an intentional effort by organizations devoted to market-driven school reform.

In short, principals in this study appear to have a desire to utilize a supervision and evaluation system that is centered more on promoting teacher growth versus holding teachers accountable. Principals in this study see a need for some type of evaluation system to be in place in the event that they encounter a teacher who is truly detrimental to the welfare of their students, but they see this as less urgent than being able to use their time to grow a majority of the teachers in their building. Principals in this study believe that a large majority of teachers are already effective in their craft and that the way to truly improve their practice is to allow them to drive their own reflection and work, as opposed to judging them within the framework of an evaluation system such as the FFT. If we truly hope to support the growth of student learning in our schools, this study would indicate that it is time to look for a new method of teacher supervision and evaluation in our schools.

APPENDIX A:
Interview Questions

Appendix A.

Guiding Questions:

- 1.) What are principals' beliefs about teacher supervision?
- 2.) How do principals decide what to focus upon when working with teachers?
- 3.) How do principals recognize when the work with teachers is successful?
- 4.) How do principals characterize the experience of supervising teachers?
- 5.) What factors do principals identify as leading to greater or less success when working with teachers?

Interview Questions:

1. Discuss your overall background and experience as an educator.
2. What do you enjoy most about your work and what are some of the broader challenges?
3. Describe what teacher supervision looks like in your current role.
4. What parts of the current system of teacher supervision work well?
5. What are some things that you think would improve the effectiveness of teacher supervision?
6. What are some areas of focus that you often find yourself working on with teachers?
7. Can you provide an example of a time where you and a teacher worked together on a specific area of focus, and how you arrived at the decision to focus on that particular item?
8. What influences the things that you work on with teachers?
9. Can you provide an example of a time where you consider your work with a teacher to have been a success?
10. What is it about this experience that leads you to believe that it was successful?
11. Do you have an example of a time where you believe that the work you did with a teacher was not a success?
12. In your opinion, what factors were different when you compare the successful and unsuccessful experiences that you described?
13. In your experience, how do you know that your work with a teacher is successful? How often do you get there?
14. If you could go back in time and have an opportunity to work with a teacher for whom the outcomes did not meet your expectations, what would you try differently and why? How likely do you believe it is that these changes would positively impact the outcomes?
15. What are some things that would help principals in their ability to influence teacher classroom practices?
16. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about this topic?

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