Supervision to Support Reflective Practices

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Abstract
There is immense pressure on school leaders to show evidence of continual school improvement. To drive these improvement efforts, there are essential considerations when planning for implementation, specifically the development of a system that supports reflective practices to increase teacher autonomy and improved student outcomes. The research presented in this article explores the attitudes and beliefs that teachers and administrators have for reflective practices through the supervisory actions of administrators in a rural Northern state. The findings from this study include, 1) the importance of a formal leadership role and the lens used when considering evaluative and non-evaluative feedback; 2) the use of reflective practices to drive changes to instructional practices; and, 3) the connection of reflective practices to school culture, professional development, and student engagement. These findings are important in that they are practical to schools and inform how the United States (US) education system might shift policies to support more formative practices that target instructional improvement.

Keywords

supervision; reflective practices; school improvement

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Introduction

Principals and teachers face immense pressure to show constant evidence of school improvement. Integral components of any school improvement effort include 1) high-quality professional development to enhance teacher skills and knowledge, 2) reflective practices that support teacher growth and autonomy, and 3) student engagement as a way to improve student outcomes; specifically, academic achievement, civic responsibility, and social-emotional development (Mette et al., 2015; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Additionally, there is an increasing recognition that the teacher is at the center of any attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and any attempts for school improvement and increased teacher effectiveness rely on professional development (Levine, 2006).

Reflective practices support ongoing professional growth and development for teachers and are defined as the ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning that aims to enhance one's ability to make informed and balanced decisions (Schön, 1983). In the field of education, reflective practices and action taking have been cornerstones of teacher education and professional development for many decades (Dewey, 1909; Feucht, 2010; Schön, 1987). Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (1997) describe reflection as the act of thinking about, analyzing, and assessing one's teaching moves with the goal of refining and restructuring knowledge and actions to inform future practice. Yet the concept of reflective practice and the central role it plays in school improvement is not clearly understood by school leaders and teachers. Identifying how to facilitate and support reflective practices can lead to a more consistent understanding of the concept and its connections to professional growth and positive student outcomes. School leaders must build their capacity of supervisory practices to include teacher reflection (Pultorak & Young, 2008).

Zepeda (2017) identify supervision as the center for the improvement of instruction and describe supervision as the ongoing process of engaging teachers in instructional dialogue for the purpose of enhancing reflection about teaching and student learning to modify teaching practices aligned with increasing student achievement. Zepeda and colleagues (1996) define supervision as the interactions between the supervisor and teacher in an environment that reduces isolation and encourages teachers to examine instructional practices. A critical aspect of supervision is its potential to educate and build the capacity of teachers. When reflective practices are common and routinely used by teachers in schools, they are empowered to determine their own professional growth and development needs. Based on these ideas, when supervision supports reflective practices school improvement becomes more of a reality (Wlodarsky, 2005).

School leaders play a pivotal role in the school improvement process. To improve and transform schools, leaders need to promote the importance of changing minds, not just practices, through the messy process of dialog, debate and reflection (Zmuda et al., 2004). Districts are challenged to address the well-known tensions of role and authority when supervising and evaluating teachers (Oliva & Pawlis, 2004). Fairman and Mette (2017) suggest that school administrators often confuse supervisory practices with evaluative practices. Assigning evaluative ratings inhibits teachers from thinking critically about their instructional practices and identifying appropriate professional development needed to address their needs.

School leaders must be able to provide support in ways that enable teachers to grow by using supervisory techniques that embrace reflective practice. The aforementioned confusion between supervision and evaluation interferes with school leaders' ability to facilitate the use of reflective practices with teachers. As such, there is a gap between school leaders' professional beliefs about supervision and evaluation and state-level mandates that are determined by policymakers (Mette et al. 2017). Administrators must understand how to provide supervision that supports reflective practices for teachers, separate from evaluation strategies, to encourage teachers to analyze current practices, consider other actions, and be more innovative as they explore new teaching methods to meet student needs.

School principals may lack the skills and knowledge needed to support reflective practices in their teachers. Current supervision practices suggest the importance of identifying what school leaders need to know and do to facilitate the use of reflective practices that are separate from evaluative practices. School leaders who focus their supervisory skills on facilitating reflective practices will show positive impacts for teachers, students, and schools (Osterman, 1990). Therefore, school leaders can focus on developing supervision and reflection as a way for school leaders and teachers to grapple with issues that are pertinent to teacher growth and be more accountable to the success of the students and community needs.

Literature Review

The following literature reviews the major themes within supervision. It describes and clarifies the purpose of supervision, while also exploring the connection between supervision and reflective practices. The connection between the use of reflective practices and supervisory practices is the theoretical framework for this study.

Supervision

The terms supervision and evaluation are frequently thought of interchangeably. Hazi and Ricinski (2009) recognize tension between both supervision and evaluation found in literature as early as the 1920s. The role of the administrator has evolved and understanding the distinction between supervision and evaluation is important. Formal evaluation now seems to dominate supervision, causing conflation between the two (Hazi and Ricinski, 2009). Practitioners and lay people often describe supervision as teacher evaluation within the school. Ponticell and Zepeda (2004) found that "for all teachers and for the vast majority of principals, supervision was, quite simply, evaluation" (p. 47). But the purposes of evaluation and supervision are vastly different. Evaluation is to assess the performance and determine job retention while supervision is to provide continual teacher support for professional growth and development.

The term supervision is defined in a variety of ways. Supervision includes informal feedback, conferencing, individual, large, and small group activities and trainings, peer observations, data analysis, goal setting, and reflection (Glickman et al., 2018, Ponticell & Zepeda, 2004; Eady & Zepeda, 2007; Hazi & Ricinski, 2009). Franseth (1961) defined supervision as leadership that encourages a continuous involvement of all school personnel in a cooperative attempt to achieve the most effective school program. It is the process of engaging teachers in intentional dialogue that enhances their reflection about instructional practices and student learning as a way of

changing or shifting teaching practices to increase student success, becoming the center of school improvement (Glanz & Zepeda, 2016; Halim et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2011; Sergiovanni et al., 2013).

Tschannen-Moran and Gaeris (2019) define supervision as an act of care for the well-being of one's charges, the ability to act on guiding principles within unique or unpredictable situations, to apply expert judgment in non-routine situations rather than acting on dictums. It is the on-going process of engaging teachers in instructional dialogue for the purpose of enhancing reflection about teaching and student learning to modify teaching practices aligned with increasing student achievement (Zepeda 2017). The ultimate goal is to improve instruction and support student success. Supervision is directly related to the needs of the teacher as the supervisor helps them considers their strengths and needs as an adult learner.

With the goal of supervision to create collaborative and trusting relationships to support teacher growth, there is tension when the supervisor is also the evaluator responsible for decisions about resource allocation and employment retention (Mette et al., 2017). Administrators, because of the tremendous list of other responsibilities, may struggle to find the time needed to adequately devote to supporting their teachers, with supervision, a separate task from evaluation.

Supervision that Supports Reflective Practices

Reflection includes knowledge, contemplation, feelings, and conclusions as a way of looking forward to take action about instructional improvement. Reflection can happen individually or in small or large groups (Cottrell, 2012; Boud et al., 1985; Schön, 1983, 1987). It has been explored through many lenses, and it has power in its ability to transform teaching and learning systems.

Reflection is the process for thinking deeply about something so that one can understand it more thoroughly and make sense of our experiences (Cottrell, 2012). Boud et al. (1985) define reflection as a person's response to an event: what he/she thinks, feels, does and concludes as it relates to the event. Schön (1983) proposes that professionals use their knowledge and past experiences as a way to look at new situations, make decisions, and take-action. When teachers begin to understand their teaching practices through individual reflection, reflection in small groups, or as part of a school-wide reflection, they are more likely to improve their effectiveness and increase student achievement levels.

Directive supervision does not create opportunities for reflection because of its correlation to controlled corrective supervision, relying on the supervisor to do the heavy lifting by identifying the problem and then the solution (Glickman et al., 2018). Collaborative supervision provides some opportunity for teacher reflection though the effectiveness of this supervision may be related to the time provided by the supervisor for both the teacher and supervisor to reflect before moving to solution identification and action planning (Glickman et al., 2018). Beerens (2000) posit the important question whether observations and feedback should focus on correction and training, or conversely if they should create conditions for reflective dialogue to develop professional competency and retain a career professional.

Non-directive supervision provides similar opportunities for reflection as collaborative supervision. However, in this approach the supervisor does not share an opinion but instead, facilitates the teacher in identifying issues, exploring solutions, and allowing the teacher to create a plan of action on their own (Gebhard, 1990). Authentic non-directive supervisory behaviors are important in that they allow for collaboration and teacher leadership. Non-directive feedback encourages teachers to see themselves as agents of their own practice and in charge of the direction of their own learning, which is an important aspect of school improvement.

Reflective practice can be a driver of teacher growth and development, allowing educators autonomy to identify specific individual needs for professional growth to happen. With the right supervisory supports, teacher autonomy can bolster a positive school culture, highlighting teachers who are motivated and feel valued as they are responsible to direct their own professional growth and development. Additionally, reflection is an essential element in teaching and learning and fosters a teachers' ability to critically analyze their own teaching practices, confront their beliefs about teaching, and reframe their actions to enhance pedagogy (Barton & Ryan 2014; Brookfield 2017; Larrivee 2000; Liston & Zeichner 2013; Loughran 2003). Reflection promotes changes in teaching practices (Biktagirova & Valeeva 2014) by stimulating teachers to critically analyze their work and create a plan to continuously improve. Within supportive environments, administrators seek ways to empower teachers to move beyond current practices as they explore and create new ways of doing.

Adult Learning

When schools focus on teacher development that includes high levels of perception, complexity and decision-making, students consistently are successful in school (Costa & Garmston, 2016). Leithwood et al. (2004) report "that student achievement increases as districts increase adult collaboration in teams." However, Drago-Severson (2009) states that school leaders often struggle to create conditions that support teacher learning. Principals today are being asked to add instructional leadership to their managerial responsibilities. To do this successfully, they must become primary adult developers and architects of collaborative learning communities.

Drago-Severson (2009) identifies two types of adult learning that correlate with the use of reflection. Informational learning can be examined considering traditional professional development focusing on the increase of knowledge and skills. Conversely, transformational learning relates to the development of cognitive capacities and is associated with an increase in individual developmental capacities which enable a person to have a broader perspective on oneself (Cranton, 1996; Merizow, 2000). Brookfield (2017) contends that adults acquire skills through the process of investigation and exploration, followed by action grounded in the exploration, then reflection on the action, leading to further investigation and exploration. During this process, teachers cycle back and forth between current and new knowledge. Cooper and Boyd (1998) state that ongoing discussions with time to analyze one's own experiences is the richest source of adult learning.

Teachers function across a developmental continuum making it important for supervisors to understand those ways of knowing in order to support their growth (Drago-Severson, 2009). Glickman et al. (2018) suggests that developmental supervision that is based on teacher levels of

need assists teachers' cognitive expansion. On-going job embedded professional development, such as reflection, leads to increased student success when teachers are given the time and support to identify and try out new strategies, as well as when teachers are provided individual support from school leaders to analyze student learning and reflect on their own (Althauser, 2015). Huffman and Hipp (2003) believe that when teachers reflect frequently on their practices, assess their effectiveness, study collectively, and make decisions based on needs, they are able to function as a community of professional learners.

Context

This study was conducted in a rural Northern state that generally recognizes the teacher at the center of any attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The current model for evaluation provided by the rural Northern Department of Education is the Teacher Performance Evaluation and Professional Growth (T-PEPG) which emphasizes evaluation over supervision to support professional growth. To understand how the supervisory and evaluative practices used by school leaders supported or impeded the use of reflective practices used by teachers to promote their own professional growth and development, three research questions guided this study; 1) What are the perceptions of school leaders and teachers related to reflective practices, 2) What reflective practices encourage professional growth of teachers and change instructional practices, and 3) What connections do school leaders and teachers see between reflective practices and teacher growth, student engagement and school culture?

Data for this study was collected during the spring of 2021 by surveying both teachers and school administrators. The responses were collected during the peak of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic when there were a variety of school and learning options being offered, specifically instruction that was in-person, remote, and hybrid. All participants were asked to respond to the same question twice; their perceptions before COVID and their perceptions in the midst of the pandemic. The study asked respondents to consider their current perceptions of supervision and reflective practices as well as their perceptions prior to COVID, understanding that there were differences in teaching and learning before and during COVID.

Methodology

In this study, rural Northern teachers and principals were randomly selected to participate in a survey. Selection criteria was supported by NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) with district's classified into nine population zones to identify the percentage of teachers and administrators working in each of the locale codes as a way survey a diverse group of educators from a variety of locales and districts across the state. Invitations were based on those percentages (see Table 1).

Table 1. NCES Locale Codes based on Population

Classification	N	Percentage
City Small	49	8.9%
Suburban Midsize	52	9.5%
Suburban Small	24	4.4%
Town Fringe	18	3.3%
Town Distant	39	7.1%
Town Remote	24	4.4%
Rural Fringe	86	15.7%
Rural Distant	169	30.9%
Rural Remote	85	15.5%

The data collection was based on two online surveys; one for teachers and one for administrators, assessing their perceptions of the use of evaluative and non-evaluative feedback to: 1) improve teaching performance, 2) support the use of reflective practices to improve instruction, 3) reflective actions that change instructional practices, and 4) assess feelings about reflective practices related to their instructional practices. Emails were sent out to 800 teachers and 444 administrators. In total 79 usable teacher surveys and 82 usable administrator surveys were received. This study sought to inform the practice of teacher supervision and evaluation by examining and understanding the opinions of teachers and administrators related to evaluative and non-evaluative feedback and its connection to the use of reflective practices that promote professional growth and development. The survey included both qualitative and quantitative components.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was an online survey differentiated for teachers and administrators. In addition to demographic information, the survey included item types in four constructs aligned to the research questions: 1) evaluative feedback to improve teaching performance, 2) non-evaluative feedback to support reflective practices, 3) actions that change instructional practices, and 4) feelings about reflection. All constructs were measured using a 1-4 Likert scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). The final section included three open-ended questions asking for participant perceptions to yield more data regarding the following: 1) the support provided by administrators to use reflective practices, 2) use of reflective practices and its connection to own professional development, and 3) impact of reflective practices on student engagement and school culture. Because the data took place during the pandemic, participants were asked to respond to each question considering their perceptions before COVID and during COVID. To establish internal reliability on the surveys, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated on all items with an overall score of .944 for the teacher survey. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated on the four sub-scales which included construct 1 (.933), construct 2 (.893), construct 3 (.780) and construct 4 (.894). The overall Cronbach alpha for the administrator survey was .921. Again, coefficients were calculated on the four sub-scales which included construct 1 (.872), construct 2 (.920), construct 3 (.852) and construct 4 (.864).

Results

To address the primary research questions, quantitative analyses were used. Means and standard deviations for each of the Likert-scaled items are presented in Table 2 looking at both administrator and teacher responses before and during Covid (see next page). Three main findings became evident when analyzing the data and can be summarized as follows: 1) role matters for how evaluative and non-evaluative feedback is perceived, 2) reflection is an important aspect of supervision to drive changes about instruction, and 3) reflective practices are closely connected to how school culture, professional growth, and student engagement are perceived.

Role Matters for How Evaluative and Non-Evaluative Feedback is Perceived

To answer the first research question, "How do the perceptions of school leaders and teachers relate to the use of reflective practices?" the research analyzed the data descriptively. Overall means were calculated to analyze evaluative and non-evaluative supervisory feedback to support reflective practices based on teacher and administrator perceptions. Table 2 shows the overall means for both teachers and administrators.

The data identifies administrators (M = 3.34 before COVID, M = 3.00 during COVID) with more positive perceptions of evaluative feedback to support reflective practices than teachers (M = 2.94 before COVID, M = 2.56 during COVID). Using a significance level of $p < 0.05$, an independent *t*-test was used to examine differences between administrators and teachers. Results of the independent *t*-test indicate a significant difference ($p < .05$) between how administrators (M = 3.34, SD = 0.539) and teachers (M = 2.94, SD = 0.659) perceive feedback before COVID, and a significant difference ($p < .05$) between how administrators (M = 3.00, SD = 0.076) and teachers (M = 2.56, SD = 0.053) perceive feedback during COVID.

Additionally, when looking at how non-evaluative feedback to improve instruction is perceived, administrators were more positive (M = 3.30 before COVID, M = 3.21 during COVID) than teachers (M = 3.09 before COVID, M = 2.97 during COVID). Using a significance level of $p < 0.05$, an independent *t*-test was used to examine differences between administrators and teachers. Results of the independent *t*-test indicate a significant difference ($p = .01$) between how administrators (M = 3.30, SD = 0.670) and teachers (M = 3.09, SD = 0.451) perceive non-evaluative feedback to improve instruction before COVID, and a significant ($p = .001$) difference between how administrators (M = 3.21, SD = 0.509) and teachers (M = 2.97, SD = 0.593) perceive non-evaluative feedback to improve instruction during COVID.

Table 2. Comparing Administrator and Teacher Responses of Evaluative Feedback, Non-evaluative Feedback, Actions to Change Instruction and Perceptions of Reflective Practices

	Position	N	*M*	SD
Evaluative Feedback Before COVID	Administrator	77	3.34*	.539
	Teacher	77	2.94*	.659
Evaluative Feedback During COVID	Administrator	79	3.00*	.076
	Teacher	77	2.56*	.053
Nonevaluative Feedback to Improve Instruction Before COVID	Administrator	76	3.30†	.670
	Teacher	71	3.09†	.451
Nonevaluative Feedback to Improve Instruction During COVID	Administrator	77	3.21**	.509
	Teacher	68	2.97**	.593
Feelings about Reflection Before COVID	Administrator	71	3.16	.395
	Teacher	60	3.14	.410
Feelings about Reflection During COVID	Administrator	71	2.96	.485
	Teacher	59	2.86	.540

Note: * - $p < .05$, † - $p = .01$, ** - $p = .001$

When analyzing locale codes that are based on population and proximity to population hubs, there was a statistically significant difference when comparing teachers in cities to teachers in towns regarding the perception of providing evaluative feedback during COVID to support reflective practices. An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between teachers in a city locale to teachers in a town locale, $F(3, 152) = 3.179$, $p = 0.026$. An alpha level of 0.05 was initially used to determine the significance, and a Bonferroni post hoc test was used to reduce the chance of a type I error. The final alpha level of 0.034 was used to determine significance.

Teachers in cities were less positive about this kind of feedback than teachers in towns. The rural Northern state used in this study has many rural school districts, and the data suggests that the ruralness of the state has an impact on what may be happening in rural districts during COVID, specifically that evaluative feedback is an accepted practice used to support the use of reflective practices.

Table 3. Teacher Responses to Evaluative Feedback Based on Locale Codes

	Locale Codes	N	M	SD
Evaluative Feedback Before COVID	Teacher /City	15	2.81	.776
	Teacher/Suburban	24	3.01	.554
	Teacher/Town	28	3.22	.677
	Teacher/Rural	87	3.21	.599
Evaluative Feedback During COVID	Teacher /City	15	2.55*	.689
	Teacher/Suburban	23	2.63	.776
	Teacher/Town	24	2.98*	.638
	Teacher/Rural	90	2.85	.886

*Note: * - p <.05*

Reflection Drives Changes to Instructional Practices

To answer the second research question, "How do reflective practices that encourage professional growth of teachers and change their instructional practices?" the researcher analyzed data descriptively. Overall means were calculated to analyze perceptions about the use of reflection to change instructional practices. Table 4 shows the overall means for teachers, administrators, and combined.

Table 4. Perceptions of Reflective Practices to Change Instructional Practices Before and During COVID

	Teachers		Administrators		Combined	
	N	M	N	M	N	M
Overall, Before COVID	71	2.99	73	3.13	144	3.01
Overall, During COVID	69	2.86	75	3.13	144	3.00

When examining perceptions about how reflection drives changes in instructional practices, it is clear that administrators view the use of reflective practices to change instructional practices more positive (M =3.13 before COVID, M =3.13 during COVID) than teachers (M = 2.99 before COVID, M = 2.86 during COVID). Although there were no significant differences at the $p <$ 0.05 level, administrators were more positive about this type of feedback and showed no change in perception before COVID and during COVID, while teachers were less positive and declined in their positivity about this type of feedback during COVID.

Reflective practices used by teachers and supported by administrators as a way of shifting instructional practices to enhance student learning and engagement was examined, as well as information about teacher and administrator feelings about the use of reflective practices (Table 5). Teacher and administrator perceptions related to reflective practices were further explored based on the open-ended question asking educators to describe their use of reflective practices and their connection to professional development using an open coding process. Similarities and differences in responses of teachers and administrators are discussed below, considering their perceptions before and during COVID.

Table 5. Comparing Administrator and Teacher Responses of Actions to Change Instruction and Perceptions of Reflective Practices

		N	M	SD
Actions that Change Instructional Practices Before COVID	Administrators	73	3.13	.499
	Teachers	71	2.99	.491
Actions that Change Instructional Practices During COVID	Administrators	75	3.12*	.737
	Teachers	69	2.86*	.598
Feelings about Reflection Before COVID	Administrators	71	3.16	.395
	Teachers	60	3.14	.410
Feelings about Reflection During COVID	Administrators	71	2.96	.485
	Teachers	59	2.86	.540

*Note: * - p = .05*

The data identifies administrators (*M* = 3.13 before COVID, *M* = 3.12 during COVID) with more positive perceptions of actions that change instructional practices than teachers (*M* = 2.99 before COVID, *M* = 2.86 during COVID). Using a significance level of *p* < 0.05, an independent *t*-test was used to examine differences between administrators and teachers. Results of the independent *t*-test indicate a significant difference (*p* < .05) between how administrators (*M* = 3.12, *SD* = 0.737) and teachers (*M* = 2.86, *SD* = 0.598) perceive feedback before COVID.

Additionally, when looking at feelings about instruction, administrators were more positive (*M* = 3.16 before COVID, *M* = 2.96 during COVID) than teachers (*M* = 3.14 before COVID, *M* = 2.86

during COVID). Although there were no significant differences at the $p < 0.05$ level, administrators were more positive about reflection during COVID. Feelings about instruction before COVID were roughly equal.

Reflective Practices are Closely Connected to How School Culture, Professional Growth, and Student Engagement are Perceived

To answer the third research question, "What connections do school leaders and teachers see between reflective practices and teacher growth, student engagement, and school culture?" the researcher analyzed two open-ended questions with an open-coding process. These questions included, "Describe your use of reflective practices and its connection to teacher professional development," and "Describe how your use of reflective practices have impacted student engagement and your school culture." The findings indicate that reflective practices are closely connected to school culture, professional development, and student engagement.

Table 6. Reflective Practices and Connection to Professional Development

Teacher	Administrator
Professional development should, but not always is, based on individual teacher needs resulting in no reflective practices.	Professional development is connected to individual teacher needs and those needs drive professional development choices.
Professional development that provides opportunities to consistently worked with colleagues to reflect on practice, analyze data, and debrief with a mentor is valued	Open communication and transparency with teachers about professional development needs are used to support growth and development
Professional development is connected the evaluation system and goal setting encompasses reflection as part of the process	Professional development is part of the evaluation system with goal setting occurring during supervision driving teacher professional development

The themes differ between teachers and administrators about professional development and its connection to reflective practices. Teacher responses to reflective practices and their connection to professional development identified three general themes; 1) reflection is best done if it meets individual needs, 2) reflection should be done with others, and 3) reflection as part of the evaluation process but not the supervision process (see Table 6). Administrator perceptions suggest themes of 1) confidence that professional development is connected to individual teacher needs, 2) transparency and open communication about professional development used to support teacher growth and 3) professional development is part of the supervision and evaluation model.

Regarding the use of reflective practices have a positive impact on student engagement and school culture, themes differed once again between teachers and administrators. Teacher responses to reflective practices and the impact on student engagement and school culture identified three general themes; 1) reflection is best used to increase student engagement, 2) reflection fosters creativity and pushes thinking out of comfort zones, and 3) reflection about

student engagement that occurred during in-person instruction can inform student engagement outside of an in-person environment. (see Table 7). Administrator perceptions suggest themes of 1) reflection is part of a collaborative process that should be centered on data analysis, 2) reflection is connected to the teacher evaluation system more than increasing student engagement, and 3) reflection should be embedded in team learning that can occur outside of an in-person environment.

Table 7. *Reflective Practices and Its Impact on Student Engagement and School Culture*

Teacher	Administrator
Teachers use reflection to analyze student needs which helps them to improve and increases student engagement	Teachers participate in collaborative experiences that focus on data analysis is a powerful instructional change driver that impacts student engagement and school culture
Reflection allows teachers to step outside of their comfort zone and be creative on how they increase engagement	Reflection is connected to evaluation system rather than increasing student engagement
Reflection about in-person instructional practices can lead to increased engagement about learning outside of an in-person environment	Reflection should be embedded in collaborative teaming that can occur outside of an in-person environment

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to understand teacher and administrator views on the use of reflective practices based on evaluative and non-evaluative feedback and support. The results add to the literature concerning administrator responsibility to provide non-evaluative feedback through supervision rather than evaluative feedback to support teachers' use of reflective practices. The results can be summarized as follows: 1) role matters for how evaluative and non-evaluative feedback is perceived, 2) reflection is an important aspect of supervision to drive changes about instruction, and 3) reflective practices are closely connected to how school culture, professional growth, and student engagement are perceived.

Teachers reported support for reflective practices through the evaluation process is less effective than the perceptions reported by administrators. Hazi and Rucinski (2009) note that over time evaluation has become the dominate form of feedback, pushing supervision to the side and embedding reflection as part of a summative process. As administrators continue to embed reflection within their teacher evaluation system, there is a blurring of the lines between formative feedback and summative feedback. As noted in this study, administrators most often provide feedback through evaluation and performance ratings and increasingly less through supervision practices. However, reflection is an important facet of supervision that includes non-evaluative feedback that should occur between the school leader and teachers in the building.

As administrators continue to conflate reflection by embedding it in evaluation systems, reflective practices increasingly are being used to rate teaching practices and student learning as opposed to support development and growth over time. As such, there is an opportunity for administrators to better understand the different responsibilities and outcomes related to supervision and evaluation. School systems can help by developing policies and procedures to put more emphasis on supervision and reflective practices by allowing school leaders and teachers to grapple with issues that are pertinent to best practices and teacher growth. Supervision is one of the most powerful methods to drive school improvement, however, the accountability system that are in place now, specifically the use of teacher evaluation, tend to use fear to demand reflection and improvement, rather than focusing on the development of trust.

Overall, teachers and administrators identify supervision practices are most effective when supporting the use of reflective practices. However, what principals feel is happening in schools and what teachers perceive is happening in schools is very different. Supervision exists to support the unique needs of individual teachers by creating collaborative and trusting relationships between teachers and administrators. Mette et al. (2017) suggest the use of collaborative supervision to increase trusting relationships, promote a positive school culture, and develop a shared leadership approach that empowers teachers to improve their own instruction, rather than an evaluator solely exercising power over them.

In order to make progress toward the use of reflective practices, practitioners need to 1) understand the differences and separate the roles of supervision and evaluation, 2) provide supervision that supports the use of reflective practices, and 3) provide time for teachers to use reflective practices as part of their own growth and development. For practitioners it is important to identify the varied approaches to supervision that contribute to barriers of the use of reflective practices as a way of supporting school improvement. School leaders need to reimagine supervision and the use of reflection as a way for leaders and teachers to grapple with issues related to teacher growth and to help the system be more accountable to the success of students and the development of teachers. Components of current evaluation models must be examined and critiqued to provide perspective about the importance of supervisory practices to support teacher growth and development. Local teacher evaluation steering committees can help by regularly meeting to review and refine their model, and to consider more emphasis on how reflective practices might play a larger role in the model for teacher growth and development.

Conclusion

School improvement requires tremendous planning and effort with integral components such as high-quality professional development to enhance teacher skills and knowledge, reflective practices that support teacher autonomy, and student engagement as a way to improve student outcomes (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). There is an increasing recognition that the teacher is at the center of any attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and any attempts for school improvement and teacher effectiveness rely on professional development (Levine, 2006, Benade, 2015). School leaders must be able to provide support in ways that enable teachers to grow by using supervisory techniques that embrace and support reflective practices. Zepeda and Ponticell (2019) identify supervision as the center for improvement of instruction and describe supervision as the on-going process of engaging teachers in instructional dialogue for the

purpose of enhancing reflection about teaching and student learning to modify teaching practices aligned with increasing student achievement.

Reflective practices support ongoing professional growth and development for teachers, and yet the concept of reflective practices and the central role it plays in school improvement is not clearly and fully understood or acknowledged by school leaders. Identifying how to facilitate and support the use of reflective practices by teachers can lead to a more consistent understanding of the concept and its connections to professional growth and positive student outcomes, leading to school improvement. School leaders must build their capacity of supervisory practices to include teacher reflection (Pultorak & Young, 2008), specifically the professional development that is needed for teachers as they consider their impact on student learning.

The implications of reflective practices can be transformational for school systems and the students they serve. When the major focus of school leaders becomes providing supervision that supports the use of reflective practices, school improvement can be achieve through rich conversations with teachers about best instructional practices, student data, and curricular choices. Teachers should be empowered to identify and direct their own professional growth and development, and as such there continues to be a need for more research that will add to the knowledge of educators that focuses on student learning and success in school, effective teacher growth and development, and the separation of supervision and evaluation. Doing so will allow teachers to confidently explore and experiment with new practices, and to do so without worry of reprisal or consequence.

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