TWO SIDES OF PROFESSIONAL: PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

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Introduction

In many countries, including Canada, the last twenty-five years have been characterized by large-scale reforms of public education systems (Fullan, 2001a, Seashore Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999, Young & Levin, 1999). While the educational reforms have not been identical in each country, or uniform across jurisdictions, it appears that due to powerful political, social, and economic shifts in the environment in which schools are nested, in the ways we understand learning, organize and manage school organizations, and relate to clients, new conceptualizations for the profession of educational leadership need to be explored (Murphy, 2002).

Arguably four key forces are shaping the context of contemporary educational leadership. The forces are: demographic trends, hybrid forms of governance, pressures for accountability, and teacher professionalism. Educational leaders are cautioned not to ignore or resist these forces, as they are too strong and too profound (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). Aspects of the terrain of two of these forces—pressures for accountability and teacher professionalism—are the focus of this review. This paper presents a foundation for an exploration of how these two forces may simultaneously impact school principals.

Professional Accountability and Professional Learning Community

Legislatures and ministries, or departments, of education have historically attempted to hold educators professionally accountable, but, over the last twenty-five years there have been increasing calls for educational reform through accountability (Dagley & Veir, 2002; Goldring & Greenfield, 2002; Moe, 2002). A recurring theme in the recent reform efforts sweeping across North America include a concern about the manner in which school personnel, especially classroom teachers, are supervised and evaluated (Dagley & Veir, 2002; Elmore, 2000). Colby, Bradshaw and Joyner (2002) suggest any effective
supervision and evaluation system gives thought to both issues of accountability and professional development, and while it is argued that it may be impossible to serve both the purposes of professional development and professional accountability through a single system of teacher supervision and evaluation (Duke & Stiggins, 1990), it is understood that a central policy intent of state legislation regarding teacher supervision and evaluation is that both professional accountability and professional development are addressed (Dagley & Veir, 2002; Veir & Dagley, 2002).

During this same period, major educational reform surges generated a renewed interest in fostering professional learning community as a means to counter teacher isolation, build a common vision for schooling, foster collective action around reform, and improve practice and student learning (Achinstein, 2002). Professional learning communities may provide the organizational conditions to facilitate significant and lasting school changes (Seashore Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999). According to DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005), “The PLC is specifically designed to develop the collective capacity of a staff to work together to achieve the fundamental purpose of the school: high levels of learning for all students” (p. 18).

A critical element in both of these school reform themes—increased professional accountability through teacher supervision and evaluation, and professional learning communities—is found in the role that a principal plays in each. It is possible that school reform might occur without the principal, but if that change is to be sustained, then the principal's active support and involvement are essential (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Principals are challenged to provide the voice of knowledge and experience, especially when it comes to improving instruction (Carr, 2002 as cited in Hargreaves, Dillon, Paul, Weir, Wilson, & Lafleur, 2002), while simultaneously meeting the expectation to build the community of school by developing and working with others (Hargreaves, et al). Principals serve as the primary link between the outside world and the school. Principals must respond to government demands while working inside schools by maintaining contact with teachers and responding to their professional problems (Martinez, 2003). A search for empirical studies which examined and explored principals’ conceptions of a professional learning community resulted in no studies being found that directly related to the topic of this research.

There is a need to uncover principals’ perspectives on educational matters as these provide a more complete understanding of principal leadership (Beatty, 2002). Conceptualizations of a professional learning community that do not take into account the conditions and circumstances in which teachers and principals are situated provide limited insight and understanding of what occurs inside and across schools (Sirotnik, 2004). Research evidence suggests that the state can make a difference in large scale, sustainable
school reform by using strategies which include accountability and capacity building (Fullan, 2005). As a part of an approach that links changes at the school to the district and state, what Fullan terms a “tri-level solution,” school improvement efforts targeted at improving student achievement have a greater likelihood of success and sustainability. States are important actors in shaping professional development policies for schools, and as a result, they have significant potential to impact school capacity (Youngs, 2001). Knapp (1997) suggests that professional development activities can be influenced by state policies which are generally described as purposeful courses of action that guide, direct, or support the improvement of practice.

Canadian legislation provides the provinces and territories with constitutional control over primary and secondary education (Webber & Townsend, 1998). Legislation regarding teacher supervision and evaluation provides policy appearance meant to ensure public confidence, not only in the education system as a whole, but also in teachers and their teaching (Bredeson, 2001). Traditional approaches to professional development in most school districts typically include annual teacher supervision and evaluation by school principals (Youngs, 2001). One goal of these professional development policies is to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individual teachers by supporting their growth in competence in instruction and evaluation (Reitzug, 2002). Professional development policy should also address elements of school capacity including a professional learning community (Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2001). Professional development should be integrated with a focus on a professional learning community rather than solely on individual teachers, and the principal should be an involved proactive change agent to initiate and support school wide improvement of the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers which can result in improved student learning (Reitzug, 2002).

Principals are asked to build and nurture the collegial and collaborative relationships required in professional learning communities (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1984), while simultaneously supervising and evaluating teachers (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Elmore, 2000). Principals are challenged to respond to the tensions created by moving from the metaphor of school as organization to one of school as professional learning community (Senge, 1990). Principals’ are called to conceptualize a professional learning community, one that maintains the ties and connectedness of a caring and stable community while sustaining the constructive controversy of a learning community (Achinstein, 2002), and simultaneously must fulfill their legislative duty of teacher supervision and evaluation.
**Principals’ Statutory Duties**

Confederation of the provinces of Canada occurred in 1867. The *British North America Act – BNA, 1867*, referred to as the *Canadian Constitution, 1867*, left the provinces largely, as opposed to the federal government, with the constitutional responsibility for primary and secondary education. The terms of Sections 91 and 92 of the *Constitution* provides for the division of federal and provincial legislative responsibilities, whereas Section 93 elaborates the specifics of the provinces’ jurisdictional boundaries over education. An exception to the provincial and territorial authority for education exists in the education of native peoples living on First Nation reserves and dependents of armed forces personnel where, in general terms, the federal government maintains jurisdiction.

Section 93 of the *Constitution* recognizes the provinces’ and territories’ constitutional authority over primary and secondary education (Thomason, 1995). Each province or territory has a constitutional obligation to provide for the education of its children and youth. Public education has been organized as a state agency and social instrument (Rallis, Schibles, & Swanson, 2002). Public schools and systems of education serve the interests of the larger society and not necessarily just those of the parent or the learner (Rallis et al.).

Educational leaders conduct a provincial or territorial function and protect a province’s or territory’s interests by promoting education (Thomas & Davis, 1998). In effect, a principal acts as a provincial or territorial constitutional officer in fulfilling her or his legislated duties. The result of Sections 91, 92, and 93 of the *Canadian Constitution* was to create the legislative framework for the now ten provincial and three territorial autonomous education systems in Canada, each with legislation that in some form specifies the duties or responsibilities of principals. Figure 1 is an illustration of pyramidal policy structure in which the Canadian principal-teacher supervision and evaluation relationship is embedded. Traditional teacher supervision and evaluation is shaped by, and in turn, reinforces, not only a legalistic and bureaucratic social environment, but also the content and form of all professional discourse and relationships which occur in a school structure (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004). As professional practice occurs within existing systems of beliefs, power and social structures, and legal frameworks, it is important to be mindful of how these forces impact understandings of school reforms that call for a change of the principal-teacher relationship from one of hierarchical authority to one of heterarchical professional practice as found in conceptualizations of professional learning communities (Downey, et al., 2004).

Conceptualizations of a professional learning community exist within and amongst the various pressures, including that of teacher supervision and evaluation, that schools are nested in. One of the reasons why educational reform so often fails is because the reform
does not appear to take into account that what must be changed is an interconnected, complex, and political system which constrains the work of teaching and efforts to improve it (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000).

Figure 1. Pyramidal policy structure in which the Canadian principal-teacher supervision and evaluation relationship is embedded (Adapted from Downey, et al., 2004)
What are Teacher Supervision and Teacher Evaluation?

Supervision, when applied to school settings, can take on a variety of meanings (Duke, 1987). Supervision has been defined as “the process of helping the teacher reduce the discrepancy between actual teaching behaviour and ideal teaching behaviour” (Acheson & Gall, 1987, p. 27, [italics in original]). Others (Zepeda, Wood, & O’Hair, 1996) take a broader view that supervision is a way to assist and facilitate the professional activities of teachers and principals working collaboratively to achieve school improvement efforts through shared decision making. Newer conceptions of supervision present it as a sustained, integrated, and ongoing process of professional development involving all educators (Matthews & Crow, 2003). While not the final declaration, after an analysis of various approaches to teacher supervision, Blase and Blase (2004) conclude that substantial disagreement about the essential nature of supervision has existed for more than 140 years, and that disagreement is likely to continue.

Typically, evaluation is the process of collecting data to make a decision (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Danielson and McGreal (2000) contend that the principal purposes of teacher evaluation are: (1) quality assurance and (2) professional development. Duke (1987) argues that evaluation when used in the context of school personnel decisions has come to mean a formal process by which judgments, usually by the principal, are made about the extent to which desired teaching outcomes have been achieved. Teacher evaluation often means rating, grading, and classifying teachers using some locally standardized instrument as a yardstick (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998).

While some (Duke, 1987) have attempted to separate teacher supervision and evaluation by claiming that supervision represents all efforts to monitor teacher performance, while evaluation is the process by which the acceptability of teacher performance is judged, such a separation may not be possible. In Porticelli and Zepeda’s (2004) study of over 100 teachers and their administrators in two southwestern states to examine what supervision meant to the teachers for all of teachers in their study and for the vast majority of principals, supervision was, quite simply, evaluation.

The Blurring Of Supervision And Evaluation

Supervision and evaluation are frequently used synonymously in practice (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Despite what supervision is intended to be, a great many teachers’ only experience with supervision is formal teacher evaluation (Porticelli & Zepeda, 2004). Discussions of teacher evaluation and supervision are marked by considerable confusion.
Often key terms are defined in different ways by different authorities, and frequently their meanings overlap and are interchanged (Duke, 1987). In reality it is often impossible to determine where supervision stops and evaluation begins. Duke argues that teacher supervision includes evaluation. Acheson and Gall (1987) contend that the two processes of teacher supervision and evaluation are often combined.

The reality is that most supervisors of teachers must also evaluate them. The two processes of supervision and evaluation are intertwined, and while they may be divisible in theory, they are not separable in practice (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Talbert and McLaughlin (1993) argue that if evaluation is to be valid, it must take into account the context of teaching or at least what Kupermintz, (2003) describes as a reasonable approximation of the context. Classroom observation and supervision have long been a strategy of the evaluation process, and it appears it will always play an important role in the evaluation of teachers (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Hazi (1994) suggests that state regulations and courts contribute to the confusion by rarely distinguishing between supervision and evaluation in legislation, regulations, and court decisions. As a result, for the purposes of this review, while perhaps separable in theory, teacher supervision and evaluation will be regarded as bonded elements of a single concept of teacher supervision and evaluation.

**Brief History Of The Principal’s Involvement In Supervision And Evaluation**

Back as far as the early eighteenth century, lay committees were charged with inspecting schools periodically to determine whether instructional standards were being maintained (Acheson & Gall, 1987). In Canada the history of teacher supervision and evaluation followed a similar progression as in the United States. From the establishment of schools for teacher training in 1847 in Ontario, teacher evaluation has been used to ensure that teachers meet the expectations set for them (Magarrey, 2002).

As schools grew larger than the one-room schoolhouse, the inspection function became the responsibility of the “principal-teacher”–the school principal (Acheson & Gall, 1987; Matthews & Crow, 2003). Two interconnected areas, namely management and supervision, helped establish the role of the principal as a distinct and separate responsibility from its roots in teaching (Matthews & Crow, 2003). The early role of school principals was inspectorial, in which the principal’s responsibility as teacher supervisor was to ferret out weak teachers and to ensure school boards that standards of teaching were being upheld (Luehe 1989).
The historical connection between supervision and evaluation practices and principals still exists. In Ontario, until the 1970s, teacher evaluation was carried out by school inspectors employed at first by the ministry of education and then later by the school boards. In the 1970s teacher evaluation became the responsibility of school administrators (Magarrey, 2002). While an exact history detailing how the role of the principal became entrenched in provincial and territorial statutes is beyond the scope of this review, it appears that teacher supervision and evaluation is among the legislated duties of the Canadian school principal.

Research On Supervision And Evaluation

Peterson (2000) suggests that decades of empirical research on teacher evaluation shows that traditional practices do not improve teachers or accurately describe what happens in classrooms. Principals’ reports do not increase good teacher’s confidence or reassure the public about teacher quality, and, as currently practiced. Teacher evaluation does not identify innovative teaching so that it can be adopted by other teachers or used in teacher education programs.

Yet, legislatures have traditionally viewed teacher evaluation as a significant means of improving the delivery of education (Dagley & Veir, 2002). Furthermore, teacher supervision and evaluation is regarded as a significant tool in controlling what is going on in schools, while it is simultaneously viewed as promoting the self-development of teachers and the quality of their instruction (Chrysos, 2000). Research (Doud & Keller, 1998; Macmillan & Meyer, 2002) on the daily work of principals indicates that principals view supervision and evaluation as a part of their instructional leadership activities and as important to their working reality.

The tension of the contradictory positions for and against the significance of teacher supervision and evaluation may be summarized in Danielson and McGreal’s (2000) claim that research over the past 35 years has consistently supported two important findings: teachers and administrators have always recognized the importance and necessity for evaluation; and they have had serious misgivings about how it was done and the lack of effect it had on teachers, their classrooms, and their students.

Claims are made (Jonasson, 1993; Kleinhenz, Ingvarson, & Chadbourne, 2001; Porticelli & Zepeda, 2004) which forecast positive results for both elements of a system of teacher supervision and evaluation. Supervision and evaluation are seen as critical means of improving teaching. Generally researchers of teacher evaluation agree that the overarching purpose of evaluation is to ensure that children are taught well (Kleinhenz, Ingvarson, &
while supervision has as its prime objective the improvement of practice (Tunison, 1998).

Jonasson (1993) proposes that if we wish to promote student learning in schools we must invest time, money, and energies into the training and development of teachers by instituting a supervision program which utilizes a process by which teachers and principals work together for mutual professional development. Porticelli and Zepeda (2004) contend supervision and evaluation are complementary processes because supervision is supposed to improve classroom teaching by enhancing teacher thinking, reflection, and understanding teaching, while evaluation is supposed to increase effective teaching behaviours and enhance teacher professionalism.

Ingvarson (2003) claims there are two purposes of teacher evaluation. One is to safeguard the educational interests and welfare of students and ensure that their teachers are able to fulfill their contractual duties. This purpose is based on the assumption that teaching and teachers ought to be held publicly accountable. The second purpose emphasizes the complementary need to ensure that teachers continually review their practices and develop professionally in light of contemporary research standards.

Kleinhenz, et al. (2001) propose there is a need to seriously and effectively evaluate the work of teachers for the twin purposes of public accountability and improvement. Teacher supervision and evaluation are seen as being critical means of improving education.

Even with claims that teacher supervision and evaluation are viewed as beneficial, Acheson and Gall (1987) conclude that most teachers do not like being supervised even though it is a required part of their professional work. Teachers often react defensively to supervision, and they do not find it helpful. Blumberg (1974) claimed, thirty years ago, that teacher supervision is like an organizational ritual of education that is no longer relevant. More recently Garman (1982, 1990) criticized the “ritualistic” nature of the instructional conference of supervision. Glanz (1995) proposes that supervision is nothing more than a bureaucratic legacy of faultfinding and inspectorial supervision, while Blase and Blase (2004) conclude that, despite the fact that many approaches to supervision are collaborative in nature, the practice of supervision remains one of inspection, oversight, and judgment. Blase (1995) claims supervision smacks of something from the Dark Ages, and that it is like a barbaric act of policing those who are only lately being acknowledged as professionals.

There are those (Glickman, 1990; 2003) who, while finding value in supervision believe that evaluation is useless in improving practice. Teacher supervision is seen as being able to enhance teacher belief in a cause beyond self, promote teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, make teachers aware of how they complement each other in striving for common goals, stimulate teachers to plan common and actions, and challenge teachers to think abstractly about their work (Glickman, 1990). Yet it is suggested that there is little research that
establishes a clear link between the attainment of school wide priorities and the amount and type of teacher evaluation and that the teacher evaluation boondoggle has been perhaps the greatest robbery of educational resources in our time (Glickman, 2003).

Traditional teacher supervision and evaluation systems have been criticized because many teacher evaluation practices do not adequately reflect the complexities of teaching as a professional occupation and do not sufficiently address what is termed the “technical-core”-teaching and learning—of teachers’ work (Kleinhenz et al., 2001). Efforts to improve the technical quality of teacher evaluation have not resulted in better evidence of teacher quality or student achievement (Blase, 1995).

Historically, evaluation has been something done to teachers by people like principals (Kleinhenz et al., 2002), and some argue that while seventy years of research on principal ratings of teachers shows that traditional supervision and evaluation procedures do not work well (Peterson, 2000). Still there are those interested in preserving the practice of principal as teacher evaluator (Elmore, 2000). Modern and postmodern views of teacher supervision and evaluation underlie some of the debate on the form and functionality of the practices and policies.

Postmodernists criticize modern conceptions of supervision and evaluation as bureaucratic, hierarchical, and oppressive (Glanz, 2000). Citing the work of a variety of researchers, Glanz contends that a postmodern supervisor would advocate for a process that is: (1) collegial, (2) non-evaluative, and (3) non-directive. Advocates of teachers and principals as collaborative inquirers of practice argue that traditional models based on modernism value principal expert knowledge and essentially marginalize teacher knowledge. Traditional modern paradigms of supervision and evaluation focus instructional relationships at the school level on a hierarchical principal-teacher dyad, thus isolating teachers from fellow practitioners and restricting opportunities for educative discourse (Reitzug, 1997). Postmodern views of supervision and evaluation, as found in conceptualizations of professional learning community, advocate partnerships, communication, and practice that are humane, equitable, and inclusive as leadership on a school becomes a process for which all are responsible instead of a trait projected onto a single individual as found in the principal (Glanz, 2000; Pajak & Evans, 2000).

A tension is exposed in the question: is the postmodern desire to eschew expert supervision, evaluation, and intelligent and judicious use of direct teacher supervision by principals misguided and limited (Glanz, 2000)? Collegial relationships that are non-directive and non-evaluative may not be adequate as principals are not only expected, but legislated, to ensure that every teacher’s best efforts at teaching are good enough to secure the students’ right to meaningful learning (Harris, 1997).
While there is disagreement about the effectiveness of various methods of teacher supervision and evaluation, one result of the widespread debate about the role of schools in many parts of the world has been an increase in the public demands for accountability, accompanied by mandated cycles of teacher evaluation (Webber & Townsend, 1998). Over the last twenty years public attention focused on school accountability and teacher evaluation has been considerable (Berliner, 1986). The theme of accountability in education through the supervision and evaluation of school personnel has not diminished (Veir & Dagley, 2002) despite claims of its traditional ineffectiveness (Peterson, 2000).

Teacher supervision and evaluation by principals is seen as a quality control and accountability measure of teaching because, whenever a problem occurs in a school, including problems about the quality of instruction, heads automatically turn toward the office (Lashway, 1999). Lashway (2000) argues that while the leading models of the school principal emphasizes facilitation and shared decision making, the principal’s hierarchical accountability remains. The “new accountability” of many current reform and school improvement efforts assumes a systematic assessment of school performance, including teaching on the basis of clearly identified standards (Lashway, 1999). When it is time for an accounting system at the school level the system still turns to one person—the school principal (Lashway, 2000).

**Supervision And Evaluation As A Function Of Instructional Leadership**

Several authors (Buffie, 2000; Duke, 1987; Hallinger, 1990; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Peterson, 2000; Sheppard, 1996) document the significance of the instructional leadership capacity of the principal. Duke (1987) argues for the need to create an integrated vision of instructional leaders to support school improvement efforts. Hallinger (1990) argues that instructional and curricular leadership must be at the forefront of school principals’ leadership skills. Sheppard (1996) claims there is a strong positive relationship between effective instructional leadership behaviours exhibited by principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovativeness. Buffie (2000) maintains that instructional leadership is the key to the quality of the instructional program in the school, while Peterson (2000) claims that one of the characteristics of a “successful school” is strong instructional leadership.

Like many concepts, instructional leadership is both difficult to define and to conceptualize. Buffie (2000) argues there is no one way, not even a best way, to conceptualize instructional leadership. Leithwood and Duke (1999) agree that a lack of an explicit definition of instructional leadership makes it difficult to assess unless it means the
same thing to all those who write about. While difficult to define and conceptualize, it appears the principal plays a critical role in conceptualizations of instructional leadership.

If a school is to be an effective one Findley and Findley (1992) claim it will be because of the instructional leadership of the principal. Most conceptions of instructional leadership allocate authority and influence to formal administrative roles, usually the principal, assuming as well considerable influence through expert knowledge on the part of the principal (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

School principals view themselves as instructional leaders. School principals believe that instructional leadership, often conceived of as a blend of supervision, staff development, and curriculum development, facilitates school improvement (Blase & Blase, 2004). So although Glickman (1991) proposes that the principal of a successful school is not the sole instructional leader but the coordinator of teachers as instructional leaders, and Barth (1990) recommends that principals be leaders of learning, Crow, Hausman, and Scribner (2002) conclude that while it is clear that the principal’s role has evolved beyond seeing the principal alone in the centre of instructional leadership, the principal remains the focal point. Duke (1987) comments that, although other individuals may fulfill the responsibility of instructional leader, in reality the principal is the most obvious candidate for instructional leadership.

One function associated with the broad category of instructional leadership is the supervision of teaching (Acheson & Gall, 1987; Duke, 1987; Elmore, 2000; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Supervision is one significant aspect of the principal’s role as instructional leader (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The skills and knowledge that matter in instructional leadership are those that can be connected to, or lead directly to, the improvement of instruction and student performance (Elmore, 2000). Supervision and evaluation are the two most important activities to the instructional leader in dealing with teachers (Acheson & Gall, 1987). One of the most critical situations that the instructional leader must deal with is the supervision and development of teachers (Duke, 1987).

While there have been arguments put forward that the principal cannot both supervise and evaluate teachers because the two processes are contradictory, it is suggested that it is important for the principal do both because to limit the principal’s role solely to evaluation and exclude supervision removes the principal from a substantive instructional leadership role (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Supervision gives principals access to the context of teaching for evaluation (Acheson & Gall, 1987).

Fullan (2001b), in citing the cover article of the January 12, 2000 issue of Education Week, suggests that education policymakers have turned the spotlight of school accountability to focus on the people charged with making the system work. At the beginning of the new millennium, the call for greater levels of accountability is stronger.
than ever before, but the focus of accountability has shifted, and now encompasses teacher accountability. This shift to teacher accountability is heavily embedded in teacher supervision and evaluation systems (Veir & Dagley, 2002). In education the scope of an accountability system refers to who is held accountable by whom, for what, and with what practical consequences (Hoffer, 2000). Principals are held accountable by the public for the quality of instruction in a school through the ongoing supervision and evaluation of classroom teachers.

**Principals’ Roles In Supervision And Evaluation**

School principals make a difference in student achievement and school outcomes (Crow et al., 2002; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Sherman, 2000; Smylie & Hart, 1999). Analyses of research suggest that principals are critical in the enormously complex workings, both physical and human, of a school (Sherman, 2000). School principals have an impact on the workings of schools. There is evidence of the importance of the principal in contributing to the learning community of schools (Crow et al., 2002). Principals have substantial influence on the development, nature, and function of teacher social relations, teacher learning, and change (Smylie & Hart, 1999). Ryan (2002) not only contends that the principal’s role in a school is important, but he also proposes that the principal generally has more influence in the school than most other individuals. The principal is the pivotal person in a position of power and leadership who can act to influence others in the school community, and as such, has the potential to have a major impact on the set of human relationships we call school (Derkatz, 1996).

The principalship is the basic unit of school administration throughout Canada (Brooks & Piot, 2003). In all thirteen of Canada’s provinces and territories basic administrative functions of schools are presented through prescribed legislation, and/or regulations as the responsibilities or duties of principals. The principalship is a vital element in the effective functioning of Canadian education systems, and consequently, it is important that the role of the principal be understood (Brooks & Piot; Scott, 2002).

Any examination of the principalship illustrates the impossibility of providing a profile of the Canadian school principal that can encompass the total picture and provide a meaningful profile of the typical principal (Reniham & Whiteside, 1985). According to Brooks & Piot (2003), the principal's role has acquired numerous layers of definitions through legislation, policy, education, research, and practice. The role of the principal has been changing continuously over the last fifty years, and political, social, religious,
environmental and economic forces have drastically affected the world in which they now operate (Scott, 2002).

Beck and Murphy (1993) note that the dominant metaphor for school administration changes every decade or so. Since the 1920s, the school leader metaphor has changed from value broker to scientific manager, to democratic leader to theory-guided administrator, to bureaucratic executive, to humanistic facilitator, to instructional leader. As the metaphor of the school leader changed so did the roles and responsibilities.

Principals should look at classrooms full of students and themselves: What is happening behind the classroom doors? What are the students learning? How are the teachers teaching? (Glickman, 2002). Peterson (2000) argues the majority of the current supervision and evaluation practices ignore the powerful effects of expectations, roles, rewards, sanctions, and relationships in the workplace. Over thirty years ago House (1973) wrote about evaluation in schools: “Education is political. It is used to allocate resources, cover up mistakes, build reputations and make money. It is also used to correct mistakes, improve programs, reward merit, and tell parents what is happening to their children” (cover leaf). Much of what was written three decades ago seems to bear significance on teacher supervision and evaluation practices of today. Teacher supervision and evaluation is linked to societal and political forces (Good, 1996).

Educational practice is simultaneously an intellectual, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical as well as technical enterprise. As such, principals’ leadership practices operate as part of a complex and interrelated system where everything is interconnected (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000). The principal becomes the interpreter of policies that are largely identified and created elsewhere (Murphy & Seashore Louis, 1999), while simultaneously functioning as a constitutional officer (Thomas & Davis, 1998).

Supervision And Evaluation Policy As Part Of Educational Accountability

According to Adams and Kirst (1999) the “new educational accountability” reform movement increasingly targets schools as the locus of accountability. To this end accountability systems establish who is accountable for what and to whom. Over the past several decades, the term accountability has been used in Canada, and elsewhere, with increasing frequency in education and government (Kuchapski, 1998). Yet, there is very little clarity on what accountability means. In practical and theoretical terms, the area of educational accountability is a mess, and the concept is in urgent need of rehabilitation (Macpherson, 1995; 1996). With this acknowledgement of a lack of complete clarity, it is
still possible to examine accountability as it applies to education as an “idea” conceptually (Kuchapski, 1998).

One possible breakout point to explore implications of the new educational accountability for principals may be found in Kogan’s (1986) definition of accountability, which is: “a condition in which individual role holders are liable to review” (p. 25). Responsibility is a fundamental construct in accountability theory. Responsibility as accountability in education means being answerable to someone else and having to account for one’s action or inaction and their consequences (Adams & Kirst, 1999).

Schools as collective entities should be accountable to the higher levels of the educational system, the district, and the state (O’Day, 2002). When the idea of accountability is applied to the individual school situation, the definition becomes inclusive of accountability to peers, school leaders, and managers, and to nonprofessional interests such as the local community and government agencies (Timperley & Robinson, 1998). In this idea of school accountability, Timperley and Robinson argue that school principals must exercise sufficient hierarchical control to enable them to report relevant information on the quality of teaching and learning in a school to a community, district, and state agencies.

Burger, Aitken, Brandon, Klinck, McKinnon, and Mutch (2001) note that in Alberta the theme of “new accountability” was at the forefront of an unprecedented wave of a top-down, seemingly ideological driven, package of education reforms that swept over the educational landscape in that province during the mid-1990s. The cornerstone of the new accountability sweeping over Alberta during that time was evaluation–evaluation policies for students and cyclical evaluation of teachers.

A principal must establish accountability among the other processes within the school for the progress of teachers and instructional practices through ongoing assessment (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Teacher supervision and evaluation are part of school accountability systems. One central purpose of supervision and evaluation is accountability. Teacher supervision and evaluation provides assurances to the public that professional incompetence and malpractice will be detected and corrected (Duke, 1987).

Parents and the public at large expect principals to exercise some authority; children are entrusted to school personnel for education and personal development in what are expected to be safe and nurturing environments (Thomas & Davis, 1998). Principals are also expected to demonstrate responsibility in their actions. Regardless of the accountability measures that exist, the principal usually must facilitate the accountability processes (Matthews & Crow, 2003). The principal remains the central figure, the key individual, who is held accountable at the school for the primary business, which is teaching and learning (Crow et al., 2002).
Cohen and Ball (1998) argue that instruction is a function of what teachers know and can do with particular students around specific material, both physical and intellectual. Instruction is constituted in the interaction of teacher, students, and material, the three elements of what Cohen & Ball term “the instructional unit.” Instructional capacity, the capacity to produce worthwhile and substantial learning, is a function of the interaction among the various elements of the instructional unit, not the sole province of any single element.

In education, professional accountability is rooted in the assumption that teaching is too complex an endeavour to be governed by bureaucratically set routines and rules. As with other professions, effective practice is situated in the professionals who have acquired specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and who are able to apply these to the specific context in which they work. Reliance on professional accountability alone cannot assure that students’ needs are addressed. What is required is a combination of professional and administrative/bureaucratic accountability to create and environment that fosters long-term school improvement (O’Day, 2002). A significant role of the principal is to “cause” greater capacity in the school in order to get better results, which is learning. The principal’s role is to support, or cause, improved instructional capacity school wide (Fullan, 2001b). The job of a principal is about enhancing the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of people in the school, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding various pieces of the school together in a productive relationship with each other and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result (Elmore, 2000). New relationships, as found in a professional learning community, and an understanding these new relationships are crucial for schools, but only if they work at the hard task of establishing greater program coherence and the addition of resources (Fullan, 2001b; Knapp, 2003).

**Supervision And Evaluation And Professional Learning Community**

There is growing call (Crow et al., 2002; Hord, 1997a; Toole, & Seashore Louis, 2002) for educational leaders and policy makers to examine “professional learning community” as a concept and practice which leads to improved school functioning. Principals are viewed as playing a significant role in the establishment and nurturing of a professional learning community (Barth, 1990; Blase & Blase, 2004; Shields, 2003).

Research studies appear to demonstrate that schools with strong professional learning communities produce important outcomes for students and school professionals (Crow et al., 2002). Toole and Seashore Louis (2002) suggest that cross-cultural research
findings indicate that professional learning communities generally lead to improved school functioning in most settings. The professional learning community, as an organizational arrangement for schools, is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement (Hord, 1997b).

In a school that is a community of learners, the principal occupies a central place, (Barth, 1990). More than ever before, school reform efforts require principals and teachers at the school level to work collaboratively to solve educational problems through the development of the school as a powerful community of learners who are willing to take responsibility for successes and who are capable of achieving it (Blase & Blase, 2003). Shields (2003) suggests that among many other professional responsibilities, principals are expected to develop learning communities and build the professional capacity of teachers.

A problem facing research on professional learning communities has been a conceptual one, and within a robust conceptualization of a professional learning community lays tensions (Toole & Seashore Louis, 2002). While there are claims (Morrissey, 2000) that the term professional learning community defines itself, oversimplifications offer very little to a meaningful conceptual understanding. Although perhaps obvious to some, the concept of a professional learning has proven to be difficult to fully capture. As a reminder of this over simplification Grossman, Wineberg, and Woolworth (2000) note that the mere gathering of a professional staff is far from a community. Hord (1997a) notes in *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* that there is no universal definition of a professional learning community. DuFour (2004) comments that people use the term professional learning community to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education. Plank (1997) offers that there as many definitions are there are authors who write about it.

Even without a precise definition of a professional learning community, an understanding of the human relations that might possibly exist in schools is significant. Professional community, however defined, is nothing more or less than a shorthand term for the kinds of adult relationships in schools that can support individual change in classrooms (Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2002). Hord (1997b) conceptualizes the interaction in a professional learning community as a place where the teachers in a school, along with its principal, continuously seek and share meaning and act on their learning.

A more robust conceptualization is offered by Achinstein (2002) who argues: a teacher professional learning community can be defined as a group of people across a school who are engaged in common work; share to a certain degree a set of values, norms, and orientations towards teaching, students,
and schooling; and operate collaboratively with structures that foster interdependence. (pp. 421 – 422)

Crow et al. (2002), in reviewing the literature on schools as professional communities, conclude that a body of literature has conceptualized professional communities in terms of three concentric circles. In their synthesis of the literature they argue that within the concept of a professional learning community there is an innermost circle which is the community that exists between teachers and children—where learning occurs. The outermost ring represents the nature of relationships between school personnel and the community at large. Mediating between these two rings, the middle ring represents relations among the professional staff within a school, including faculty and the principal.

In response to the question “Do professional learning communities matter?”, Toole & Seashore Louis (2002) respond that professional learning communities are being viewed as a form of school culture that can provide a critical context for school improvement. Toole & Seashore Louis claim the term professional learning community integrates three robust concepts: a school culture that emphasizes professionalism is client oriented and knowledge based, one that emphasizes learning places high value on teacher inquiry and reflection, and one that is communitarian emphasizes personal connection. In expanding what they term “the rings of influence” surrounding the innermost circle of teacher-student interaction, Toole & Seashore Louis contend:

Like the Russian dolls that fit inside each other, the teacher’s instructional program exists within conscious and unconscious rings of influence by parents, principals and headmasters, unions, school cultures, national culture, organizational structures, micro-politics, professional networks, community educational values, and district, regional and national policies (p. 250).

Toole & Seashore Louis’s conceptualization identifies that the interaction of the human relationships, including those between teachers and the principal, provides a more developed understanding of interactions and influences within a professional learning community. This brief review points to an under-explored area that may provide for a more complete understanding of principals’ roles in relation to the profession of teaching by trying to answer the following question: how do principals conceptualize a professional learning community vis-à-vis provincially or territorially legislated duties to supervise and evaluate teachers?
References


