

**EVALUATING FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS:  
PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

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Dedication

To my mother and grandmother

Eleanor Munroe

and

Anne Munroe

You spent your lives loving me, helping me and teaching me to learn.

## Abstract

Principals are the main evaluators of beginning teachers. This study examines principals' perceptions of the policies, procedures, processes and instruments they employ in evaluating the competencies of first-year teachers. The study is based on data collected from interviews with 11 high school principals in two Canadian prairie urban school divisions. Results indicate that the principals in the sample are satisfied with the overall efficacy of the evaluation process, as well as the detailed evaluation instruments and timelines for evaluation used in their school divisions. One of the two divisions provides a mentoring program for new teachers, and the principals in that division view the program very favorably. On the other hand, the principals in this study also expressed concerns about several aspects of evaluation. Principals' concerns focused primarily on having too little time to spend observing and subsequently meeting with new teachers as part of the evaluation process.

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## Chapter 1. Background and Introduction

### *Impetus for the Study*

For the past eleven years, I have taught high school students in private Roman Catholic schools. During that time, I have been evaluated by several principals using very different models and styles of evaluation. For example, one principal evaluated teachers during only their first year of employment; another evaluated teachers over the course of a three-year induction process.

In the system in which I currently teach, a teacher's employment contract is renewed yearly and is dependent on the principal's informal and formal evaluations. Consequently, I have seen many teachers asked not to return the following year, based on informal observations, formal checklists, and anecdotal reports from the principal. In a system where there is no union protection, these evaluations become critical for career survival. Each private school seems to be its own entity with its own chain of authority and method of evaluation.

My experience in the private system caused me to wonder what the corresponding processes are in public schools. Because so many of my private school colleagues were dismissed for a variety of perceived inadequacies, which supposedly came to light through their annual evaluations, I began to wonder what the process of evaluation in public schools was like. Specifically, I became very interested in both the processes of evaluation of new teachers used by principals in public schools and, more importantly, in the way principals feel about the evaluation processes that they employ. That is, I became interested in principals' perceptions of the efficacy of the evaluation process and its instruments.

### *Introduction*

Effective evaluation of first-year teachers is a key factor in building an effective teaching staff, and there are many valid reasons for studying the evaluation process. At the macro level of a national perspective, as Middlewood and Cardno (2001) note, quality teaching and learning are central to the production of an educated workforce, which is directly tied to a country's economic prosperity. At the micro level of the local classroom students need and deserve effective teachers. Accordingly, as Stronge (2006) notes, "Given the pivotal role of teachers in improving educational outcomes for children, it follows that the enhancement of teacher quality should be the objective of all hiring, development, and evaluation activities within a school system" (p. 154).

If teacher quality is so crucial, then those assigned to evaluate teachers have a task and responsibility of great importance. This responsibility has traditionally fallen upon school principals. Despite their busy schedules and the demands of providing leadership for teaching staffs that are often large, they are required to observe and evaluate all of their new teachers. The results of a new teacher's evaluation can promote that teacher to tenure or end his or her teaching career. The principal's ultimate decision can also help to facilitate and encourage sound classroom instruction, or it can allow a marginally competent, perhaps even incompetent, teacher to nestle safely in a protected union environment.

### *The Research Question*

For all these reasons, the overall efficacy of policies, procedures, processes, and instruments employed in evaluating the competencies of new teachers warrants careful and continuing study. The following investigation may help to address this need. Chapter

2 begins with an overview of the research literature addressing the importance of evaluating new teachers; the consequences of evaluations; the difficulties, challenges, issues and concerns inherent in the enterprise; and the ultimate benefits to be reaped. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study. The study seeks to answer the following question: How do principals in selected Canadian high schools perceive the evaluation process that they employ in evaluating first-year teachers? The qualitative research methodology employed in the study is described in detail. The results of the investigation are reported in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 includes recommendations for enhancing and facilitating the evaluation of first-year teachers.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Administrators have a high degree of responsibility for making good hiring choices, providing support for new teachers, and ultimately evaluating their performance to ensure that the original hiring decisions were sound. Phillips (2002) warns that the initial hiring process is critical to the effectiveness of the teaching force, as it is difficult to reverse poor decisions once teachers have attained seniority and tenure. Whaley and Cox (2002) agree that time spent in hiring the best candidate will later be saved by not having to try to make the new teacher into something he or she is not. However, once the hiring decision is made, it is often the decision of the principal whether or not to continue to employ a teacher after his or her first year.

### *Failure to Meet Standards*

The ultimate decision not to continue employing a teacher is often the result of perceived incompetence. Bridges (1986) describes incompetence as a failure to maintain discipline, demonstrate mastery of one's subject, impart information well, treat students properly, and accept advice from one's superiors. Whaley and Cox (2002) summarize the definition of incompetence as "a lack of relevant content knowledge or necessary skills in such key areas as instruction and classroom management" (p. 189).

Carroll (1997) argues that incompetence is unacceptable in the teaching profession because education is so vital to the future of society. Accordingly, evaluation of teachers is required to eliminate those who do not belong in the profession. Clark (1993) believes in the philosophy of accountability in education. He criticizes the current evaluation process of teachers, suggesting that there are too many ineffective teachers in the system who are not performing to the standard of the job they were hired to do.

Wragg, Haynes, Wrag and Chamberlin (1999b) found that principals believe teacher recognition of problems is key to successfully addressing the problem of incompetence. In their study, struggling teachers who recognized a problem had a greater rate of improvement (63%) than those who denied that problems existed (38%). However, knowing how to identify and then ameliorate incompetence in teaching seems as elusive as identifying and facilitating effectiveness. Clark (1993) explains:

There are those teachers, educators, and members of the public who feel that the current methods used to evaluate teachers may be missing the mark. The chief concerns appear to be what actually defines an effective teacher, and then how can you accurately assess if the teacher is meeting this definition? On the same level, what if the teacher is below the expectations, is the teacher to be terminated or put on probation? (p. 3)

Czuboka (1985) cautions that terminating a teacher can often mean terminating the teacher's career. Such terminations are not only costly financially, but they also take a toll on the morale of the school and on those in charge of the termination. Unless there is a blatant incident that leads to termination, supervisory evaluations can often be seen as subjective in nature, and therefore they are not usually enough to lead to a teacher's firing. This might explain why, while suspensions or dismissals for non-compliance or discipline issues do happen, dismissal based on teaching performance is very rare (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1995; Tucker, 2001).

Research suggests that 5 to 15% of public school teachers in the United States perform at incompetent levels. However, the termination rate, including resignations, dismissals of tenured teachers and non-renewals of probationary teachers, is less than 1%

(Tucker, 2001). A study by Wragg, Haynes, Wrag, and Chamberlin (1999a) showed that incompetence cases generally last from one to seven or more years before they are resolved, and there is a great deal of concern about this length of time. If the teacher remains in front of a class during all or part of that period, the delay may not only damage students' attitudes and progress but also undermine the motivation of the entire school staff. Taking early action in identifying and dealing with cases of incompetence is one of the main suggestions of principals in the Torrington, Earnshaw, Marchington, and Ritchie study (2003).

Taking early action makes sense, as performance difficulties do not usually appear overnight (Whaley & Cox, 2002; Wragg et al., 1999b). Stronge (2006) notes that incompetence must be proven as a pattern of conduct. The evidence can come from "good classroom observations, reviews of portfolios, client surveys, student outcomes, and other related evidence of performance, documented over the period of time in question, as well as thorough summary evaluations" (p. 260). Bridges (1986) cautions that, "because there are no clear-cut standards or yardsticks for determining whether a teacher has failed to meet a particular criterion, supervisors must accumulate numerous examples of a teacher's shortcomings to demonstrate that a pattern of failure exists" (p. 5). Clark (1993) identifies another source of ineffective teaching, that is, certified teachers who were hired through a fault in the system. This sometimes occurs because, although as new teachers they may have lacked the qualities to be successful, these teachers nevertheless were hired on permanent contracts, after which the protection of tenure makes it very difficult to fire them.

Ideally, effective evaluation would catch incompetence early. As Bridges (1986) explains, “Recognizing that most of a teacher’s activities take place behind closed doors, administrators use a variety of means to detect the incompetent teacher: supervisor ratings; student, parent, and teacher complaints; student surveys; and student test results” (p. 7). In a study by Wragg et al. (1999b), union officers in the United Kingdom believed that 90% of cases of incompetence concerned classroom practice, and only 10% dealt with managerial issues; furthermore, these officers reported that new teachers, and those over 45 years of age with many years of experience, were the most likely to be accused of incompetence. Glickman (1981) explains that new teachers may be fearful and insecure because they are mostly concerned with proving their adequacy to others.

According to Torrington et al. (2003), the climate of teachers working completely independently with no interference and no support is changing to a climate of accountability. However, Glickman (1981) suggests that the teaching profession is still plagued with the history of the one-room schoolhouse. New teachers are expected to accomplish the same amount of work as veterans. Furthermore, teachers are isolated, psychologically overloaded, and work in a highly routinized environment. Glickman believes that all these factors lead to boredom and a lack of extrinsic motivation for improvement. While ineffective teaching might be thought to result from a lack of effort, Bridges (1986) finds that a lack of skill or ability is more often the cause of teachers’ difficulties in the classroom. Bridges argues that, “Conceivably, remediation is effective, but only at the early stages of a person’s teaching career when his/her teaching style is still malleable” (p. 14). However, due to a lack of skill, some supervisors fail to deal effectively with incompetent teachers early in the teachers’ careers, when their advice

could have been beneficial. Therefore, administrator error or neglect seems to contribute in part to failures to identify and ameliorate teacher incompetence.

Wragg et al. (1999b) found that teacher unions in the United Kingdom believe tracing the causes of incompetence to be useful. Factors such as health problems, marital difficulties, bureaucratic paper work and an unrealistic workload should be examined to avoid the ensuing stress that a charge of incompetence brings. The union officers also warned that almost every teacher could be labeled as incompetent in one area or another, and that principals often had too narrow a focus when evaluating a teacher's performance. Bridges (1986) notes, "In the absence of clear-cut standards for judging the competency of a teacher, comparative judgments inevitably creep into the evaluation process" (p. 6).

Danielson and McGreal (2000) suggest that some teachers are actually more skilled than the administrators who are evaluating them. They provide the example of a humanities-educated principal who missed errors in an observed chemistry class. Clearly the enterprise of evaluating the competence of teachers is fraught with difficulties.

### *Supervisory Challenges and Evaluation*

If accurate identification of both effective and incompetent teaching is to occur, many challenges related to supervision and evaluation must be overcome. Researchers agree that the process of evaluation, though riddled with flaws and difficulties, is a necessary one, as students especially depend on this system of accountability. Phillips (2002) observes:

A single elementary teacher can affect the learning of at least 25 students per year or approximately 875 students in a career. A secondary teacher influences

learning outcomes for a wider group of students, perhaps 175 learners a year or 6,125 young people in 35 years. (p. 73)

Yet evaluation is by no means an easy task. Milner (1991) explains that teaching cannot be measured objectively, as it has a subjective dimension that gives it creativity. Middlewood and Cardno (2001) note that the qualities of effective teachers, such as compassion and a sense of humour, although necessary, are incredibly difficult to assess; however, “Teachers are persons with emotions, aspirations, and need for self-esteem; and their success in their jobs will depend upon the extent to which these are successfully channeled” (p. 4). Williams (1992) found a void in the research comparing teachers and administrators’ views of what makes an effective teacher, especially at the secondary level; furthermore, their perceptions are not always the same. Phillips (2002) asserts that teacher evaluation is inconsistent in different districts and lacks the rigor of many other professional or technical vocation systems.

While expressing such concerns about evaluation, researchers not only investigate the problems but also offer recommendations for maximizing effectiveness in teaching. Whaley and Cox (2002) believe that the first part of a fair evaluation is a clear articulation of the job expectations; most teachers want to meet the expectations and a clear articulation prevents misunderstandings. WestEd (2000) concurs with the idea that an articulated teacher preparation and support system should extend from recruitment to retirement.

### *Concerns and Issues in the Evaluation of Teachers*

The fact that administrators lack available time to devote to evaluation appears to be a continuing problem. Sergiovanni (1992) argues that differentiated supervision would

allow the principal to focus on teachers who need it rather than performing ritualistic visits for the entire staff. Xu and Sinclair (2002) found that the principals in their study were frustrated because they lacked time for evaluations and because only one person had input into the process. These principals wanted to spend more time with their teachers, and the teachers wanted more frequent as opposed to annual visits to their classrooms. Xu and Sinclair also identified principals' lack of proficiency in specialty areas, such as music, as another obstacle to the monitoring of effective teaching. Stronge (2006) suggests using more than one evaluator, allocating more resources for evaluation and using multiple data sources. Whaley and Cox (2002) elaborate on the issue of time and suggest that principals avoid remediation except as a last resort.

Bridges (1986) cautions that, even when evaluators observe a teacher in the classroom, they may not see a representative sample of the teacher's behaviour. Stronge (2006) agrees, adding that the full scope of teacher responsibilities cannot be observed during a classroom visit. Carroll (1997) notes that often "evaluation is based on a few sporadic, unannounced visits to the classroom with no prior discussion with the teacher on what will be taught or any problems that teacher might be experiencing and need help solving" (p. 4). Furthermore, Clark (1993) warns that classroom dynamics are altered when evaluators are present. Elements such as curriculum and rules of behaviour only return to their former status following assessment. Teachers present a false image of their work as they prepare their classrooms for an evaluation. Even at the university level, one of the greatest challenges for university supervisors is the lack of spontaneity provided by the glimpses they get into the student teaching practicum (Sullivan, Mousley, & Gervasoni, 2000).

However, even if enough time is allowed for evaluation, teachers' perceptions of the process and of their evaluators can be detrimental to improving effectiveness in teaching. Glickman (1981) asserts that supervisors must convince teachers that their main goal is improving instruction, rather than judging the teacher according to some standard. Stronge (1991) warns that, if an evaluation system does not have a clear purpose, it will be meaningless. McBride and Skau (1995) add that teachers should feel as if they own the written observations and should be able to question the supervisor's findings. Carroll (1997) favours a clinical supervision model over an evaluation one, as "evaluation systems based on accountability produce negative feelings, lack of participation, and less likelihood of altered classroom behaviour" (p. 5). For Serpell and Bozeman (1999), "There is also considerable debate about whether induction should be used as a means of eliminating incompetent beginning teachers, given the fact that induction programs are by definition designed to assist, not assess" (p. 7). Darling-Hammond (1986) disagrees with the use of a checklist evaluation, which ignores human relation skills and measures more trivial ones.

Teachers can and do develop negative attitudes towards the evaluation process. McBride and Skau (1995) acknowledge that teachers often isolate themselves in fear, keeping problems to themselves, as they believe that supervision leads to summative assessment. Teachers also experience conflict when deciding whether or not to rely on the evaluator for assistance or to expect criticism (Carroll, 1997). Newton and Braithwaite (1988) acknowledge that teachers view evaluations as a method of bureaucratic control by administrators. However, Sclan (1994) explains that hierarchical evaluation methods can be changed to methods that support collegial interactions,

suggesting that it is the collegial comfort level that is in doubt, rather than the evaluative process.

The problem is exacerbated when there is lack of clarity about criteria. Loup, Garland, Ellett and Rugutt (1996) found that many of the 100 largest school districts in the United States were deficient in establishing performance standards. They also discovered that the results of teacher evaluations were often simply filed, and principals rarely acknowledged teachers' accomplishments.

Even after a definition of teaching effectiveness is established and the process of evaluation has begun, the question of the quality of the evaluator arises. As Colby, Bradshaw and Joyner (2002) state, "Evaluator competence requires the ability to make sound judgments about teaching, and the ability to make suggestions for improvement as necessary" (p. 7). However, Oppenheim (1993) found that the principal in his case study based his evidence for good teaching on his own practice. This could become troublesome, depending on the effectiveness of the principal's own teaching. Stronge (2006) asserts that, to be effective, principals need to be familiar with the research on effective teaching to help strengthen their teachers' practices.

Finally, it is not only new teachers whose effectiveness should be examined in a school. Glickman (1990) explains that, when teachers do not receive supportive supervision, they feel that their work is unimportant and occurs in a very isolated situation. Thus evaluation is a process that can support and help all teachers.

#### *Helping Teachers*

Stronge (2006) argues that "Good teachers don't just teach; rather, they think about what they plan to teach, they teach, and then they think about it again" (p. 17).

Self-reflection is important in increasing teacher effectiveness (Bennett, 1995; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Cousins, 1995; Delandshere, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Lofton, Hill, & Claudet, 1997; Shinkfield, 1994). Natriello (1984) suggests that, if the number of evaluations that a teacher faces increases, there will be an increase in the teacher's self-analysis and reflection, leading to an improvement in the teacher's effectiveness.

Although more time spent on evaluation may lead to higher levels of teacher effectiveness, the evaluation of most teachers consists of an administrator visiting a classroom a few times a year for a short period of time (Brandt, 1996; Haughey & Howard, 1996; McConney, 1995; Peterson, 1995, 2000).

Regardless of the quantity and quality of supervision, Bridges (1992) notes that principals may avoid mentioning problems to teachers to encourage them and avoid conflict. As Wragg et al. (1999a) show, this is not a recent phenomenon. Davis (1964) provides examples from 1907, when 90% of the teachers in Brooklyn were given marks of over 90%, while in Chicago 96% of teachers were graded high enough to entitle them to promotion.

Xu and Sinclair (2002) found that having only one principal as evaluator can lead to a conflict between the principal's dual role as leader of instructional improvement and as administrator. They name teacher evaluation as principals' least favourite activity and suggest that principals are not inspired to do a thorough job. Wragg et al. (1999b) explain that dealing with incompetence is an emotionally searing process in which both the teacher and the principal suffer stress and health issues. Often a teacher who is incompetent in one school may do well in another, or a teacher may be incompetent in one subject and proficient in another. Such inconsistencies lead Wragg et al. (1999b) to

caution that “One person’s feckless incompetent is another person’s misunderstood victim” (p. 34).

Clark (1993) advocates the idea of increasing student achievement by sharing and using teacher evaluation results for staff development. Sergiovanni (1992) expresses the hope that teaching will become a profession with differentiated supervision, because experienced teachers need feedback and support from students and colleagues, not from administrators.

### *Mentorship*

A growing trend in recent decades has been not to let teachers flounder on their own during their early career years. Serpell and Bozeman (1999) state:

The increase in state participation in induction has encouraged a more focused and critical attempt at setting standards for evaluating teacher effectiveness.

Furthermore, the lack of strong empirical data in this area of research has not affected the preponderance of mentoring programs and the strikingly large information base on mentoring that spans across a wide range of information mediums including the Internet. (p. 9)

Serpell and Bozeman continue to explain the focal shift from a managerial one in which induction is planned to help beginning teachers cope, to a pedagogical one in which encouraging excellence becomes the goal. They claim that greater new teacher effectiveness and retention as well as benefits for veteran teachers are attained through induction programs that provide emotional support, extended preparation and professional development.

Whaley and Cox (2002) agree that mentoring reduces the number of teachers who need remedial intervention, encourages teacher retention and improves the practice of the veteran teachers who provide mentoring. According to the National Commission of Teaching and America's Future (1996), research shows that teachers in their first years improve their effectiveness and are retained in the profession when they are involved in induction programs where they are systematically mentored. According to Phillips (2002), Cincinnati's Peer Assistance and Evaluation program prevented a significant number of underperforming new teachers from having their contracts renewed, helped a number of veteran teachers in need of help to improve, and encouraged the rest to either retire, resign or go on disability:

The AFT/NEA [American Federation of Teachers/National Education Association] believe that peer assistance programs help new and veteran teachers improve their teaching knowledge and skills. New teachers or struggling veterans are linked with consulting teachers who provide ongoing support through observing, modeling, sharing ideas and skills, and recommending materials for further study. (p. 78)

Peterson (2000) identifies reduced teacher isolation and encouragement of professional behaviour as the positive results of peer review.

The benefits of induction and professional development are not only for new teachers. As Whaley and Cox (2002) explain, school districts are realizing that veteran teachers who are suddenly reassigned to different subject or grade areas may need the help of colleagues as much as new teachers do. However, this type of peer collaboration may not always be effective. Issues related to age, culture, colleagues' negative

perceptions about marginal teachers and about the mentoring of a veteran teacher by another colleague in the same school may interfere.

### *Lifelong Learning*

Ideally, continued professional development would occur for each teacher from hiring to retirement. Phillips (2002) advocates continual learning on the job for teachers throughout their careers to increase teacher effectiveness and, in turn, student achievement. Sergiovanni (1992) agrees that continuous learning of new knowledge about teaching is necessary to improve instruction. Researchers are also considering incentives such as monetary rewards to encourage more effective teaching. While scholarships, bursaries and forgivable loans are sometimes offered in an attempt to recruit students, Phillips points out that few incentives are offered to working teachers throughout their 35-year careers, until they are encouraged to retire.

### *A Continuing Need to Study the Evaluation of Teachers*

The research suggests that many areas in education, including evaluation processes, need improvement to increase teacher effectiveness. Sergiovanni (1992) believes that the organization exerts a strong influence on teacher effectiveness. He suggests that principals should conduct daily informal observations over a period of time, and that structured times should be set aside for teachers to meet with principals to discuss concerns and exchange ideas.

Glickman (1981) suggests that through listening and observation administrators should diagnose teachers' level of cognitive ability and motivation as the first step of the evaluation process. Clark (1993) states:

The primary purpose of teacher evaluation must be to improve the educational system by means of identifying effective teachers, what they are doing, and how this can be taught to those teachers who are evaluated as being less than effective. Additionally, those teachers who are less than effective must take the opportunity to self-assess their weaknesses and seek the needed instruction to improve their craft. (p. 34)

Chow, King-por, Yeung and Kim Wan (2001) and Lofton et al. (1997) advocate the use of a fair appraisal system, including assessment data. However, collaborative, reflective conferences encourage the professional growth and learning of teachers and allow them to have a basis for constructive personal decisions. While it makes sense that effective evaluation may lead to more effective teaching, Stronge (2006) cautions that often direct evaluation research on teachers is ignored in favour of teacher effectiveness checklists filled in by administrators who have little meaningful contact with the students.

Carroll (1997) states that, unlike the traditional method of evaluations completed by a single administrator, “Effective clinical supervision can involve the building principal, another building administrator, a peer teacher, or another district faculty member” (p. 12). Carroll believes that what matters is not who the supervisor is, but the degree of collegiality that exists between that person and the teacher being assessed. Glickman (1981) argues that peer supervision changes the supervisor’s role to helping with minor problems and providing training, materials and encouragement for teachers. Carroll advocates for teachers’ self-analysis of their work, to overcome the challenge of supervisors’ inability to be present for every lesson. Glickman (1981) believes that peer supervision can be helpful, with stronger teachers matched with weaker ones. Chow et al.

(2001) found that “Senior teachers appraised by their principal had a stronger positive sense of the formative purpose of appraisal than teachers appraised by senior teachers. However, for summative purposes, teachers tended to prefer their principal to do the appraisal for them” (p. 10).

This move towards a more open system of communication and trust in evaluation led McBride and Skau (1995) to study teacher empowerment. They suggest that teachers who become leaders in their communities do so when caring exists and interdependence with others is created. Such leaders feel capable, strong and committed. When they are empowered, teachers are open to discussing their teaching, create environments that engage students, view learning as lifelong, and accept responsibility for their choices. Torrington et al. (2003) agree that job satisfaction and teacher effectiveness are linked. If schools are to retain strong teachers, issues such as stress and teacher morale must be addressed.

Lecuyer (1986) reveals that most Canadian teachers understand the need of their provincial government and the public to be reassured about the effectiveness of teaching in public classrooms. However, teachers are also concerned about the multiple purposes and applications of evaluation: professional growth, retention, promotion, demotion, and dismissal.

In summary, the research literature indicates that evaluation of new teachers is a major factor in ensuring a quality teaching force. High-quality teachers are necessary to provide effective instruction and encourage learning and success in a wide variety of students. Thus the policies, procedures, processes and instruments employed in evaluations of the competencies of teachers, and the perceptions of the evaluators

themselves, mainly principals, are valuable subjects for ongoing research. Such studies are necessary if schools are to continue improving not only teaching quality but also student learning. It is furthermore especially pertinent to pay particular attention to the evaluation of first-year teachers.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study is to document the perceptions of public high school principals of the teacher evaluation process for first-year teachers in two school divisions in Canada's prairie provinces. The development of the research instrument, data collection and data analysis are driven by the research question: How do principals in selected Canadian high schools perceive the evaluation process they employ for first-year teachers? Specifically, the study examines the principals' perceptions regarding policies and procedures, the evaluation process, instruments, results of the evaluation, communication with teachers being evaluated, overall efficacy, continuing evaluation and recommendations for improvements.

### *Method*

This is a qualitative study involving interviews and item analysis. The data are collected through individual interviews with eleven high school principals. The interviews are key informant ones, as the intent is not a statistical analysis of a large sample but interviews directed at respondents who have "particular experience or knowledge about the subject being discussed" (Anderson & Arseneault, 1998, p. 191).

From themes identified in the review of the literature, I created a list of open-ended questions to elicit principals' perceptions on evaluation (see Appendix A). These questions were developed with the help of my supervisor and thesis committee members, to elicit useful data from the principals regarding the research question and to eliminate as much interviewer bias as possible. As Anderson and Arseneault (1998) note, open-

ended questions help identify the respondents' priorities, allow them to communicate their ideas freely, and pose no threat as there is no correct answer.

Question 1, "What are the policies in place to guide you in the evaluation of first-year teachers?" was inspired by the research of Whaley and Cox (2002) and Loup et al. (1996). These authors explained the need for a clear purpose to be articulated before an effective teacher evaluation can take place. This question was meant to examine principals' perceptions of their divisional policies.

Question 2, "Have you experimented with other methods of evaluation?" was based on the suggestions of Stronge (2006) and Carroll (1997) that using more than one evaluator may improve the teacher evaluation process. This open-ended question was included to allow principals to articulate their independent evaluation decisions within their school divisions' existing policies.

Many concerns are noted in the literature concerning the procedures used for first-year teacher evaluation. For example, Stronge (2006) and Carroll (1997) express apprehension about classroom observations as the sole basis of teacher evaluation. Clark (1993) believes that having the evaluator present in the classroom compromises the gathering of the data. Darling-Hammond (1986) considers a simple checklist to be an inadequate instrument for data gathering in evaluation. Such deficiencies led me to ask Question 3, "Please describe the process you use to evaluate first-year teachers," and Question 5, "Please describe the instruments you use for the gathering of data." I hoped these would lead to principals' articulation of the process, the instruments, and their perceptions about the effectiveness of the process and instruments used in the evaluation of first-year teachers.

Xu and Sinclair (2002) and Sergiovanni (1992) discuss the challenge for principals that they do not have not enough available time to perform teacher evaluations effectively. Question 4, “How do you schedule time for evaluations?” was designed to be a non-biased question on the topic of time.

Middlewood and Cardno (2001), Williams (1992) and Milner (1991) discuss the subjective nature of teacher evaluation. They assert that many qualities of effective teachers are difficult to measure and that many differences exist among evaluators and their teachers as to what is considered effective teaching. Question 6, “On which of the teacher competencies do you spend the most time gathering data?” was designed to elicit data about which of the teacher traits principals perceive to be of highest priority in first-year teachers.

The wealth of research on teacher effectiveness versus teacher incompetence (e.g., Bridges, 1986; Carroll, 1997; Clark, 1993; Whaley & Cox, 2002) led to the generation of Question 7, “How do you make the decision to retain a first-year teacher?” and Question 8, “How do you make the decision to dismiss a first-year teacher?” These questions were designed to elicit data that might help to define the qualities of an effective teacher and the qualities of an incompetent teacher, according to the perceptions of the principals in this study.

Question 9, “How would you describe the communication with the teacher during the process of evaluation?” and question 10, “How do teachers respond to the evaluation process?” seek to examine the degree of communication between the principal and first-year teacher. Carroll (1997), McBride and Skau (1995) and Braithwaite (1988) all

advocate the importance of a relationship of trust between the person being evaluated and the evaluator.

Question 11, “What are the areas of strength in the evaluation process of first-year teachers?,” Question 12, “What are the areas that could be more effective in the evaluation process of first-year teachers?” and Question 16, “Do you have recommendations on how to improve the evaluation of first-year teachers?” were all chosen because of the expertise of the principals as my sample group. Their perceptions based on their evaluation experience provided data concerning the state of the evaluation process in Western Canadian high schools today. These questions are designed to elicit these principals’ perceptions of the existing strengths and any potential deficiencies in the evaluation process of first-year teachers.

Question 13, “Do you think teachers who have undergone your evaluation process have changed?” and Question 14, “If so, how have they changed?” were inspired by a conversation with a former superintendent of a school division in western Canada, who told me he had performed many teacher evaluations throughout his career. He reported that, in the years after they received his advice, very few of the teachers he observed actually changed. I wanted to investigate whether or not high school principals perceive change to be a goal of their evaluation process and also to see whether or not they observe in their first-year teachers any change that they attribute to the evaluation process.

The research literature on first-year teachers also recommends lifelong learning as imperative. For example, Phillips (2002) and Sergiovanni (1992) argue the need for

continual learning for teachers beyond their first years of employment. Consequently, Question 15 asks, “How do you do follow-up evaluations after the first year?”

I was aware of the mentorship program available in one of the two school divisions in the study. Based on the research of Whaley and Cox (2002), Serpell and Bozeman (1999), and the National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future (1996) on the importance of induction and mentoring programs, Question 17 asked the principals about their perceptions about existing programs, such as the mentorship one, or about programs that the principals would like to see implemented: “Do you believe that there are programs or policies which could be implemented for first-year teachers that would help them improve their evaluation results?” Question 18, “Is there anything at all you would like to add about any aspect of our conversation on the evaluation of first-year teachers?” ended the interview and allowed principals to mention any thoughts they had forgotten or any topics of value that they felt might have been missed.

I provided these probe questions to the principals in advance of the interview. The questions can be classified under Patton’s (1990) categories; there was a balance of knowledge, experience, and opinion questions. I collected demographic data on the principals’ gender, years of experience as high school principals, age, own area of subject expertise, the number of first-year teachers they had evaluated, and the results of those evaluations. I followed Maycut and Morehouse’s (1994) suggestion to leave this possibly intrusive information gathering to the end of the interview. I asked the questions as objectively as possible to avoid any sense of judgment as an interviewer. Moursund (1973) explains that, when the questions address attitudes, the respondent will have more

difficulty being accurate and honest due to being highly sensitive to being judged himself or herself by the interviewer.

I recorded the dialogues between the principals and myself. I transcribed the first interview to review it before continuing with the rest of the interviews. As Seidman (1991) explains, a researcher can use tapes to study interviewing technique and improve upon it. According to Seidman, this should provide added security for the participants, as they will be assured that a record of their interview is available and that “their words will be treated responsibly” (p. 87). I then transcribed all of the interviews for more accurate analysis and quoting.

### *Sample Selection*

I sampled principals who are currently working in high schools. This narrowed the focus of the interviews to issues relating to observations of teachers in a setting involving adolescent students. The sample selection also recognizes the possibility that high school principals’ methods of evaluation may differ from those of elementary school principals, because the former evaluate subject specialists while the latter evaluate generalists.

I chose two school divisions located in one of Canada’s prairie provinces from which to obtain data. Both are large divisions in the same urban location. This selection reduces differences in government regulations concerning teacher licensing and still provides variety to the sample, as it involves several high schools in two separately managed divisions. I received consent from the superintendents of these divisions (see Appendix B).

I assigned the fictitious names of River Valley and Henderson to label the two divisions. I then assigned letters from A to K to the principals to protect their anonymity. The River Valley school division consists of seven high schools that follow the standard provincial curriculum and two high schools that provide technical programs. For the purposes of this study, the principals of the two technical schools were not approached. Of the seven schools whose principals were interviewed, two are French Immersion schools, four are English schools, and one has both an English and a Partial French program. Four of the schools include Grades 9 through 12, two include Grades 10 through 12, and one includes Grades 7 through 12. The student populations range from 350 to 1,150, and the teaching and non-teaching staff number on average about 50.

Henderson school division has four high schools: two English and two English and French Immersion. Three schools include Grades 9 through 12, and one includes Grade 10 through 12. Their teaching and non-teaching staff numbers range from 60 to over 100.

Having gained consent from their divisional superintendents, I invited (see Appendix C) and subsequently interviewed the principals of these 11 schools. The sample consists of eight males and three females, ranging in age from 42 to 59.

### *Sample Delimitations*

I chose to work exclusively with principals because, by nature of their positions, they have years of both teaching and administrative experience. Their feedback on evaluation would have more depth than might the perceptions of first-year teachers. Finding a significant homogenous sample of first-year high school teachers would also have been less likely than finding high school principals. Principals, despite their busy

schedules, are more readily accessible during the school day than are teachers. Principals who are secure in their jobs are also more likely to share their opinions readily with an unknown researcher, compared to first-year teachers whose tenure is still at stake.

### *Procedure*

#### *Data Collection*

I telephoned and e-mailed each high school principal in the two school divisions to invite him or her to participate in the study. In these communications, I introduced myself and the purpose of the study in order to encourage their participation and protect their anonymity. I provided each principal with a copy of the probe questions (see Appendix A) in advance of the interview.

I interviewed all of the principals from the 11 eligible schools. I offered the principals complete freedom in choosing the time and location of our approximately 45 minute interview and informed that the conversation was to be recorded only for the purpose of the study. I scheduled the interviews as closely together as possible to limit variables such as time of school year and to allow for the data to be fresh in my recollection. The first interview occurred May 6, 2008, and the last June, 8, 2008.

#### *Data Analysis*

After reading the transcriptions of the interviews, I used Microsoft Word to separate the data into the following categories based on the probe questions: policies and procedures, evaluation process, instruments, results of the evaluation, communication with teachers, overall efficacy, continuing evaluation, recommendations, and other. Once I sorted the data into sections, I tallied the number of principals in agreement with each item. I was also able to note the number of principals who did not respond to a question.

Next I examined these results in the context of the literature review. I followed Seidman's (1991) recommendation about separating the interview and in-depth data analysis as much as possible. Seidman suggests trying to "minimize imposing on the generative process of the interviews what I think I have learned from other participants" (p. 86). As I read through each transcript, I highlighted notable statements that most clearly illustrated the principals' opinions. As Anderson and Arsenault (1998) recommend with key-informant interviews, I used "direct quotes to illustrate the findings" (p. 188).

### *Limitations*

As noted, there are differences from division to division and from province to province in evaluation protocols and teacher licensing requirements. Furthermore, the fact that I am teaching full time, the reality that the interviews must be conducted during the school term, and the very great difficulties inherent in gaining permission and access to interview school principal restricted the sample pool I could reasonably draw upon to a convenience sample. Accordingly, the results of this study, although valuable for the reasons already noted, cannot be generalized without extreme caution.

### *Ethical Considerations*

I received permission from the Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge to conduct the study. In requesting permission, I considered such ethical issues as the importance of the anonymity of the principals in the study. Their names and the names of their school divisions have been disguised, so that they could speak freely during the interview.

## Chapter 4. Results

The results of this study are outlined below. The order of the reporting follows the framework and progression of the nine categories into which the probe questions were divided: policies and procedures, evaluation process, instruments, results of the evaluation, communication with teachers, overall efficacy, continuing evaluation, recommendations, and other (see Appendix A). In each category, the responses to the probes are reported in the order in which the questions were asked.

This method of reporting is employed because the nine categories and their constituent probe questions were designed to guide the interview in a logical progression. In documenting principals' answers to each probe question, the results are presented in an order based on the degree of consensus, from greatest to least, among the responses offered. Where appropriate for clarification, ease of reference or illustration, summative tables are provided.

### *Policies and Procedures*

#### *Policies*

Comprehensive policy manuals exist for both the River Valley and Henderson school divisions. Therein, detailed attention is devoted to the evaluation of teachers at all stages of their careers. Before the respective policies of the two districts are outlined, it should be noted that the two sets of documents use different terminology. First, both divisions use the term "evaluation." They also use the term "supervision," specifically in terms of "intensive supervision," which is the step taken for teachers who are not meeting the expectations of the basic teacher evaluation process. For consistency in reporting the results of this investigation, I will use the terms "evaluation" and "intensive evaluation."

River Valley division's current policy manual contains a section titled Supervision of Professional Staff: Teacher Evaluation. It refers to three appendices: Appendix A: Indicators of Professional Practice; Appendix B: Evaluation Guidelines, Formal Observation Report Template, and Summative Report Template; and Appendix C: Professional Growth Plan Guidelines and Professional Growth Plan Template.

The River Valley policy document outlines the process of supervision for growth, which includes teachers who are new to the division. It also outlines the steps required for intensive supervision. Both are founded on the Indicators of Professional Practice, a list of 19 expectations under four general categories. The general headings are the following: practice to develop and support a safe and positive learning environment, practice to develop and implement an effective instructional process, practice to maintain professional relationships, and practice to achieve professional development and contribute leadership capacity.

The River Valley document mentions specific dates as required deadlines. Informal observations for the purposes of evaluation must be completed by October 15. In addition, one formal observation must be completed by October 31. This includes both a pre-conference and a post-conference meeting with the principal. March 1 is the deadline for two formal observations, and March 15 for the summative report. Final copies of these are provided to the teacher and then filed at the Board Office. River Valley division also requires several groups of teachers to undergo this process: non-tenured teachers, tenured teachers who are new to the division, teachers who initiate requests for evaluation, teachers who require administrative support to develop and implement a professional growth plan, and teachers who require updated evaluations

according to the divisional three-year cycle. If a teacher requests a performance evaluation, this evaluation is due by May 31. If a December termination is being considered, two formal observations and a summative report are due by November 15. Term teachers receive a summary evaluation report, and one formal evaluation is required for term teachers who are employed for more than four months.

The River Valley document includes policy for intensive supervision. Intensive supervision begins with consultation between the principal and the superintendent, then continues with notice to the teacher, appointment of a second evaluation, at least three formal evaluations, informal observations and a summative report.

Current policies guiding evaluation in the Henderson division are contained in a Professional Growth Handbook. The Handbook's chapters include Professional Growth, Performance Assessment, and Intensive Supervision and Support. The chapter on Performance Assessment includes a list of professional standards which comprise the division's description of teaching quality: creating and maintaining an effective learning environment, curriculum and program planning and implementation, engaging and supporting all students in learning, assessing student learning, interpersonal relationships, and professional involvement.

The chapter on Performance Assessment includes a flow chart description of the assessment cycle, which begins with a pre-conference and continues with a professional planning conversation with an administrator, formal and informal observations, post-observation professional conversations, and formative and summative performance reports. Multiple forms are provided in the Henderson policy manual, including a six-page professional standards self-assessment inventory checklist, a formative report form

and a summative report form. The report forms list the six previously mentioned professional standards and state that copies of the forms are to be distributed to the educator, the administrator and the superintendent's office.

The chapter on Intensive Supervision and Support is intended for teachers whose performance is not meeting the specified professional standards. The process, according to the Handbook, begins with notification of the teacher and superintendent and continues with an observation conference, observations, post-observation conference and reporting, interim evaluation and summative evaluation. This chapter provides forms, including an Intensive Supervision and Support Action Plan, a Post Observation Summary, an Interim Evaluation Support and a Summative Report.

As noted, the policy manuals for both the River Valley and Henderson school divisions address the evaluation of teachers at all stages of their careers. Their responses to the probe, "What are the policies in place to guide you in the evaluation of first-year teachers?" clearly indicated that all ( $n = 11$ ) principals were well aware of their districts' policies. Indeed, several offered copies of the policy manuals during their interviews. In reference to the evaluation of first-year teachers, 64% ( $n = 7$ ) of the principals referred to the summative reports they write for the board office, as well as the need to meet mandatory deadlines for submitting the reports. What is most striking about the principals' responses to this first question is that they quickly steered my inquiry about policy toward a discussion of the processes they employ and follow when evaluating first-year teachers, as will be reported in the next major section, Evaluation Process.

### *Experimentation*

The principals were next asked if they had experimented with other methods of evaluation. Sixty-four percent ( $n = 7$ ) replied that they had, while 27% ( $n = 3$ ) said they had not. Nine percent ( $n = 1$ ) did not respond directly to this question. Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) of the principals referred to the importance of the policy and the need to follow procedure, whether or not they experiment outside of the board office's requirements. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) admitted their lack of confidence in evaluating. In terms of how they experiment, only 9 % ( $n = 1$ ) of the principals named the following methods as examples of experimentation: portfolios, mentoring, action research, self-evaluation, peer coaching, professional reading, professional growth, anecdotal reporting or tearing up poor evaluations and allowing completely new observations.

### *Evaluation Process*

Next principals were asked to describe the processes they use to evaluate first-year teachers. Their responses are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Processes Used by Principals in the Evaluation of New Teachers

Process	% of Principals	Number of Principals
Use formal evaluation	100	11
Use pre-conferencing	82	9
Use post-conferencing	82	9
Use informal visits	64	7
Use summative reports	55	6
Share duties with vice principal	45	5
Name hiring choices as critical	36	4
Consult mentors/department heads	27	3
Request lesson plans	18	2
Mention clear communication	18	2
Require formal self-reflection	9	1
Make extra-curricular observations	9	1

### *Scheduling*

When asked how they schedule time for evaluations, 64% ( $n = 7$ ) of the principals explained that they allow teachers to settle into their classes in the first few weeks of September before beginning any formal observations. Forty-five percent ( $n = 5$ ) reported allowing teachers to choose the classes they would like evaluated, and 18% ( $n = 2$ ) stated that it was important to give teachers time to plan for the visits in order to avoid surprises. The idea that teachers should be comfortable with the scheduling was mentioned by 55% ( $n = 6$ ) of principals. Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) report seeking to avoid observing the

perfectly planned showpiece lesson, in favour of evaluating a regular class. One principal mentioned trying to observe an entire unit from planning to introduction to assessment to see how the teacher executes the entire topic. Another reported meeting with new teachers initially as a group to discuss evaluation procedures so as to be less intimidating.

### *Instruments*

The 11 principals were asked what instruments they use to gather data for first-year teacher evaluation. Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) explained that they ask first-year teachers what they would like examined during the observation; thus these teachers have some input into the instruments chosen. Forty-five percent of the principals ( $n = 5$ ) described using a template that includes a list of expected competencies. Thirty-six percent ( $n = 4$ ) reported using a chart form to keep track of questioning patterns or time on task. Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) stated that they simply keep good anecdotal notes. Only one principal mentioned either analyzing the lesson plan, asking the students in class for feedback, or requesting a self-reflection from the teacher.

### *Competencies*

The principals were asked, “On which of the teacher competencies do you spend the most time gathering data?” Their answers are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Teacher Competencies Which Principals Spend the Most Time Evaluating

Important Teacher Competencies	% of Principals	Number of Principals
Student/teacher relationship	82	9
Learning taking place in class	82	9
Classroom management	55	6
Assessment	45	5
A safe environment	36	4
Extra-curricular involvement	27	3
Professional development	18	2
Leadership	18	1
Collegial relationships	18	1
Knowledge of discipline	18	1

### *Results of the Evaluation*

#### *Retention*

Principals were asked, “How do you make the decision to retain a first-year teacher?” Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) explained that they felt lucky in their hiring choices. Another 18% ( $n = 2$ ) clarified that usually teachers under permanent contracts are retained. Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) listed a variety of qualities that they look for in the teachers to be retained: a positive relationship with students, openness to recommendations, passion, caring, good class management and effective instruction. Of these, a positive relationship with students received the most consensus at 27% ( $n = 3$ ).

Furthermore, 27% ( $n = 3$ ) expressed hope that teachers who are less than perfect can learn and improve, thereby avoiding dismissal.

### *Dismissal*

Table 3 illustrates the principals' responses to the question, "How do you make the decision to dismiss a first-year teacher?"

Table 3. Principals' Perceptions of Teacher Dismissals

Responses	% of Principals	Number of Principals
Offered negative qualities which could lead to teacher dismissal	73	8
These negative qualities include:		
Inability to change	45	5
Poor instruction	36	4
Poor student relationships	36	4
Poor classroom management	27	3
Stated policies are clear and mandatory	64	7
Mentioned seeking superintendent help	36	4
Directly dismissed a teacher	36	4
Never dismissed a teacher	27	3
Recommended December dismissals	27	3

### *Communication With Teachers*

The principals were asked first how they would describe their communication with the teachers during the process, and then how the teachers respond to the evaluation process. Overall, the principals used positive words such as “healthy,” “open,” “transparent,” and “supportive” to describe the communication between administrator and teacher during the process. All of the 11 principals acknowledged a need to reduce the anxiety of new teachers throughout the evaluation process. Several recognized that, while teachers do not particularly like being evaluated, they do appreciate the feedback. Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals explained that teachers want to hear that they are doing a good job but that some teachers are uncomfortable being critiqued. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals noted that, as administrators, they have a high degree of influence over how threatening or non-threatening the evaluation process appears to teachers. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals described their approach as business-like or professional during the formal evaluations. One repeated that communication is the single most important part of the evaluation process.

### *Overall Efficacy*

#### *Strengths*

Principals were asked to name the areas of strength in the evaluation process of first-year teachers. Their answers were scattered over several areas. Forty-five percent ( $n = 5$ ) mentioned the effectiveness of the evaluation tool used. Four of these five principals were from River Valley school division, where they use a list of teaching competencies as an evaluation instrument. Thirty-six percent ( $n = 4$ ) of the principals appreciated that the policy of their school division forces them to visit classes and to make time in their

schedules for teacher observation. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) named as strengths the self-reflective nature of the process for teachers, the mentorship program, transparency, conversations or the informal visits. Only one principal identified accountability as a strength of evaluation.

### *Weaknesses*

A follow-up question to that concerning areas of strength asked about areas that could be more effective in the evaluation process of first-year teachers. Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals chose not to identify any areas of weakness in the process, while only one principal each identified one of the following areas: the number of informal observations required by principals could be increased; the process could be less formalized; there could be more resources available to principals trying to help their new teachers; and the length of time a term teacher can be employed could be lengthened. The issue of time was the most frequently raised in response to this question.

Of the weaknesses in the evaluation process mentioned by principals, the lack of time they were able to spend observing teachers' classes received the most consensus. Sixty-four percent ( $n = 7$ ) reported that they do not perform as many observations as they should because of the busy nature of their positions and schools. One principal described the school as high risk and requiring a large amount of administrator time dealing directly with student issues. The principals' explanations for their time pressure varied. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) attributed it to being rushed in the spring. One principal lamented the extra time that working with struggling teachers absorbs, compared with effective teachers. Another stated that the professional growth expectations are difficult to manage. One principal felt that pre- and post-conferences are difficult to schedule, while another

blamed the formal nature of the evaluations and subsequent reports. One principal gave a very negative self-description when discussing the issue of time and evaluation.

### *Continuing Evaluation*

#### *Change*

The issue of change was addressed by asking principals, “Do you think teachers who have undergone your evaluation process have changed and if so, how have they changed?” The responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Principals’ Observed Change in New Teachers

Principal Behaviours	% of Principals	Number of Principals
Observe change in new teachers	100	11
Believe their authority evokes change	27	3
Are unsure if evaluation causes change	18	2
Believe some teachers do not change	18	2
Observe improvement of teachers in:		
Class management	27	3
Instruction	27	3
Relationships with students	18	2
Demeanour	9	1
Use of French language	9	1
Professional development	9	1
Level of confidence	9	1

### *Follow-Up*

Principals were asked how they perform follow-up evaluations after teachers' first year. Eighty-two percent ( $n = 9$ ) referred to their division's professional growth model. The River Valley division principals explained that a new professional growth model was introduced at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, whereby all teachers cycle through, creating a professional growth plan and meeting with administrators once every three years after the first year of probation. The Henderson school division principals described a yearly professional growth plan that is created by teachers and discussed with administrators but that does not contain any formal assessment after the first year. Thirty-six percent ( $n = 4$ ) of the principals expressed concerns about the time required to follow up with tenured teachers. Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) described the follow-up professional growth model as being a less intense process than that experienced by first-year teachers, and 18% ( $n = 2$ ) clarified that classroom observations at this stage are optional. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) referred to a small percentage of teachers who are placed on direct supervision and therefore face the risk of dismissal.

### *Recommendations*

Principals were asked, "Do you have recommendations on how to improve the evaluation of first-year teachers?" Their recommendations are noted in Table 5.

Table 5. Principals' Recommendations for Improvement of the Evaluation Process

Recommendations	% of Principals	Number of Principals
Offered recommendations	82	9
Were completely satisfied	18	2
Mentioned supportive nature of process	55	6
Recommended the following:		
A two-year probation period	45	5
A mentorship program	18	2
Professional development for principals in evaluation	9	1
Multiple evaluators	9	1
A wider range of data instruments	9	1
Including student service faculty in modeling lessons	9	1
Renaming evaluation to something more positive	9	1

### *Hiring of Teachers*

Although it was not directly addressed in the probe questions, the topic of hiring emerged as an important initial step in the evaluation process for some principals. One principal explained that the hiring decision is critical because the number of permanent positions is limited. Once a teacher is hired for two consecutive term positions in the school division, if the teacher is hired a third time the position becomes permanent. Two

concerns raised include the pressure to hire effectively, not only for the school but for the division, and the fact that occasionally a principal cannot hire the best candidate for the job because that person would then become a permanent hire.

Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals identified that they have observed an increasing number of teachers hired in recent years. They mentioned especially the need for more maternity leave replacements. One principal expressed frustration with the lack of help received from human resources in screening the multitude of applicants. This principal had just spent an entire weekend filtering applications and interviewing. Overall, the principals were satisfied with their own hiring choices and found that they had the most difficulty with teachers they had inherited from other administrators or through divisional transfers.

### *Deficiencies*

Forty-five percent ( $n = 5$ ) of the principals cited a lack of knowledge about assessment as a major deficiency in new teachers. Their school divisions have been researching and implementing current assessment techniques, and according to these principals, student teachers and new teachers are not up to date on the new research. The principals blame this situation on the universities, since they feel that student teachers are not adequately prepared for the types of assessment they will undergo, especially the students of one of the three feeding universities. Another principal, while not mentioning assessment specifically, identified a lack of professional development and interest in new research as an area of deficiency in new teachers.

Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 5$ ) of principals recognized as an issue the increasing need for knowledge about differentiated learning. Poor classroom management, lack of

rapport with students, sloth-like behavior of student teachers, and teachers' attempting to run a business in addition to teaching were problems each named by only one principal.

### *Mentorship*

The principals were asked, "Do you believe that there are programs or policies which could be implemented for first-year teachers that would help them improve their evaluation results?" The River Valley school division has a formal mentorship program, while the Henderson school division manages its first-year teacher induction on an individual school basis rather than a divisional one. The River Valley mentorship program received favourable comments from 100% ( $n = 7$ ) of its high school principals, who used words such as "wonderful," "excellent" and "powerful" to praise it. These principals described the program as run by three master teachers who are assigned to meet with first-year teachers early in the year, complete classroom observations, provide suggestions and facilitate a series of workshops throughout the year. Each new teacher is assigned to one of the three mentors, one for French Immersion teachers and two for teachers in the English program. Seventy-one percent of the River Valley principals ( $n = 5$ ) explained that mentorship is non-evaluative and is therefore designed as more of a teaching tool. Forty-three percent ( $n = 3$ ) were thankful that the program relieves some of the stress from the principal's role. Twenty-nine percent ( $n = 2$ ) wished for the inclusion of term and part-time teachers in the mentorship program, despite its limited resources.

Sixty-four percent ( $n = 7$ ) of the principals overall described pairing their new teachers with other teachers in the school in a buddy system, for guidance and support outside of a formal mentorship program. Fifty percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals of the Henderson division, which has no formal mentorship program, expressed a desire to start

such a program. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) reported that they consult with their department heads or the new teachers' buddies when creating teacher evaluations.

The final question was "Is there anything at all you would like to add about any aspect of our conversation on the evaluation of first-year teachers?" The principals interpreted this question as a formal close to the interview. They replied briefly, wishing me well and expressing interest in reading the results of the study.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

The central investigative question of this study is the following: How do principals in selected Canadian high schools perceive the evaluation process that they employ for first-year teachers? Remarkably, 100 percent ( $n = 11$ ) of the principals in both urban school divisions agreed to participate in this study and generously shared their perceptions on various elements concerning their experience of new teacher evaluation.

### *Policies and Procedures*

#### *Policies*

The first element was the area of policies and procedures. Both divisions have policy manuals that have been developed within the last few years and outline policies, procedures and timelines for the evaluation of new teachers by principals. The River Valley principals used the word “clear” most often to describe the division’s policies regarding the evaluation of first-year teachers.

The principals recognized the existence of the policy manuals and in some cases offered the researcher a copy. For example, Principal C commented, “We actually have divisional policy that speaks specifically to supervision of professional staff, not only first-year teachers, but there are very clear expectations, guidelines, dates and time frames for first-year, for beginning teachers.” Sixty-four percent ( $n = 7$ ) of the principals mentioned the summative reports they write for the board office.

The principals were all familiar with the importance of their policy manuals and, although they could not necessarily remember the exact evaluation deadlines, they reported that they use their manuals each year for the necessary evaluation forms.

The actual dates as stated by the River Valley division are October 15 for initial informal observations; October 31 for at least one formal observation and an initial report completed based on formal and informal observations; March 1 for at least two formal observations; March 15 for a summative report defining a recommendation of tenure; October 15 for the submission of a Professional Growth Plan for teachers who are new to the division or are due for their three-year cycle evaluations; November 15 for the signing of the growth plan for teachers on the three-year cycle; and May 31 for the delivery of a summative report for all teachers in the third year of their evaluation. There seems to be a variance in the months that principals find important for deadlines, and a few principals were uncertain of the actual dates. Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) named April, 36% ( $n = 4$ ) named October, and 18% ( $n = 2$ ) named May as important report deadlines. Only one principal named either January, February, March or November. The principals noted their need to refer to their manuals each year to refresh their memories as to deadlines.

### *Procedures*

The initial discussion with the principals about policies led to answers relating to procedures as well. Chow et al. (2001) and Lofton et al. (1997) advocate the use of a fair appraisal system, including assessment data and collaborative, reflective conferences to encourage teachers' professional growth and learning and to allow them to have a basis for constructive personal decisions. Such recommendations led to the inclusion in this study of a question about current procedures followed in the evaluation of first-year teachers. As is shown in Table 1, in response, 100% ( $n = 11$ ) of the principals stated that they conduct formal observations, which range from two to as many as eight visits per year, with the majority being two or three visits a year.

Eighty-two percent ( $n = 9$ ) of the principals talked about pre-conferencing. Another 82% ( $n = 9$ ) mentioned having post-conference meetings, and 64% ( $n = 7$ ) discussed making informal visits. Sergiovanni (1992) suggests that informal observations be made by the principal for a period every day and that there be structured times for teachers to meet with principals to discuss concerns and exchange ideas. While this suggestion seems unrealistic in terms of time, Principal D seemed to agree with Sergiovanni's philosophy of increased communication. This principal explained that what is important for first-year teachers is ensuring that, "You're always looking out for them, always available to them, checking in with them on a regular basis to make sure that things are going well and problems aren't growing and they're not knowing how to deal with them."

Early communication of the process to teachers is important to 36% ( $n = 4$ ) of these principals, who described the need for either effective hiring or an early meeting in August to outline evaluation procedures with new teachers. Principal B explained:

[The administrator should] always talk to the teacher about what you see so that by the time you're going to the formal process, I should know already what kind of quality teacher I have and know what kind of areas the teacher needs support in. I don't want to wait until the formal evaluation in October to help the teacher with classroom management because then it's too late.

As opposed to the traditional method of evaluations completed by one administrator, Carroll (1997) believes that effective clinical supervision can involve multiple people, such as other administrators, teachers or district faculty members. She believes that it is not who the supervisor is but the degree of collegiality that exists

between that person and the teacher being assessed that is important. Likely motivated by practical matters of time rather than Carroll's philosophy, 45% of principals ( $n = 5$ ) reported sharing the observation and evaluation duties with their vice-principals. This seems to be a collaborative process that is divided fairly according to the number of new teachers and the vice principals' assigned administration allocation. Principal F explained:

For first-year teachers, we would look at the load, about how many people we would have to do, what the subject area is, who would feel more comfortable for whatever reason to evaluate that individual so first we would determine which of the three administrators would do the evaluation.

Other elements that the principals identified as being important to the procedure include mentors or other teachers, named by 27% ( $n = 3$ ); clear communication with the teacher, named by 18% ( $n = 2$ ); and a lesson plan requested or discussed before the observation, named by another 18% ( $n = 2$ ). Principal B explained the reasoning behind the lesson plan:

I feel the formality of a written lesson plan is a message that first-year teachers need to get clearly. It's also about due process. I have been in the past challenged on my decision and so as to be very clear with the process, this takes away any of the guesswork.

Only one principal suggested requiring a self-reflection from the teacher or observing the teacher during extracurricular activities as part of the evaluation process.

The principals spoke about procedure with a mix of concern for the official requirements, such as a summative report and various deadlines, and concern for the

fairness of the process for teachers, such as giving fair warning, openly discussing positive and negative feedback and providing teachers with genuine care and as much time as possible. A summation by Principal E of the formal evaluation illustrates the intent of this cohort of principals:

It's all part of taking a variety of snapshots, sharing my perceptions and my understandings of what those snapshots say to me, making adjustments if necessary as a result of dialogue and developing a sense of comfort that by the time I make a final statement I believe that what I say is accurate.

### *Experimentation*

The principals were asked if they have experimented with other methods of evaluation. Sixty-four percent ( $n = 7$ ) replied they had, while 27% ( $n = 3$ ) said they had not. Principal G, in describing past experimentation, reported leaving the method of evaluation up to the teaching staff: “[I said] ‘You’re very competent, conscientious professionals. What would be useful for you to learn and grow professionally?’ So it really pushed some of them out of the comfort zone.” Principal D fondly remembered a less formal time when peer coaching was possible and colleagues would meet in subject-specific groups to discuss lesson plans and books, as part of their evaluation.

There appears to be a conflict for principals between meeting the demands of the policy and conducting effective and individually tailored evaluations. Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) of the principals referred to the importance of the policy and the need to follow procedure, whether or not they experiment outside of the board office’s requirements. Principal C stated that it is “very important that we stick to the guidelines and let the process be clean so that, should there be any question, it doesn’t come back to me or the

principal as a question of process not being respected.” However, not all of their methods were exactly the same, as Principal G explained:

The report in the end would still have to fit the divisional requirements but there wasn't a need [for clinical evaluation] because I was in the class enough formally to see what they were doing, what they were about that we didn't waste our time doing the standard classroom observation, pre-conference, post-conference.

The most avant-gard seemed to be Principal K, whose philosophy contradicts that of some colleagues. While some request a formal lesson plan and conduct a controlled clinical evaluation, Principal K takes a different approach:

I don't think that's real. Not even for first-year teachers. You know I don't want them wasting time writing up the perfect lesson plan and trotting it out. It's the canned lesson. I hate those things...I don't want to see a lesson plan. If I can't figure out what your objective of the lesson is within the first three minutes that I'm in there, the kids won't either.

Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals admitted their lack of confidence in evaluating. Stronge (2006) asserts that, to be effective, principals need to be familiar with the research on effective teaching to strengthen their teachers' practices. Principal H openly described weakness as an evaluator in his early years in administration: “I experimented with lots of evaluation techniques in the beginning of my administration career because I knew nothing... so my first attempts at evaluation were, in honesty, laughable and certainly I don't think very helpful.”

In terms of how they experiment with evaluation, only one principal named each of the following methods as examples of experimentation: portfolios, mentoring, action

research, self-evaluation, professional growth or ripping up a poor evaluation and conducting a new observation. The last of these was the idea of Principal K, who asserted:

Every single one of us has had a lesson or ten or twenty blow up in our faces. You planned it, you did it, you did everything and something goes wrong that you couldn't have predicted to save your soul and here I am sitting at the back and you just want the floor to open up and you fall through it or all your kids fall through it... If everyone was evaluated on our worst lesson, none of us would be teaching.

This more flexible approach seems to be a feature of principals who are experienced in their administration roles and have had lengthy teaching careers; consequently they express empathy for those who are beginning the challenging profession.

### *Evaluation Process*

#### *Scheduling*

In terms of scheduling evaluations, 55% ( $n = 6$ ) of the principals expressed concern that their teachers should feel comfortable with the courses and times chosen for the formal evaluations. The literature warns that often evaluation is accomplished through unannounced class observations with no pre-conferencing on the lesson or on any problems the teacher might need help solving (Carroll 1997). Consequently, a more callous response was expected from these principals. Instead, 64% ( $n = 7$ ) displayed the courtesy of not entering teachers' classroom during the first few weeks of school for a formal evaluation, as doing so would be unfair. Principal F reported avoiding evaluation "too early in the semester, to give them a chance to get their feet wet, to get to know the kids, and establish a rapport and set routines." McBride and Skau (1995) suggest that

teachers who become leaders in their communities do so when caring exists and interdependence with others is created.

Torrington et al. (2003) maintain that job satisfaction and teacher effectiveness are linked. In order to retain strong teachers, issues such as stress and teacher morale need to be addressed. Principal E agreed:

I try not to make it stressful because it just distorts the results, so I really try and develop a sense of trust and have an ongoing dialogue, and part of that is to allow the teacher a lot of decision making as to when and under what conditions I do any observation and we have any conversation.

Hence, 45% ( $n = 5$ ) of principals said that they allow teachers to choose the lessons they would like them to observe. A different 18% ( $n = 2$ ) agreed that avoiding surprises and allowing teachers to plan for the observations is fair. Given the hectic nature of the principals' schedules, this decision seems all the more remarkable. Even though there are divisional deadlines for submitting evaluation results, the humanity of the process in terms of scheduling seems to be intact.

Principals' sense of empathy for their teachers may result from having undergone fairly rigorous evaluations themselves and not wanting to inflict the same experience on their staff. Oppenheim (1993) found that the principal he studied based his evidence for good teaching on his own practice. Principal G extends this to the position of administrator: "I remember, as a beginning teacher, I didn't want anyone in my classroom in the month of September." Principal C meets initially in a group setting with the teachers when introducing the topic of evaluation to avoid intimidation at the start of the school year.

The literature suggests that there is a possible negative influence when teachers know their evaluation dates in advance, as they are able to concoct an unnatural lesson that is not an accurate example of their regular teaching. Bridges (1986) cautions that, even when evaluators observe a teacher in the classroom, they may not see a representative sample of the teacher's behaviour. However, only 27% ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals mentioned this as an observation. Principal I stated, "As I tell people, it's day to day stuff. You don't have to create this big performance." Principal D acknowledged that students are aware of the unnatural formal observation: "They're not necessarily acting the way they would on any given day." Principal K is proactive in avoiding this problem:

I let them choose, and then I pick the informals from something that they didn't have me choose. It's interesting. They will often pick their very best class, because they'll sit there quietly while they do their showpiece lesson. I find that sometimes better evaluations or better observations on their teaching practice and their interaction with kids is when it's a less than stellar class, because then you really see how they do handle classroom management.

### *Instruments*

The principals were asked what instruments they use in evaluation. Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) explained that they ask first-year teachers what they would like examined during the observation. Therefore, the teachers have some input into the instruments chosen. Forty-five percent ( $n = 5$ ) of the principals described using a template that includes a list of expected competencies. Thirty-six percent ( $n = 4$ ) reported using a chart form to keep track of questioning patterns or time on task. Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ )

simply keep good anecdotal notes. Only one principal mentioned analyzing the lesson plan, asking the students in class for feedback, or requesting a self-reflection from the teacher. McBride and Skau (1995) argue that teachers should feel as if they own the written observations and should be able to question the supervisor's findings. Principal K agrees, "If they don't feel truly comfortable, we'll tear it up."

### *Competencies*

When asked on which competency the principals spend the most time, 82% ( $n = 9$ ) mentioned the relationship between teacher and student (as is shown in Table 2). Coppola, Scricca, and Connors (2004) maintain that the most effective teachers are warm, enthusiastic, caring, friendly and thirst for learning; therefore, these authors recommend hiring teachers for character rather than for content. Although the principals in this study did not mention these characteristics directly, most echoed the importance of witnessing a teaching bond. For example, Principal F stated:

I'm a real believer in relationship-building with students ...all good teachers build relationships with the kids. They don't just stand in front of the kids and lecture. They're not vessels just to be filled. You need to develop a relationship with a student for them to really want to learn about your subject and what's going on in your classroom.

Of equal importance to these principals was classroom instruction and subsequent learning. The learning taking place in class also received 82% support ( $n = 9$ ). Principal J explained that teachers' rapport with students is usually good, so instruction is the most important element to observe:

I'm looking at what kinds of questions are they asking of students. What kinds of activities have they planned? Are they planned just on content? Are they planned on the bigger picture? Have they used any backward design? I want the higher level questions.

This comment aligns with Sergiovanni's (1992) belief that teacher knowledge of subject matter, curriculum, pedagogy and the students themselves affects students' performance and therefore helps to define teacher effectiveness.

Classroom management was declared important by 55% ( $n = 6$ ) of the principals. As Principal F explained, "They can be as knowledgeable as you want, but if they don't have the attention of the students, then it doesn't matter what the course is, there's not going to be any learning taking place."

Assessment was mentioned by 45% ( $n = 5$ ) as an area to which principals choose to devote time evaluating. Principal G described the school's new policy of offering flexibility in the weight given to the school terms to benefit students who may have done poorly in the first term. Being able to work within a more flexible assessment model would be important to new teachers in this school. Principal G explained:

I use the analogy of a driver's test for students and teachers to understand this.

Would you want to be marked and part of your mark from the driver's test how you did the first time that you were behind the wheel of a car? For some of these students it's the same so we really want to test them on how they do when it's performance time.

Thirty-six percent ( $n = 4$ ) of the principals mentioned safety of the environment and 27% ( $n = 3$ ) mentioned extra curricular involvement as areas they wish to focus on

during the evaluation process. Professional development, leadership, collegial relationships and knowledge of one's discipline were mentioned by only 18% ( $n = 2$ ). The most surprising among these is that knowledge of one's discipline did not seem to concern principals as much as the method of content delivery. There has been extensive debate in the literature about the importance of teaching credentials and content knowledge in terms of teacher effectiveness. Darling-Hammond (2000) outlines the variables usually indicative of teachers' effectiveness as they affect student learning: teachers' academic ability, subject matter knowledge, years of education, teaching experience, certification status, and teaching behaviors in the classroom. Only the last of these was identified as an area of significant interest in this study. However, Principal K did express the need for a balance between content knowledge and relationship skills:

You can have people who've got great interpersonal skills with kids. The kids love them. They know "diddly squat" about what they're doing or they teach them wrong things and I've seen people like that. Or you can have people who are as knowledgeable as anything, [who] love kids and the kids are hanging from the ceiling every day.

Many researchers have declared the task of finding a single definition of teacher effectiveness to be impossible. Goldhaber and Anthony (2005) assert that studies have failed to reach a consensus over identifiable teacher characteristics associated with students' improved learning. Principal G offered an interesting analogy that includes instruction, relationship and classroom management, the three top characteristics that seem to interest these principals the most:

The first thing you're going to look for in a beginning teacher is whether they have what I call "with-it-ness" or not, whether they have the steps of consciousness that they are directing an orchestra. And if they are conducting an orchestra, they have to be aware that there are different instruments in the classroom, different skills and they all have to be working together. The degree to which they can be aware if someone's out, off, out of tune, conversations going on in the back, or someone is sleeping... Within five minutes you can walk in and tell whether the kids are with the teacher or not.

### *Results of Evaluation*

#### *Retention*

In reply to the question of how principals make the decision to retain first-year teachers, 27% ( $n = 3$ ) explained that they felt they were lucky in their hiring choices. A different 18% ( $n = 2$ ) stated that teachers under permanent contracts are usually retained.

Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) listed a variety of qualities that they look for in the teachers to be retained, including a positive relationship with students, openness to recommendations, passion, caring, good class management and effective instruction. Of these qualities, maintaining a positive relationship with students received the greatest consensus at 27% ( $n = 3$ ). Principal K repeated a conversation with a university professor who identified passion as the defining quality of a good teacher:

I know I've seen beginning teachers who have no experience have it. I've seen teachers who are within two years of retirement. They still have it. I've seen people who had it and lost it and where they're just marking time... I really truly

believe you can learn to be better but if you don't have that passion... You can lose it. I'm not sure you can find it.

Bridges (1986) argues that remediation is possible, but only early in a teacher's career when his or her habits are still malleable. This might explain why 27% ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals expressed hope that teachers who were less than perfect can learn and be formed, thereby avoiding dismissal. Principal F took a compassionate stance: "Just because somebody's maybe not an excellent teacher after their first year doesn't mean that we wouldn't retain them. It just means they have some work to do and that would be in the recommendations in the summative report." Principal E expressed a similar viewpoint: "We believe as educators that people under the right conditions can learn and grow and change so we approach it that way. We're nurturers." This principal allows the teacher in question a year to prove him or herself, before initiating a dismissal.

Despite being happy with past hiring choices, Principal A suggested that simply retaining people may not always lead to a staff of competent teachers, as sometimes the unions protect incompetent teachers:

Some would debate [that] perhaps screening is not as strong as it needs to be.

Some would put forward that perhaps the effects of a unionized environment have not served to increase the caliber of teaching, and some would argue that the idea of having someone tenured after one year is a license for incompetence as well.

The tone of the discussion of retention was positive overall. However, several of the principals channeled their answers somewhat towards concerns about dismissal.

### *Dismissal*

Tucker noted in 2001 that, in the United States, the termination rate, including resignations, dismissals of tenured teachers, and non-renewals of probationary teachers, was less than 1%. Table 3 illustrates that in keeping with the findings in the literature that dismissals are rare, only 36% ( $n = 4$ ) of the principals in this study specifically named themselves as responsible for initiating any dismissals; one of these had let only two teachers go during a ten-year administrative career. Dismissal is a process that the principal does not undergo alone. Sixty-four percent ( $n = 7$ ) of the principals referred to the importance of divisional policy when discussing teacher dismissals. Thirty-six percent ( $n = 4$ ) mentioned the need to seek help from the superintendent's office during the process of dismissal.

Although this study primarily concerns first-year teachers, the principals voluntarily addressed the topic of tenured teachers and their subsequent incompetence. Clark (1993) identifies as another cause of ineffective teaching: certified teachers may be hired through a fault in the system, despite the fact that they lack the qualities to be successful, and then because of tenure they cannot be fired. This scenario does occur in Canada and leads to the disappointment of the administrators who are responsible. Several of the principals in this study mentioned real incidents they have faced in attempting to oust a tenured teacher, and the ensuing frustrations. Principal E recounted:

I've seen a serious problem that I've inherited, and I've tried to go through this once before. It's still very, very difficult. I'm actually appalled at how difficult it is to make any changes in areas where teachers have screwed up and continue to screw up even though they've been teaching for twenty years.

Despite receiving legal advice that simple documentation would be enough for a dismissal, this principal explained that it was not enough.

Principal K suggested that the reason for incompetence later in a teacher's career is a changing classroom climate to which mature teachers cannot always adapt:

He wanted to have his 35 years in, and he was 53 or 54 and had 30 years. His day book was absolutely empty. He never knew what he was doing. He had never been stellar, but they needed warm bodies and back in the day where kids sat waiting for the teacher, he managed. In today's world...he wasn't managing.

Even with first-year teachers, the issue of timing in dismissals can mean the difference for principals between being forced to take a teacher on staff permanently and letting one go after the first year of probation. Stronge (2006) states that incompetence must be proven as a pattern of conduct. The evidence can come from accurate class observations, portfolios, surveys, student results, and other forms of documentation, in addition to thorough summative evaluations. Principal C, who had experienced a failed attempt to dismiss a first-year teacher, commented:

If you do not put into place processes that show that you're trying to bring the teacher along to where your standards are or provide the teacher with either the supports or the models or the extra assistance they might need to be successful, [and] you don't provide an adequate time frame for that to happen in order for you to see whether or not change can occur, then the recommendation to dismiss or not renew the contract may be quashed, not because the person is perceived as a competent teacher but because you were not seen as providing sufficient assistance in a timely manner.

This decision is made by the board office, which must, according to these principals, officially approve each retention and dismissal.

Taking earlier action to address incompetent teaching is one of the main suggestions made by principals (Torrington et al., 2003). Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals in this study suggested dismissing a teacher in December rather than waiting until the end of the first full school year. According to Principal B, waiting until March to inform a teacher of dismissal can have negative consequences: “Basically you’re saying they’re not competent enough to be in a class even though they’re going to be there for two and a half months.” There is agreement in the literature that taking early action makes sense, as performance difficulties do not usually appear overnight (Whaley & Cox, 2002; Wragg et al., 1999b).

A less traumatic alternative to dismissal could be transfer. Wragg et al. (1999b) explain that dealing with incompetence is an emotionally searing process in which both the teacher and the principal may suffer stress and health issues. Often an incompetent teacher in one school does well in another, or a teacher may be incompetent in one subject but proficient in another. As Wragg et al. state, “One person’s feckless incompetent is another person’s misunderstood victim” (p. 34). Principal A discussed such interdivisional transfers: “We do find that occasionally moving an individual to another situation and a fresh start in a different building is desirable too. It is sometimes difficult to convince them of that, but nonetheless.”

Bridges (1986) describes incompetence as a failure to uphold discipline, show subject mastery, effectively convey information, treat students well and follow advice from superiors. These exact categories were mentioned by 73% ( $n = 8$ ) of the principals

in this study when asked the general question of how they would decide to dismiss a teacher. The problem most frequently referred to by 45% ( $n = 5$ ) of the principals was a teacher's refusal or inability to change. Principal B provided a blunt description:

You ask yourself the question, "Do I see this person being a 25-year teacher? Do they have the skills, or are there some critical things missing that make me say I'm just not willing to put the time and effort into helping them improve or not able to put in the time because there's just too much to fix?"

Aside from the impact on the principal's time, Principal E expressed concern for the students of an incompetent teacher:

If the teacher is clearly not being effective, does not build meaningful relationships, has not got the skill set, the tools necessary to do the job, despite the supports that are provided, then in all conscience I cannot recommend that teacher continue because it would be a detriment to the kids and it would be destructive to the individual.

Principal E noted that concern for the teacher also plays a role in a principal's decision to dismiss: "Part of the decision is, if you can't fix this, you can't condemn someone to a life of this kind of misery. It's not just the kids, it's the individual."

The idea of a teacher being unable to change also entered into the discussion of poor instructional skills, mentioned by 36% ( $n = 4$ ) of the principals. Principal C stated:

It has to be effective instruction, and if that's not changing and if the person is not getting what I'm saying, doesn't perceive the problem to the extent that I'm trying to bring it forward, then I think we have an irresolvable issue.

Hanushek (1992) argues that a student can reach a full level of achievement due to the impact of a good teacher or can fail to do so as a result of being subjected to an incompetent teacher over the course of a full school year.

The principals in this study were just as concerned about teachers' relationships with students as they were about instruction. Thirty-six percent ( $n = 4$ ) named a deficiency in relationships with students as grounds for dismissal. Using a self-questioning technique, Principal H asked:

Would I want my kid taught by this person? That's my first question. And the second thing is would I want to work with this person as a partner? If I can honestly say no to both of those questions, as difficult as that would be, that would be my answer.

Principal K mentioned the case of a particular teacher:

We had a teacher who retired who never knew the names of anybody... He never made any attempt to learn them. That's just insulting. [gives sample dialogue]

"Tell me about Bob."

"Bob who?"

"Bob Smith."

"Oh, is he in my class?"

"Yes, that's why I'm asking you. For Pete's sake!"

Bridges (1986) cautions that many examples of a teacher's shortcomings must be gathered to prove that a pattern of incompetence is present, because there are few yardsticks with which to measure teachers' characteristics. Qualities such as relationships

with students are difficult to quantify. Principal K described the intuitive nature of determining teacher incompetence:

There are a lot of people in teaching who don't like kids and it's not a quantifiable thing. It's not something I can describe an instrument to measure, but I can pretty much tell which people think the kids are the enemy and this is a contest that they have to win.

Surprisingly, classroom management was mentioned least often by these principals, with only 27% ( $n = 3$ ) naming it as a concern when considering teacher dismissal, even though it is a topic discussed frequently in the literature. Principal C identified classroom management as something that can be learned. Notably, when discussing dismissal, the principals in this study did not mention to any significant extent teachers' content knowledge, educational credentials and general charisma, although these are considered in the literature to indicate teacher effectiveness.

#### *Communication With Teachers*

The point that gained the highest consensus in the responses relating to communication is that the evaluation process is stressful to first-year teachers. Principal A stated, "The stress rate for first-year teachers is really, really high. We recognize that and want to minimize it and be as supportive as possible. So in terms of that communication we try and make it frequent and supportive." All ( $n = 11$ ) of the principals described ways in which they help teachers to avoid being overwhelmed. For example, Principal H stated, "My intention is to find you doing things right, not find you doing things wrong." The move towards a more open system of communication and trust in evaluation led McBride and Skau (1995) to study teacher empowerment. They suggest

that teachers who become leaders in their communities do so when caring exists and interdependence with others is created. These leaders feel capable, strong and committed. Principal E commented, “I don’t believe in being prescriptive, so it’s a dialogue with suggestions. I like to provoke thinking rather than accommodation.”

The principals all used positive language when talking about their efforts to help teachers through the process. As Principal K stated, “I just do everything I can to put them at ease.” Some reported going out of their way to ensure that even their comments are favourable. For example, Principal J remarked, “I think most people are almost too critical of themselves, so sometimes you as an administrator have to make sure you’re very positive about some of the things you’ve seen.”

The principals were also insistent that the communication with teachers be open, transparent and two-way. Principal K explained that, if teachers are not comfortable sharing their troubles with administrators, they should at least confide to their colleagues: “If it’s upsetting you this much, there’s something wrong because it shouldn’t be an upsetting experience.”

Whaley and Cox (2002) argue that most teachers want to meet expectations and that this prevents misunderstandings. Most of these principals supported this point, expressing their perception that teachers, though stressed, are used to being evaluated as a result of their student teaching or previous teaching terms. Most are not threatened by informal visits from their principal. Principal I remarked, “I think people recognize I’m not there looking for teachers, I’m looking to get some ideas on how kids are functioning.” However, 27% ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals mentioned that some teachers do not deal well with unannounced visits or with being critiqued. Principal H explained:

In some cases, I don't know if the evaluation process at the university has been as constructive so there's sometimes a defence, particularly for high flyers, people who have been used to 4.0s or high marks. There's a defensiveness that comes across. You have to really get past that if you're really going to improve.

Newton and Braithwaite (1988) report that teachers view evaluations as a method of bureaucratic control by administrators. Only 18% ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals acknowledged the high degree of influence that their administrative role has in terms of how threatening or non-threatening the evaluation process seems to teachers. Principal E stated, "I'm still a little shocked at how intimidating the title or role of principal can be to teachers, so you've got to work through that a little."

Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals described their approach as businesslike or professional during the formal evaluations. Nine percent ( $n = 1$ ) emphasized that communication is the single most important component in the evaluation process.

Principal K explained:

[I ask] "How can I help you so that you can do your job better?" And one of the ways to do that is to make sure you build a relationship with your teachers so that if something goes wrong in the classroom, they're not afraid to come and tell you.

### *Overall Efficacy*

#### *Strengths*

Principals were asked to identify the areas of strength in the process for evaluation of first-year teachers. Their answers were scattered over several areas. Forty-five percent ( $n = 5$ ) mentioned the effectiveness of the evaluation tool used. Four of these principals were from River Valley school division, which uses a list of teaching

competencies. The four principals considered the list of competencies to be helpful in describing to teachers their areas of strength and weakness.

Because they are so busy, 36% ( $n = 4$ ) of principals appreciated that their divisional policy forces them to visit classes and to make time in their schedules for observations. Principal H commented, “The policy creates an urgency that you may not feel necessarily otherwise. Because the deadlines for the evaluations are so stringent, particularly for first-year teachers, that’s the pressure that creates the opportunity so that’s important.”

Principal E explained that this dedication of time is important for the teacher as well as the principal: “There’s a time element that from my point of view is absolutely critical here, because building a relationship and developing and understanding is not something you can do in a half-hour meeting.”

In the literature, self-reflection is considered important in increasing teacher effectiveness (Bennett, 1995; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Cousins, 1995; Delandshere, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Lofton et al., 1997; Shinkfield, 1994). However, surprisingly, only 18% ( $n = 2$ ) of these principals mentioned the self-reflective nature of the evaluation process as a strength.

Chow et al. (2001) and Lofton et al. (1997) advocate the use of a fair appraisal system that includes evaluation data and collaborative and reflective conferences. In this study, the mentorship program, the transparency of the process, the conversations and a preference for informal visits all received equal attention as strengths. Principal I, a fervent supporter of the mentorship program, said that the River Valley school division provides a model that others are hoping to emulate. Transparency was particularly

important for Principal C, who stated, “The dates aren’t a surprise. They know what the expectations are... Nobody’s sabotaged it. Nobody’s surprised.” Principal E commented:

[The process] requires a lot of talking, really getting to know the teacher. Not so much seeing the action, getting a sort of secondary feedback to really understand where the teacher’s coming from and how they’re thinking and how they’re solving problems, if they’re solving problems.

Only one principal mentioned accountability, and each principal seemed to favour a particular strength. The principals expressed general satisfaction with the tools used, the demands of the policy timelines and a variety of elements that could be categorized as being of direct benefit to teachers. These ranged from the transparency or fairness of the process to informal visits, conversations between the administrator and teacher, and the supportive mentorship program.

### *Weaknesses*

Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals chose not to identify any areas of weakness in the process. Each of the following areas was identified by only one principal: the number of informal observations required by principals could be increased, the process could be less formalized, there could be more resources available to principals trying to help their new teachers, and the length of time that a term teacher can be employed could be lengthened.

Although these principals indicated that the policy and its timelines were clear in their school divisions, they expressed a few criticisms. Principal I stated, “The policy is more driven by the legalities of contract than it is, in my opinion, by pedagogy.” Principal

K expressed disagreement with the mandatory three-year cycle of supervision for an aging workforce of teachers:

You have a cadre of teachers who have been teaching for 20 years. They did not need to be clinically evaluated every three years, and it was a hoot because the vice principal would evaluate me. He'd always do it around the same time of the year. I was always teaching [subject] and I must have taught him that lesson over and over and over again.

As anticipated, the issue of time was the most frequently raised in response to this question.

Not surprising is the feedback from 64% of the principals, who felt that they do not get into classrooms as often as they would like to observe and evaluate teachers. Xu and Sinclair (2002) found that the principals in their study were frustrated with the lack of time they had for evaluations. Principal F stated, "Scheduling time is the most difficult thing to get into classrooms."

Although more time spent on evaluation may lead to higher levels of teacher effectiveness, the evaluation of most teachers consists of an administrator visiting a classroom a few times a year for a short period of time (Brandt, 1996; Haughey & Howard, 1996; McConney, 1995; Peterson, 1995, 2000). Principal H acknowledged this paradox: "I think it's the most important thing, and yet I know I don't put the time into it really that it requires to do a good job, and that's too bad."

Glickman (1990) found that, when teachers do not receive supportive supervision, they feel that their work is unimportant and occurs in a very isolated situation. Principal

C appeared to agree and expressed a sense that a lack of adequate time available and hence a lack of support given can affect rates of teacher attrition:

With 44 professional staff and a total staff of 60, how do you ensure you're providing everybody with adequate time? That's probably the biggest issue and that isolation is probably why, in three to five years, that's when we lose the largest complement of teachers if they don't feel they're being supported.

There seems to be a variety of reasons why evaluation is cannot be a priority in principals' schedules. One principal described some schools as high risk, with between 40 and 50 students visiting the office daily for administrator assistance. Two principals discussed how busy the spring semester is and mentioned that, if evaluations are not done mainly in the fall, the second part of the year is too rushed. Principal A commented:

We probably are unable to get to as many formal conferences around reflective practices as we'd like to, but again it's one of those things. There's way too much to do in the course of a given school year, so some things get minimized a little bit, and that is probably one of them.

Sergiovanni (1992) argues that differentiated supervision would allow the principal to focus on teachers who need it, rather than performing ritualistic visits for the entire staff. Principal C highlighted this imbalance in evaluation:

There's a significant amount of time that's involved in the evaluation process, hours invested as an administrator with a good first-year teacher. Can you imagine exponentially how many more hours [it would take] when you think this isn't going to work? I could show you a file of a good first-year teacher and let's say it's four millimeters thick, and those cases that were disputed, that went to a

whole different level, they were five times that thick. Do you think you went to that one formal observation or were you in that classroom every single day checking things out?

One principal felt that the pre- and post-conferences are difficult to schedule.

Another blamed the formal nature of the evaluations and subsequent reports. It is not only the first-year teachers who suffer a lack of attention in terms of evaluation, as Principal E explained:

We've got a professional growth model, so there's an opportunity to get together with teachers. But then again, first of all, it's a little unwieldy for administrators because there's three of us here and there's a staff of 55, and following through in some respects is unrealistic given the time demands.

Xu and Sinclair (2002) named teacher evaluation as principals' least favourite activity, suggesting that they are not inspired to do a thorough job. Consequently, I anticipated an angry or decidedly negative response from principals. However, they did not express distaste for the process. Rather, they spoke with regret and a hint of guilt about not being able to complete their perceived evaluation tasks as thoroughly as they would hope. Principal F reflected, "I try to wander into all teachers' classrooms at different times. That was one of my goals this year was to get into more classrooms, but it's been one of my goals for the last five years." Principal H summed up the issue of time after a lengthy discussion, regretfully commenting, "I do a terrible job at this."

### *Continuing Evaluation*

#### *Change*

The question about change as it relates to evaluation was inspired by a former superintendent, who once told me that he had spent years as a principal conducting evaluations and saw little evidence of change in his teachers. I am relieved to see that the principals in this study believe unanimously that their first-year teachers do change.

However, in their answers they expressed a degree of doubt, using statements such as “I hope so” or “I think so.” Principal I, for example, expressed uncertainty but also hope:

It’s even a little more difficult to tell how much of a change is occurring, or is it going to be a sustained change? You don’t really know for sure, but at the same time, I guess I’m always optimistic that people will welcome feedback and take that into consideration and do things to improve.

Table 4 reveals that eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals suggested that there are some teachers who do not change. Principal B described with compassion the need to be honest with teachers through courageous conversations when a need for change is observed: “It challenges them to do the things necessary to improve because if they don’t, then you know that they’re not going to get hired.” In response to this question, none of the principals expressed concern that change should be immediate, although they had voiced their concerns earlier in the interviews about the difficulty of removing incompetent teachers once they have been given tenure. Bridges (1986) suggests that there is a period where change is possible but that this timeframe is limited.

Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals clarified that they are unsure if the perceived change is correlated to evaluation; they suggested that the teachers’

connections to other adults involved in education may be more responsible for change. Principal J mentioned observing change but said, “The change really happens for teachers when they also talk to their colleagues, when they participate in professional development, when they try things out and look at it and try it again, refine it.”

Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals admitted that their expertise or position of authority as administrators influences the change they observe in teachers. It also causes their new teachers to take seriously the teacher competencies that the principals feel are important and consequently to demonstrate them. Principal E explained:

Being a semi-authority figure has some merit. It gives a little more weight to my own beliefs and values and education, so I reinforce the relationship-building piece. Clearly I reinforce the need to have a range of strategies. Clearly I reinforce the necessity of having clear targets that everyone understands. So where those might be less than at the top of the agenda initially, they often move up the concern ladder as we have our conversations.

This phenomenon of new teachers adopting the behaviours of their evaluators is mentioned in the research, in cases where the people in authority are the professors and the teachers are still in training. The untrained, vulnerable students, lacking in experience, change their views of teaching to gain approval from evaluators who are responsible for analyzing and judging the students' performance (Sullivan et al., 2000). Such compliance with authority can clearly have a positive impact if the principal is an effective pedagogue or a negative one if the principal is transmitting weak teaching traits.

Twenty seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) of the principals named instruction and another 27% named class management as the areas they observe improving throughout the year. Principal D mentioned observing progress as teachers gain experience, particularly in their second year of teaching, and “their toolbox fills up with strategies on how to teach, how to manage certain situation, how to evaluate certain things.” Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals mentioned teachers’ relationships with students as an area of improvement. Only one principal named each of the following: demeanor, the use of French language, professional development or an increased confidence as areas that improved. Surprisingly, they did not mention intelligence as a factor relating to change, although Glickman (1981) mentions it as important to teacher quality.

#### *Follow-Up*

When principals were asked how they do follow-up after the first year, 82% ( $n = 9$ ) referred to their division’s professional growth model. The River Valley division principals explained that a new professional growth model had been instated at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, whereby all teachers cycle through, creating a professional growth plan and meeting with administrators once every three years after the first year of probation. The Henderson division principals described a yearly professional growth plan that teachers create and discuss with their administrators; it does not involve any formal assessment after the first year. This model has been in place for two full years and took a few years to develop. Principal G described the goal for all teachers as professional growth, which is described in a divisional handbook intended for “teachers who are competent, conscientious teachers, [on] permanent contract and [who] have established themselves as not needing intensive supervision.”

Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals spoke about moving from the role of evaluator to the role of coach. One of them explained that occasionally a first-year teacher will have the probation year extended to a second one, to allow for more formal feedback. Lecuyer (1986) states that most Canadian teachers understand the need of the province and public to be reassured about the effectiveness of teaching in public classrooms, but they are concerned about the dual purposes of evaluation, both for growth and for retention, promotion, demotion or dismissal. Principal I offered that, in the case of parents questioning a teacher's competency, continuing evaluations are in the teachers' best interest: "Teachers need to be protected, so this information needs to be in their files and it needs to be current."

Chow et al. (2001) and Lofton et al. (1997) encourage the professional growth and learning of teachers in order to foster independence in their future learning and to create a basis for constructive personal decisions. The principals spoke with less certainty when asked about follow up. Seventy-three percent ( $n = 8$ ) responded with expressions such as "less formal," "evaluation-light" and "we don't." Twenty-seven percent ( $n = 3$ ) described the follow-up professional growth model as being a less intense process than that experienced by first-year teachers. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) clarified that classroom observations at this stage are optional.

After the first year, the consequences for poor teaching seem to be few. Eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals referred to a small percentage of teachers who are placed on direct supervision and therefore potentially risk dismissal. Principal E admitted that there is no tangible cost to poor performance in teachers' later years: "In a program area,

if you don't keep up, your colleagues will make life a little difficult for you. You won't necessarily be doing the programs you wanted to."

Xu and Sinclair (2002) recommend that evaluation courses be set up for principals to provide a variety of models for teacher evaluation. Only one principal in this study alluded to any lack of knowledge on the part of administrators. Principal E stated, "Unfortunately, what's a really great idea, it falls short in the implementation because of some resource restraints, time being one of them and also probably the need to adequately develop skill sets for administrators."

The interviews occurred in the late spring, when the principals' follow-up evaluations were due. This timing may account for the 36% ( $n = 4$ ) of principals who reported some frustration about the time that the evaluation process requires. Principal F explained, "I have, in one week, five evaluations to turn in and I'm nowhere near ready." Principal H replied bluntly, "This is done very poorly." Principal K mentioned the wide variation of teachers now in the division, from those not yet ready to retire who are getting sick and taking care of their parents or children to those who are on maternity leave:

As your cadre of teachers change, your supervision policy has to be a dynamic process that can flex with the people that you've got... I've got all of these term people who also need to be evaluated so my workload goes up.

This sentiment was echoed in the uncertainty of some principals, who are waiting to see how the newly implemented River Valley three-year cycle evolves.

### *Recommendations*

It was anticipated that the most valuable results from this study would be the recommendations by the principals, who are the experts working directly in the evaluation of first-year teachers. Table 5 shows that eighteen percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals were completely happy with their current process, in part because of the existence of the mentorship program, and offered no recommendations.

The remaining 82% ( $n = 9$ ) offered a variety of suggestions. Fifty-five percent ( $n = 6$ ) mentioned that the evaluation process should be supportive. Forty-five percent ( $n = 5$ ) suggested either a two-year probation period or a two-year apprenticeship where teachers gradually work their way up to a full teaching load before receiving tenure.

Principal A explained:

I would institute a two-year internship program for new teachers, similar to what we see in other professions like accounting and medicine and engineering... where there's an ongoing connection with the post-secondary institution that certified them, where there's an ongoing mentorship program involved, there's ongoing course requirements and there's ongoing work practicum as well that they get paid for.

Two principals, whose division does not have a mentorship program, hoped for a continuing education program for first-year teachers that would act as a support group, provide formal exposure to important areas of education and present current research.

To address the issue of a lack of time, Principal H suggested that the school division and principals should "prioritize what the administration should be doing and how they should be spending their time." This would, for instance, remove the role of

general contractor from the principal's job duties as was the case in one school undergoing heavy renovations. The principal of that school subsequently spent many hours consulting on a construction site, rather than addressing direct teacher and student issues.

Principal H described a professional development experience in which a group of educators purchased a text, divided it up by chapter, and then each taught a chapter to the group. Then they all applied the topic to their classrooms for the following two weeks before returning to discuss how it unfolded. Principal H commented, "The PD was completely in-house, hands-on... it was non-threatening."

The principals suggested a number of ideas, including professional development in evaluation for principals, conducting evaluations in pairs, gathering a wider range of data collection methods, and including student service faculty in modeling lessons. Principal A recommended taking the word "evaluation" out of the process to promote growth and confidence in new teachers rather than presenting something that is potentially punitive:

I know many people in the first couple of years of their career, and some for much longer, are not particularly confident that they are competent and are able to do what they need to do well and feel good about that. That's very, very draining over a long period of time.

Principal K offered many recommendations, including offering flexibility in the clinical evaluation model to avoid teachers going through the useless process this principal had undergone as a teacher:

That classroom observation did not tell him whether I was a good teacher or not, and it certainly didn't do anything for me, so [a solution might be] putting in a model where you have growth plans, where people have an opportunity to explore their own development and do some risk-taking and some planning and some purposeful professional development.

One principal suggested that the universities offer more post-service training in the evenings for experienced teachers who would like to continue learning. Principal K suggested that divisions should collaborate with various other educational shareholders: "The teachers' association, the union and the employers should work together to develop policy because if it's just one then you're setting people up to be in adversarial situation."

#### *The Importance of Hiring*

The literature acknowledges the importance of hiring effectively as an important first step to ensuring an effective teaching staff (Phillips, 2002; Whaley & Cox, 2002). Principal B valued and quoted a former assistant superintendent's advice, which emphasizes the seriousness of hiring: "Be reminded that when you hire someone, you're hiring them not just for your school, you're hiring them for the division." One issue emerged from this study that was not mentioned in the literature, the pressure on principals to hire term rather than permanent teachers. The teachers' union has a rule that, after serving two consecutive terms for the division, a teacher must be hired on a permanent contract to serve a third term. Principal B expressed frustration with this: "I've had that happen where we haven't been able to hire the person we want because it would mean them being permanent."

According to this study, the largest deficiency of new teachers seems to be their knowledge of assessment. Principal G mentioned that, to ensure a candidate's knowledge about assessment, "[During the interview] I'll ask some probing questions, and if they can't answer very well from a depth of knowledge about some of those areas, then they're not likely going to be hired."

Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs and Robinson (2004) state that the effect of teacher personality on student achievement is an under explored issue. However, Coppola et al. (2004) recommend hiring for character rather than for content. Principal A commented:

We have found ourselves in the last number of years looking very differently at the type of person that we hire as well. I explained to somebody once, I'm not looking for a mathematician who happens to be a teacher, I'm looking for a teacher who has some mathematics skills. It's a very, very different way of looking at things. Traditional high schools have not looked at teachers that way, so we have shifted that in the last ten years, particularly in the last five here. So we're hiring "people" people who happen to have some academic skills.

Overall, the principals expressed the opinion that solid hiring is critical and that the principal has an increasing responsibility in this area. Principal K described the school division as being not as stable as it used to be, with increased turnovers and many young teachers who are on term positions or who take maternity leaves. Principal E explained:

There was a flurry of postings and hires over the last few years because teachers were reaching retirement age, particularly in high schools where for years and years there was nothing and suddenly you had a complete changeover of a 30-year staff.

This might explain how Principal G hired 65 of the 80 staff members in the previous ten years. Reports such as this confirm the notion that principals' hiring and eventual evaluation decisions are their most valuable contributions to creating an effective teaching staff. Principal K commented:

You grow and you have to give people opportunities to grow, and you have to have a trust relationship between the teacher and the principal because our number one job as administrators is to hire the best people we can, and then we have to get out of their way and let them teach.

#### *Deficiencies in the Preparation of New Teachers*

Fullan (2001) asserts that 25% of the solution is attracting good people to the profession and providing them with the best possible initial preparation. He believes that solid teacher preparation programs are in the minority. Several of the principals in this study became passionate when discussing the student teachers' lack of preparation in the area of assessment. Principal A commented: "I think it's a travesty for example that teachers coming into the profession in [province] are not required at any stage along their training to have any sort of academic background in current assessment practices. It's completely absent." The principals placed the blame for this situation largely on the universities, although they rated two of the universities much higher than a third one.

A concern for teacher education programs is the students' perception that they do not teach the skills that they perceive they need (Cooper, Jones, & Weber, 1973).

Unfortunately, untrained and vulnerable students who are lacking in experience tend to change their views about teaching to gain approval from supervisors who are responsible for analyzing and judging their performance (Sullivan et al., 2000). This finding is

supported by Principal I's critique of one education faculty: "The assessment is archaic and they practice archaic assessment methods within their own faculty. They're not even modelling things that are remotely in touch with what's going on in the field." Mention of that particular university elicited angry responses from several of the principals. Principal I stated:

I think there are things that the university is doing that are so out of touch with the schools that it's frightening, and they're putting kids at risk, really. Like [it's putting] their student teachers at risk because they're not even coming close to dealing with the realities. And they're not honest with them. They're not honest in their first, second year when the kids just show no aptitude for the job, and then people are left with the most difficult decision in their fourth year or fifth year or whenever it is, and you find somebody who is absolutely not ready to go into the school system and yet they've covered the whole program, and what do you do?

The concerned principals agreed that longer in-school placements were a possible solution. Principal F remarked:

We've had some student teachers in the last little while that my cooperating teachers, the staff here, have not been happy with, and I think that's the place we need to stop people from getting their teaching degree because they're not cut out to be teachers.

Three principals specifically named the ability to implement differentiated instruction as something lacking in new teachers' training. Principal A explained:

In the public school system anyway, we're experiencing the need for a lot more skill on the part of everybody that works in the system, in terms of dealing with

difficult kids, behaviourally challenged kids, academically challenged kids. [For] a number of people, including myself, when we entered the profession students of this type were not within the system.

This principal emphasized the importance of special education awareness for new teachers, so that they realize that addressing the needs of these students is indeed part of their job.

### *Mentorship*

Principals were asked about any programs or policies that they felt could be implemented for first-year teachers that would help them improve their evaluation results. The River Valley school division has a formal mentorship program that its principals described in overwhelmingly positive terms, whereas the Henderson division manages its mentorship on a school-by-school basis rather than a divisional one. The River Valley mentorship program received favourable comments from 100% ( $n = 7$ ) of its high school principals. Principal H, who works in a high-risk school and strives but often fails to find enough time for evaluation, stated that if River Valley did not have the mentorship program, “I think we’d be really struggling, particularly in the at risk schools. So they do a terrific job because I think first-year teachers need less evaluation and more support.”

Serpell and Bozeman (1999) explain that induction or mentorship encourages teacher excellence. They claim that new teacher effectiveness and retention, as well as benefits for veteran teachers, are attained through such induction programs, which provide emotional support, extended preparation and professional development. The principals in this study supported these positive effects of a mentorship program in different areas. Seventy-one percent ( $n = 5$ ) of the principals explained that a mentorship

program is non-evaluative and is therefore a less intimidating teaching tool. Principal B agreed:

[Mentors] have no part in the evaluation process. They don't even speak to us about the teacher, really, about issues or anything because the process is to be clean. My job is to evaluate. Their job isn't to evaluate, it's to support the teacher, to mentor, to help them.

Hence only 18% ( $n = 2$ ) of principals reported consulting with their department heads or the buddies when creating teacher evaluations.

Forty-three percent ( $n = 3$ ) were thankful that the program removes some stress from the principal's role. Principal H explained:

[The mentorship program] allows us to do a better job of evaluation because we're comfortable with the fact that there's somebody who's actually working with them to improve their skills, which we should be doing but we don't have the time to do.

The principals' only criticism of the mentorship program was that they wanted more resources for it. Twenty-nine percent ( $n = 2$ ) wished for the inclusion of term and part-time teachers in the program, despite its limited resources. Principal D clarified that there is a formula by which the division decides who is assigned a mentor, "but if you're not a full time teacher [in the] first year, then you would not necessarily have priority to be in the mentorship program. That would be an improvement, to say that they could all be part of it."

Sixty-four percent ( $n = 7$ ) of the principals described pairing their new teachers with other teachers within the school in a buddy system, for guidance and support outside

of a formal mentorship program. The intention of the buddy system is not for evaluation, but to offer help with the rules, expectations, policies and practices in the school. Fifty percent ( $n = 2$ ) of the principals of the Henderson division, who had no formal mentorship program, expressed a desire to start such a program. Principal I, from River Valley, said that the mentorship program is something other divisions are hoping to emulate. Principal E, from Henderson, explained, “I am thinking of creating a position, a part time position of a support teacher because we have a couple of really great staff members who work really well with their colleagues, with new teachers in particular.”

In closing my discussion of the results uncovered in this study, I note with gratitude that the principals were very accommodating throughout the interview process. They treated me as an equal and a colleague and were eager to provide as much feedback as possible. They took valuable time to discuss the strengths and shortcomings of the evaluation process that they had identified throughout their years as administrators. Chapter 6 includes a discussion of my recommendations, based on their input.

## Chapter 6. Recommendations

This study addresses the research question, how do principals in selected Canadian high schools perceive the evaluation process they employ for first-year teachers? Once the principals in the study had elaborated on their perceptions, they were asked to make recommendations for continued improvement of the evaluation process. Based on their comments, the results of this study, the preceding discussion of the results, and my experience as a high school teacher, several recommendations are offered for the consideration of other Canadian researchers, high school principals and school divisions.

The first recommendation is to allow principals to have even more control of the hiring process. It appears that the principals work best with teachers whom they hired themselves. The problems they observe often relate to having to work with teachers who have been transferred in from other schools within the division or having to work with teachers who were hired by someone else before the principal arrived at the school. Perhaps the process of simply transferring teachers who are not doing well in one school could be re-examined. Such teachers could be asked to interview for the transfer as they would for any other job. If they are not competent enough to remain in their current teaching position, simply placing them in another position without any assistance or evaluation may not be helpful.

Once a new teacher has been hired, the strongest recommendation is to offer support. The principals in the school division that provides a mentorship program were completely satisfied with it and expressed the belief that it helps them to overcome the challenges of time pressure in the evaluation process. The principals in the school division that does not have a mentorship program expressed the desire for a more

formalized program in which strong teachers provide advice and resources to new teachers. A mentorship program that appears to be working well is coordinated at the board office level by expert teachers, who act as mentors for one year to all of the new teachers entering the school division. While this is not officially part of the evaluation process, it provides emotional and instructional support that teachers need to weather the turbulent first year of teaching and subsequently to succeed in the evaluation process. In times of budget tightening, an extra program such as the mentorship one might be deemed extraneous, but according to the principals it is vital to the effective integration of new teachers into the school division.

Several of the principals also recommended an extension of the induction period. Rather than hiring teachers for a full-time position in their first-year, assigning them a reduced load with time for professional development may prove useful. While new teachers are busy building their repertoire of teaching techniques and resources, they could benefit from more preparation time in their schedule or more time to collaborate with mentors or to attend various educational workshops. Universities may choose to collaborate with school divisions during this extended year of induction, so as to be better able to evaluate their degree programs in education. This would allow universities a direct link into schools to observe areas of strength in the teachers they have prepared, as well as to modify their post-secondary courses to mend any deficiencies observed by the principals in their beginning teachers.

One such deficiency appears to be in the area of assessment. School divisions are actively pursuing new research in improved and varied methods of assessment, yet student teachers and new teachers seem not to be prepared for these. If collaborative

programs between universities and school divisions are not possible, perhaps at least conversations between principals, teachers and university instructors and administrators might be feasible. If school divisions are seeking to employ new teachers who use certain assessment techniques, a meeting with university instructors might be useful to inform them of new divisional practices. In turn, if university researchers discover new trends in other areas of research in education, they might make presentations to school divisions on such topics to stimulate growth in the school systems.

As well intentioned as the teachers' unions must be to have developed policies to protect their working teachers, the unions have also placed barriers that prevent schools from releasing incompetent teachers and retaining term teachers past two years. The principals described a difficult, quagmire-like legal process that they must endure to terminate a teacher. If one deadline is missed or the paperwork is not perfect, even an incompetent teacher could be granted tenure, and generations of students could be negatively affected as a result. My recommendation would be for principals to be increasingly diligent in their documentation of problems they observe in new teachers, if incompetence is observed, so as to fulfill the union requirements accurately. If a dismissal is inevitable, the incompetent teacher will have had a fair opportunity to improve and will not have recourse to claim unlawful dismissal.

The rule that a term teacher cannot be hired for more than two consecutive terms without being then given a permanent position was likely implemented in order to protect term teachers from being taken advantage of and never hired for a permanent contract. However, principals with tight budgets cannot always hire for permanent positions, and therefore a skilled term teacher must be released after two terms because there are no

funds for a permanent position. The potential exists for a less qualified term teacher to replace the skilled teacher who was released. My recommendation is for unions to re-examine this rule and perhaps add in an exception, where the principals and term teachers mutually agree on a continued term contract beyond the current two-year limit.

My final recommendation is for researchers to continue conducting studies in schools, using methods such as direct interviews. I was initially daunted by the idea of approaching principals in roles of higher authority than mine, but they all treated me as a worthy researcher and generously offered their perceptions, which were based on many years of experience in education. They are the authorities on how the evaluation process is functioning in their schools. As helpful as the research literature is in provoking questions for research, actually talking with practicing experts contributed more depth, examples and raw opinions than might have been gleaned from simple reading. I would encourage researchers to continue pursuing the topic of teacher evaluation and related issues, such as mentorship, through contact with principals, teachers and students. In doing so, they will not only add to the existing fund of current knowledge but also continue to work towards increased teacher effectiveness and ultimately higher student achievement.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions for Principals

### ***Policies and Procedures:***

1. What are the policies in place to guide you in the evaluation of first-year teachers?
2. Have you experimented with other methods of evaluation?

### ***Evaluation process:***

3. Please describe the process you use to evaluate first-year teachers.
4. How do you schedule time for evaluations?

### ***Instruments:***

5. Please describe the instruments you use for the gathering of data.
6. On which of the teacher competencies do you spend the most time gathering data?

### ***Results of the evaluation:***

7. How do you make the decision to retain a first-year teacher?
8. How do you make the decision to dismiss a first-year teacher?

### ***Communication with teachers:***

9. How would you describe the communication with the teacher during the process of evaluation?
10. How do teachers respond to the evaluation process?

### ***Overall efficacy:***

11. What are the areas of strength in the evaluation process of first-year teachers?
12. What are the areas that could be more effective in the evaluation process of first-year teachers?

***Continuing evaluation:***

13. Do you think teachers who have undergone your evaluation process have changed?
14. If so, how have they changed?
15. How do you do follow-up evaluations after the first year?

***Recommendations:***

16. Do you have recommendations on how to improve the evaluation of first-year teachers?
17. Do you believe that there are programmes or policies which could be implemented for first-year teachers that would help them improve their evaluation results?

***Other:***

18. Is there anything at all you would like to add about any aspect of our conversation on the evaluation of first-year teachers?

## Appendix B: Superintendent Consent Letter

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

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**Evaluating First-Year Teachers: Perceptions of High School Principals**

Dear Participant:

Your school division is being invited to participate in a study entitled Evaluating First-Year Teachers: Perceptions of High School Principals that is being conducted by Lisa Cadez. Lisa Cadez is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone at (204) 257-4055 (home) or at (204) 831-2300 (work) or by e-mail at kirela@uleth.ca

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Master of Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kas Mazurek. You may contact my supervisor at (403) 329-2462 or by e-mail at kas.mazurek@uleth.ca

The purpose of this research project is to document the perceptions of public high school principals of the teacher evaluation process in two school divisions in western Canada. The development of the research instrument, the data collection, and the data analysis are driven by the research question: How do principals in selected western Canadian high schools perceive the evaluation process they employ for first-year teachers?

Research of this type is important because the literature on teacher evaluation suggests that there are many areas for improvement needed to increase teacher effectiveness, one of which is improving the evaluation process. Speaking to principals who conduct evaluations and seeking their expert opinions on the topic will add to the body of research in evaluation in Western Canada. I will be asking for the principals' perceptions of the evaluation process and recommendations for improvements to the evaluation process and this feedback will help other superintendents, principals, teachers, student teachers and as a result, students who will experience more effective teaching.

Your principals are being asked to participate in this study because they are in one of the two school divisions I have chosen for this study. Each high school principal in both divisions is invited to participate.

If they agree to voluntarily participate in this research, their participation will involve an interview of approximately 45 minutes where I will ask them the questions attached to this form. Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to them, including being tape-recorded although their anonymity is guaranteed. They will be interviewed but can choose the time and location of the interview to minimize any inconvenience.

There are no known or anticipated risks to them by participating in this research. The potential benefits of their participation in this research include their contribution to a study that will be published in order to help other principals, teachers and school divisions.

Their participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If they do decide to participate, they may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If they do withdraw from the study their data will not be used.

In terms of protecting their anonymity, they will be identified as high school principals in Western Canada. They will be referred to by code names throughout the thesis. Their confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected as I am the only interviewer and will be the only one to view the data. I will preserve the data from this study, including the tapes.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in a thesis presentation and published thesis.

In addition to being able to contact myself and my supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Sincerely,

Lisa Cadez  
University of Lethbridge Master of Education Student  
kirela@uleth.ca / (204) 257-4055 / (204) 831-2300

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix C: Principal Consent Letter

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM****Evaluating First-Year Teachers: Perceptions of High School Principals**

Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled Evaluating First-Year Teachers: Perceptions of High School Principals that is being conducted by Lisa Cadez. Lisa Cadez is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone at (204) 257-4055 (home) or at (204) 831-2300 (work) or by e-mail at kirela@uleth.ca

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Master of Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kas Mazurek. You may contact my supervisor at (403) 329-2462 or by e-mail at kas.mazurek@uleth.ca

The purpose of this research project is to document the perceptions of public high school principals of the teacher evaluation process in two school divisions in western Canada. The development of the research instrument, the data collection, and the data analysis are driven by the research question: How do principals in selected western Canadian high schools perceive the evaluation process they employ for first-year teachers?

Research of this type is important because the literature on teacher evaluation suggests that there are many areas for improvement needed to increase teacher effectiveness, one of which is improving the evaluation process. Speaking to principals who conduct evaluations and seeking their expert opinions on the topic will add to the body of research in evaluation in Western Canada. I will be asking for your perceptions of the evaluation process and recommendations for improvements to the evaluation process and this feedback will help other superintendents, principals, teachers, student teachers and as a result, students who will experience more effective teaching.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a principal in one of the two school divisions I have chosen for this study. Each high school principal in both divisions is invited to participate.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will involve an interview of approximately 45 minutes where I will ask you the questions attached to this form. Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including being tape-recorded although your anonymity is guaranteed. You will be interviewed but can choose the time and location of the interview to minimize any inconvenience.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. The potential benefits of your participation in this research include your contribution to a study that will be published in order to help other principals, teachers and school divisions.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, you will be identified as a high school principal in Western Canada. You will be referred to by a code name throughout the thesis. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected as I am the only interviewer and will be the only one to view the data. I will preserve the data from this study, including the tapes.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in a thesis presentation and published thesis.

In addition to being able to contact myself and my supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Sincerely,

Lisa Cadez  
University of Lethbridge Master of Education Student  
kirela@uleth.ca / (204) 257-4055 / (204) 831-2300

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***