

Co-Constructing Equitable Academic Discourse: Culturally Conscious Instructional Supervision in a Rural Early College High School

Journal of Educational Supervision

52 – 67

Volume 8, Issue 2, 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69772/8.2.4>

<https://jes.lib.buffalo.edu/articles/10.69772/8.2.4>

Lyndsay Britt¹

Abstract

In this qualitative participatory action research study, I explore how a school leader, as a culturally responsive instructional supervisor, collaborates with teachers to enact equity-driven change in classroom discourse practices. This research is situated in a rural, Title I Early College High School (ECHS) serving a global majority student population. For this study, I employed Community Learning Exchange (CLE) protocols (Guajardo et al., 2016; Tredway et al., 2025) to cultivate a culturally affirming community of practice among four teachers across three iterative inquiry cycles over fourteen months. The professional learning structure developed teachers' and leaders' cultural competence and critical consciousness while disrupting traditional hierarchies and deprivatizing teaching practice. Equity-based observation tools and reflective coaching conversations functioned as levers for transforming instructional discourse practices. Key findings reveal that: 1) facilitated communities of practice (CoP) foster educator agency and collective leadership toward equity; and 2) culturally responsive instructional supervision that is grounded in evidence, dialogue, and trust promotes sustained shifts in instructional practice that center student voice, identity, and rigor.

Keywords

culturally responsive instructional supervision; community of practice; equity-driven school leadership; classroom discourse practices

¹ Elizabeth City State University

Corresponding Author:

Lyndsay Britt (Department of Education, Elizabeth City State University, 252 Willie and Jacqueline Gilchrist Education and Psychology Complex, Elizabeth City, NC. 27909, USA)
email: lbbritt@ecsu.edu

Introduction

Ongoing disparities in academic discourse and conventional instructional practices limit access to rigorous, affirming learning environments. Within this context, instructional supervision must move beyond technical compliance and toward a liberatory approach that centers equity, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Khalifa et al., 2016). In this qualitative participatory action research study, I investigated how culturally responsive instructional supervision can support teachers in using equity-based protocols to promote academic discourse (Mette et al., 2024; Tredway et al., 2025). In turn, the processes foster more democratic processes for teachers that model how they should shift classroom practices for students. Situated in a rural, Title I Early College High School (ECHS), the study explores how teachers develop and apply equity-focused practices across three iterative inquiry cycles while examining the researcher's growth as an instructional leader. The central research question guiding this study is: *How do teachers use equity-based protocols to promote academic discourse?* I explored teachers' understanding and enactment of equitable access and rigor, the role of coaching in supporting implementation, and the researcher's development as a culturally responsive supervisor. This work contributes to the field of educational supervision by offering a grounded, replicable model for leading equity-centered instructional improvement. The replicable process offers a way forward for policy shifts that support liberatory practices.

Literature Review

Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), the role of the principal has shifted dramatically from a building manager to an instructional leader responsible for student achievement and the professional growth of teachers (Fullan, 2002; Louis et al., 2010; Shelton, 2011). In this evolved role, principals are expected to lead reform efforts in increasingly diverse, under-resourced, and socially complex environments (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mendels, 2012; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). Leadership, while not directly impacting student achievement, influences it profoundly through teachers and the culture of the school (Grissom et al., 2021; Louis et al., 2010; Murphy & Louis, 2018; Supovitz et al., 2010).

The Wallace Foundation (2013) identified five key leadership responsibilities: shaping a shared vision, cultivating a climate hospitable to learning, developing leadership in others, improving instruction, and managing data, people, and processes. These leadership areas are echoed in Grissom et al.'s (2021) meta-study of what constitutes instructional leadership, which emphasizes the principal's impact when engaging in instructionally focused teacher interactions and strategic personnel management. Central to this body of work is the recognition that effective instructional leadership fosters trust, collaboration, and a stable, learning-centered climate (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Trust plays a pivotal role in school improvement. When principals build trust with teachers, they set the tone for collaboration and continuous improvement (Louis et al., 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Leaders with emotional intelligence are better equipped to establish trust and cultivate collective leadership (Aguilar, 2016). Self-awareness and emotional responsiveness allow leaders to build community through empathy, reflection, and transparency. These traits are particularly important in equity-driven leadership,

which demands attention to identity, race, and systemic power dynamics (Glickman & Mette, 2020; Gooden et al., 2023).

Mette et al. (2017) highlight the “wicked problem” of supervision and evaluation, arguing that instructional supervision must move away from compliance models and toward structures that promote professional growth and trust that are the basis of liberatory discourse between a supervisor and teacher. Their more recent work (Mette et al., 2024) further supports this argument, demonstrating that reflective instructional leadership not only supports teacher agency but also drives equity-centered pedagogical improvement. When school leaders value teachers’ expertise and create reflective spaces for dialogue, they foster a culture of continuous learning rooted in democratic, inclusive practice—the same practices that we want teachers to transfer to their instructional presence in classrooms to promote student-generated discourse (Tredway et al., 2019).

By connecting racial identity, emotional intelligence, and equity leadership, Gooden et al. (2023) promote risk-taking and racial identity. In this study, I emphasize the courage required for leaders to confront inequities in schools and the importance of self-reflection in developing the critical consciousness necessary for systemic change.

Communities of Practice

While principal leadership is essential for setting vision and direction, sustainable instructional improvement requires structured spaces for teacher learning. Teacher learning directly influences student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1996, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning theory asserts that professional learning is most effective when embedded in the daily practices of teachers and occurs within a social, relational context (Lave, 1991; Morck, 2010; O’Connor & Allen, 2010). Within this framework, communities of practice (CoPs), professional learning communities (PLCs), and networked improvement communities (NICs) have emerged as dominant models for supporting collaborative teacher growth (Bryk et al., 2015; Whitford & Wood, 2010).

CoPs are grounded in mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Teachers engaged in a CoP learn from one another by sharing tools, reflecting on practice, and developing collective solutions to shared challenges. PLCs, while similar, are typically organized by grade level or subject area and emphasize common planning, analysis of student work, and goal setting (DuFour et al., 2005; Little, 2006). NICs focus more explicitly on continuous improvement science and are often cross-institutional or multi-school efforts aimed at solving persistent educational problems (Bryk et al., 2015).

Regardless of the model, successful teacher learning communities share common attributes: a focus on student learning, structured collaboration, a culture of trust, and sustained professional inquiry (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Fullan, 2000; Wood, 2010). These communities are only effective when organizational structures support teachers to meet regularly, reflect deeply, and co-construct instructional practices that meet the needs of students of the global majority. As Glickman and Mette (2020) argue, democratizing schools “from the inside out” requires creating safe, inquiry-rich spaces where teachers feel empowered to lead change.

In equity-centered schools, teacher collaboration with leader guidance takes on a critical role. Teachers and leaders are not merely focused on improving instruction but focus on disrupting deficit narratives and ensuring all students are seen and heard in the learning process (Paris & Alim, 2017; Tredway et al., 2025). By engaging in structured, equity-based learning communities, teachers can collectively reimagine pedagogy in ways that affirm student voice and increase access to rigorous discourse.

Purpose of the Study

The overall study was designed to explore how school leaders, as equity-focused instructional supervisors, support teachers in using equity-based protocols to promote academic discourse in the classroom. In the participatory action research study, I investigated how professional learning structures grounded in trust, collaboration, and critical reflection can foster teacher agency, build cultural competence, and disrupt traditional norms in instructional practice.

Responding to the urgent need for school leaders to create conditions where equitable teaching practices can take root and flourish, the study responds to that call by examining how equity-centered leadership, informed by emotional intelligence, identity awareness, and trust-building, can transform professional learning environments and advance culturally sustaining pedagogy.

The study is guided by one overarching research question: How do teachers use equity-based protocols to promote academic discourse? It is further informed by sub-questions that explore how teachers demonstrate understanding of equitable access and rigor; how they implement and adapt protocols; how instructional coaching supports their learning; how cross-content collaboration strengthens practice; and how the researcher grows in their own leadership capacity to guide this work. By integrating teacher learning communities, reflective coaching, and responsive supervision, this study aims to provide a practical, replicable model for school leaders committed to leading equity-driven change.

Methods

This study employed a participatory action research (PAR) design rooted in the epistemology and methodology of the Community Learning Exchange (CLE). PAR is a collaborative inquiry approach that positions participants as co-researchers engaged in cycles of reflection, action, and evaluation aimed at systemic change (Herr & Anderson, 2014). This approach was purposeful by supporting educators in co-constructing knowledge, examining practice, and transforming inequitable conditions within their school context (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). The PAR theory of action posited that if teachers co-developed an understanding of how equity-based protocols promote academic discourse, they would be more likely to implement those practices consistently in their classrooms (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). In addition, the study relied on the framework of academic discourse (Tredway et al., 2019; see Figure 1) to guide inquiry and analysis.

Figure 1. Academic Discourse Framework

Academic Discourse (AD)			
	Teacher-Generated	Teacher Initiated and Facilitated	Student Generated
Academic Task	-Designer: Teacher-designed, directed & controlled -Cognitive Demand: Typically low	-Designer: Teacher-initiated & facilitated -Cognitive Demand: Medium to high, teacher-facilitated	-Designer: Teacher and student collaboratively designed & facilitated -Cognitive Demand: High cognitive demand
Protocols and Questioning	-Teacher Role: Teacher-designed questions; teacher-controlled protocols -Underlying focus: Often compliance & behavior-driven; concerned with pacing and fidelity -Primary interaction relationship: Teacher-to-student; often pseudo-discourse -Calling on strategies: Typically raised hands; limited use of strategies for equitable access -Level of questions: Often recall and the application questioning levels with few questions at higher cognitive levels	-Teacher Role: Teacher-initiated, including encouraging student-to-student dialogue -Underlying focus: Student understanding and teacher use of student experiences -Primary interaction relationship: Teacher-to-student, with teacher encouragement of student-to student & small group -Calling on strategies: Designed for equitable access of all students -Level of questions: Attention to higher cognitive level questions, including synthesis and creativity	-Teacher Role: Coaching students as facilitators; warm demander & strong student relationships -Underlying focus: Encouraging more student-facilitated groups -Primary interaction relationship: Student-to-student -Calling on Strategies: Primarily student-generated questions & student-to-student interactions -Level of questions: High-level questions that elicit creative responses & authentic problem-solving
Dialogue	-Teacher role in questioning: All questions by teacher; posed for short responses; teacher often looking for right answers -Teacher-to-student dialogue: Typically one-way dialogue and with a subset of students -Student responses: Inaudible and short; often repeated by teacher or ignored if “wrong answer”; teacher often repeats student responses	-Teacher role in questioning: Most questions generated by teacher; questions range: recall to analysis -Teacher-to-student dialogue: Focusing on extensions: Teacher asking for elaboration & clarification; Teacher requesting support for ideas; student paraphrasing encouraged, student questions encouraged -Student Responses: Often recorded by students or teachers; equitable access for student responses; complex thinking and interactions in teacher-student interchanges; multiple student ideas or solutions considered; paraphrasing of student responses encouraged	-Teacher role in questioning: Collaboratively generated -Teacher-to-student dialogue: Primarily coaching; focusing on probing questions for deeper learning -Student responses: Student-to-student dialogue, often initiated by students; student-driven conversations; built on and challenging ideas of other students; ideas supported with evidence, often co-generated

The CLE framework provided both the epistemological stance and methodological approach for the study. CLE methodology centers the wisdom of community members, honors local

knowledge, and emphasizes relational, experiential learning (Guajardo et al., 2016). The five CLE axioms are:

- (1) learning and leadership are dynamic social processes,
- (2) conversations are vital pedagogical strategies,
- (3) those closest to the issues are best situated to identify solutions,
- (4) crossing boundaries enriches learning, and
- (5) hope and change are rooted in community assets.

This guided the design and facilitation of this research. As an activist research approach (Hale, 2017; Hunter et al., 2013), CLE enabled participants to critically examine power, identity, and equity in instructional discourse and to collaboratively enact change.

Context and Participants

The study took place in a Title I-designated rural Early College High School (ECHS) in northeastern North Carolina, serving the student body comprised of students of the global majority. The school is characterized by limited resources but a strong commitment to equity and early college access for first-generation college students.

Participants included the instructional supervisor (the researcher) and four classroom teachers representing different academic content areas. The group formed a co-practitioner researcher (CPR) team and engaged in cycles of collaborative inquiry over a 14-month period. The co-practitioner researcher (CPR) team consisted of five members: the instructional supervisor (the researcher) and four classroom teachers representing different academic content areas. Participants were purposefully selected (Patton, 2015) based on their experience, expertise, and existing collaborative relationships, ensuring both trust and professional diversity. This composition reflected the CLE and PAR emphasis on relational knowledge construction and shared leadership. The group engaged in three iterative cycles of collaborative inquiry over a 14-month period.

The instructional supervisor served as a participant and facilitator, supporting teacher learning through classroom observations, coaching conversations, and reflective practice designed to cultivate professional freedom and collective resistance to inequitable instructional norms. In this dual role, the supervisor enacted liberatory leadership using evidence-based supervision and the Community of Practice framework not only to build trust and equity but to create conditions where teachers could exercise agency, challenge traditional hierarchies, and co-construct emancipatory practices within their classrooms. The field-based practitioners demonstrated a commitment to implementing equity-based protocols that promote academic discourse and recognize that their CPR experiences modeled and reinforced their ability to engage more democratically in school reform efforts that challenge the traditional hierarchy of leader to teacher.

Data Collection and Procedures

Qualitative data collection occurred over three iterative cycles of inquiry aligned to the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model (Bryk et al., 2015). Data sources included:

- Classroom Observations: Focused on the implementation of equity-based discourse protocols and instructional strategies that promoted access and rigor.
- Coaching Conversations: Conducted after observations to support teacher reflection, decision-making, and problem-solving.
- CLE Artifacts and Reflections: Generated through structured conversations and activities that explored racial identity, equity, and pedagogical practice.
- Community of Practice (CoP) Meeting Notes: Documented collaborative learning and cross-content strategy sharing.
- Reflective Memos: Written by the researcher to capture evolving understandings and shifts in leadership practice.

In each PAR cycle of inquiry, CPR members engaged in member checking the data to confirm the accuracy of interpretation; participants co-analyzed emerging themes to determine next steps in practice. Data were organized and triangulated using Guba and Lincoln's (2000) framework for credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Data analysis followed Saldaña's (2016) two-cycle coding method. During the first cycle, open coding was applied to all qualitative artifacts, while a set of predetermined codes derived from the CLE axioms and the academic discourse framework guided the analysis of coaching conversations and observations. In the second cycle, codes were organized into broader categories and subcategories, leading to the identification of emergent themes related to equity, discourse, and instructional practice. To enhance analytic rigor, I analyzed data through the development of a codebook in which I documented the frequency of codes across data sources. As coding progressed, I observed patterns to monitor co-occurrences and emerging categories. I reviewed and refined these patterns collaboratively with a research coach and the CPR team to ensure accuracy and alignment with participant perspectives. Categories reflecting shifts in understanding, such as equity versus equality, classroom discourse, and teacher willingness to change practice, were refined through recursive analysis and peer debriefing. This iterative and participatory process reflected both the cyclical nature of PAR and the relational learning stance of CLE. Table 1 represents the data collection cycle over the process.

To maintain methodological rigor, I used multiple strategies consistent with qualitative and participatory paradigms (Gerdes & Conn, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through repeated observations, peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation across data sources, credibility of the data was achieved. Dependability was sustained through systematic documentation of coding decisions, reflective memos, and analytic records that created an audit trail. Confirmability was strengthened by ongoing reflexivity through researcher journaling and consultation with a university-based research mentor to mitigate bias. Although findings were highly contextual to the school community, the participatory and equity-centered process of the study is transferable to other educational contexts seeking to transform instructional discourse through collaborative inquiry. These strategies collectively enhanced the trustworthiness, transparency, and integrity of the study's findings and interpretations.

Table 1. Data Collection

Cycle	Meetings	Data Collected
Pre-Cycle	• Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) Meetings (n=3) • One-on-One Interviews (n=4) • Community Learning Exchange (CLE) (n=1) • Observations (n=4)	• Agenda • Notes • Group Reflections • Interview Data • Selective Verbatim Observation Notes • Posters • Gallery Walk Artifacts • Reflections • Reflective Memos
Cycle One	• Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) Meetings (n=5) • Observations (n=12)	• Agenda • Field Notes • Group Reflections • Selective Verbatim Observation Data • Gallery Walk Artifacts • Reflective Memo
Cycle Two	• Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) Meetings (n=4) • Coaching Conversations (n=12) • Observations (n=8) • Community Learning Exchange (CLE) (n=1)	• Coaching Conversation Transcript • Reflective Memo • Agenda • Field Notes • Group Reflections • Selective Verbatim Observation Data

Findings

Results are organized around two central findings that emerged across three iterative inquiry cycles conducted over a 14-month period: (1) Communities of practice (CoPs) can serve as liberatory spaces in which a school leader and teachers cultivate relational trust and improve instructional practices, and (2) evidence-based observations and coaching conversations can inform and transform teacher practice. Together, these findings illustrate how sustained collaboration and relational trust fostered teacher agency and culturally responsive instructional shifts in a rural, Title I Early College High School and represent school level practices that could inform district level policy decisions for supervision and evaluation that focuses on teacher data analysis and decision-making as a primary component of more effective supervision (Mette et al., 2024; Tredway et al., 2025).

Community of Practice as Liberatory Space

In this study, the CoP emerged not as a top-down initiative but as a teacher-led, inquiry-based space for reflection, collaboration, and shared decision-making grounded in the co-construction of equitable academic discourse practices. The principal intentionally shifted from authoritative supervisor to facilitative learner, disrupting traditional hierarchies often present in school improvement efforts (Grissom et al., 2021; Louis et al., 2010; Yurkofsky et al., 2020).

From the outset, participants identified relational trust, psychological safety, and gracious space as foundational. These conditions supported the co-practitioner research (CPR) group to function as an authentic CoP (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) in which teachers examined classroom data, questioned existing practices, and determined next instructional steps collaboratively. Teachers expressed feeling empowered to take risks, reflect on their instruction, and voice their perspectives. As one teacher reflected, “It gave me the freedom to fail... it has 100% changed how I reflect on the day—I have a voice.” These reflections illustrate how the CoP fostered both emancipation and resistance to traditional top-down supervision.

As the inquiry cycles progressed, teachers demonstrated increased agency through shared leadership, peer coaching, and instructional experimentation. For example, after analyzing observation data showing an over-reliance on low-level questioning, the group co-developed higher-order questioning strategies and implemented them across classrooms. Rather than prescribing changes, the principal facilitated liberatory reflection through inquiry, protocols, and shared decision-making (see Table 2 for specific liberatory leadership approaches).

In later cycles, the CoP evolved into a site for collective leadership and emancipation. Teachers co-designed and facilitated a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) for the entire faculty, using classroom observation data to frame discussions on equitable academic discourse. This marked a significant shift from teacher participants to practitioner-leaders, extending the CoP’s influence beyond the initial research group. By the end of the study, the CoP functioned as a liberatory space where vulnerability, shared leadership, and critical reflection supported sustained instructional improvement and a professional culture grounded in trust and collaboration.

Table 2. Liberatory Leadership Approaches

Liberatory Leadership Practice	Description	Outcomes
Dynamic Mindfulness and Gracious Space	Intentional sessions with mindfulness moments and community-building check-ins to promote presence, trust, and openness. Gracious space norms encouraged risk-taking, empathy, and mutual respect.	Cultivated relational trust and psychological safety; teachers reported feeling “free to fail” and share authentically, fostering vulnerability and agency.
Personal Narratives	Participants shared personal experiences related to teaching,	Deepened collective empathy and cultural understanding; surfaced

	identity, and equity, following CLE's emphasis on storytelling as a tool for learning and connection.	shared commitments to equitable practice; strengthened group cohesion.
Equity-Based Protocols for Dialogue	Structured conversation protocols guided reflective discussions of classroom data and equity texts.	Promoted balanced participation and equitable voice; shifted group dialogue from problem identification to shared inquiry and solution-building.
Evidence-Based Observation Tools	Selective verbatim scripting to collect non-evaluative classroom data on discourse patterns and questioning levels.	Enabled data-driven reflection and ownership of improvement; increased rigor and equity in teacher questioning practices.
Collaborative Data Analysis and Goal Setting	Teachers jointly reviewed observation data and co-constructed next steps during inquiry cycles.	Built collective efficacy and teacher-led professional development; strengthened agency in instructional decision-making.
Teacher Facilitation of Community Learning Exchange (CLE)	Teachers co-designed and facilitated a schoolwide CLE session to share protocols and findings with colleagues.	Marked a shift from participant to practitioner-leader; expanded the school's collective capacity for equity-centered dialogue and practice.
Reflective Coaching Conversations	Post-observation discussions were structured as non-evaluative coaching dialogues emphasizing teacher reflection, inquiry, and goal-setting.	Enhanced teacher voice in supervision; transformed principal-teacher relationships into collaborative partnerships.

Evidence-Based Observations and Coaching Conversations Inform Teacher Practice

Instructional supervision centered on culturally responsive pedagogy through evidence-based observations and reflective coaching. Teachers used observation tools focused on questioning levels and student discourse patterns to illuminate aspects of classroom practice often overlooked. Initially, the process felt overwhelming, but teachers quickly recognized how data revealed hidden barriers to equitable learning. One teacher noted, "Once we looked at it together, it really showed us how much we needed to change."

Across three inquiry cycles, the group observed a measurable increase in higher-order questioning, rising from 17% to nearly 50% as teachers collaboratively designed prompts aligned to Bloom's taxonomy. Simultaneously, as we practiced strategies in the CPR group, they transferred practices that increased equitable student participation to the classroom, using think-write-pair-share and structured pause time more consistently. As one teacher reflected, "I'm intentional about how I call on students and how I ask them to respond."

Critically, post-observation conversations transformed supervision from an evaluative process to a collaborative, emancipatory dialogue. Teachers received observation data beforehand, allowing

them to lead reflective discussions and set their own goals. Over time, talk-time analysis revealed a shift toward teacher-led reflection, with participants describing the conversations as “comfortable, not evaluative, and an opportunity to see growth.”

These evidence-based observations and coaching cycles created conditions for teacher agency, reflective practice, and resistance to traditional hierarchical supervision. The process exemplified a supervision model that fosters emancipation, professional freedom, and critical engagement, demonstrating how leaders can use structured, evidence-based, and collective practices to advance liberatory teaching and learning.

Discussion

The study demonstrates that when supervision is reimagined through participatory, equity-centered inquiry, professional learning becomes both liberatory and transformative. The CoP functioned as a holding space where teachers and leaders co-constructed meaning, challenged inequitable norms, and engaged in continuous learning (Drago-Severson, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2021). As such, they became teachers who tested possible ways of changing their practices in public by problem-posing and experimentation; as a result, they fostered student-generated dialogue—a cornerstone of liberatory practice (Freire, 1970). As Wenger et al. (2002) suggest, CoPs cultivate shared identity and collective agency, both of which were evident as teachers developed a common language and practice for equitable academic discourse.

Evidence-based observations further anchored this process by providing concrete data to disrupt implicit biases and promote reflective, rigorous dialogue (Mette et al., 2024; Tredway et al., 2025). The shift from compliance-driven to inquiry-driven supervision aligns with culturally responsive leadership research (Glickman et al., 2018; Gooden et al., 2023; Khalifa et al., 2016), which emphasizes professional learning that affirms teacher expertise and disrupts hierarchical structures.

Ultimately, this study offers a model of instructional supervision grounded in trust, evidence, and shared inquiry. Teachers improved their practice not through external mandates but through engagement in a relational process that valued voice, agency, and reflection. When leaders intentionally structure professional learning around communities of practice and evidence-based coaching, they create the conditions necessary for both teacher growth and equitable instructional transformation.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings from this study offer important implications for school leaders, instructional supervisors, and policy makers seeking to advance equity through culturally responsive instructional supervision. While the work unfolded at the school level, its lessons point to larger systemic opportunities for reimagining how supervision policy is enacted across districts and states.

First, the study demonstrates that instructional supervision, when grounded in evidence-based tools and teacher-led reflective dialogue, can serve as a mechanism of emancipation. Tools such

as selective verbatim observation surfaced inequities in classroom discourse, specifically regarding student access and rigor. Districts and instructional supervisors can learn from this approach by shifting from evaluative models of supervision to inquiry-driven models that center teacher agency, student voice, and critical reflection within broader evaluation systems. When observation protocols emphasize evidence over judgment, they cultivate teacher agency and continuous improvement rather than compliance. Such a shift has the potential to reframe state and district accountability systems around learning-oriented supervision, aligning professional growth with equity and instructional quality. Supervision practices that emphasize factual, observable patterns rather than subjective judgments support teachers in identifying specific changes to practice without fear of punitive feedback.

Second, the implementation of a community of practice (CoP) that functioned as a liberatory space was foundational to the success of this initiative. For sustained impact, districts and state agencies should institutionalize CoPs as a core structure for professional learning rather than viewing them as optional or time bound. Policy frameworks could require or incentivize protected time for collaborative inquiry among educators, supervisors, and principals. Embedding CoPs into district professional learning plans supported by structured protocols, access to relevant data, and coaching in relational trust can normalize shared leadership and elevate teacher voice in school improvement processes.

Third, the findings point to a need for intentional professional learning and development for supervisors in evidence-based observations, coaching conversations, and culturally competent praxis. Supervisors should be prepared to engage in equity-centered coaching that supports teachers in dismantling dominant norms such as tracking, deficit-based thinking, or uncritical acceptance of traditional questioning patterns that often reproduce inequities in classrooms. Training must go beyond technical knowledge of observation tools and include critical reflection on the supervisor's own beliefs, positionality, and potential biases. Districts and preparation programs should invest in professional learning that equips leaders to guide conversations about access and learning with confidence and humility.

At the policy level, state and district guidelines for instructional supervision should be revised to include explicit attention to equity, culturally responsive pedagogy, and teacher-led inquiry. Mandated observation frameworks should move beyond compliance to incorporate evidence-based observations that offer meaningful, context-specific feedback, enabling teachers to reflect on their instructional choices and make informed changes to improve practice. Policymakers can support these shifts by revising evaluation frameworks to include collaborative evidence analysis, reflection cycles, and documentation of equity-focused growth. Policies that provide time, space, and autonomy for professional communities to thrive are essential for sustaining this work.

Ultimately, when instructional supervision is reconceptualized as a vehicle for collective inquiry and systemic learning, it becomes a lever for both school-level transformation and policy-level reform. Embedding evidence-based tools, collaborative professional communities, and equity-centered coaching into supervision policy affirms teacher professionalism, centers student voice, and redefines accountability as a process of shared growth. These policy shifts can help

dismantle entrenched inequities by aligning daily supervisory practices with broader systemic commitments to equity and inclusion.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the emancipatory potential of instructional supervision when it is grounded in liberatory praxis. By centering teacher voice, employing evidence-based tools to disrupt inequitable patterns in classroom discourse, and cultivating professional communities rooted in shared inquiry, supervision becomes more than a mechanism for accountability—it becomes a lever for collective transformation. The findings demonstrate that when supervision is reframed as a partnership focused on equity and culturally sustaining pedagogy, it creates space for both teacher and student empowerment. As such, this work calls for systemic policy shifts that prioritize humanizing models of supervision, invest in sustained professional learning for leaders, and dismantle traditional hierarchies that limit educator agency. School systems must move beyond compliance-based observation frameworks and embrace supervision as a practice of liberation.

References

- Aguilar, E. (2016). *The art of coaching teams: Building resilient communities that transform schools*. Jossey-Bass.
- Boykin, A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. ASCD.
- Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Harvard Education Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2018). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (6th ed.)*. Pearson.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1996). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work (Rev. ed.)*. Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (1999). *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice*. Jossey-Bass.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T., Mattos, M. (2005). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Solution Tree Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10qqwwp>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum Books.
- Fullan, M. (2000). *The new meaning of educational change (3rd ed.)*. Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2002). *Leadership and sustainability*. Corwin Press.
- Glickman, C. D., & Mette, I. M. (2020). *The essential renewal of America's schools: A leadership guide for democratizing schools from the inside out*. Teachers College Press.
- Gooden, M., Khalifa M., Arnold, N. W., Brown, K. D., Meyers, C. V., & Welsh, R. O. (2023). A culturally responsive school leadership approach to developing equity-centered principals: Considerations for principal pipelines. Wallace Foundation.
<https://doi.org/10.59656/EL-LS5949.001>
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. The Wallace Foundation.
<https://doi.org/10.59656/el-sb1065.001>
- Guajardo, F., Guajardo, M., Janson, C., & Militello, M. (2016). *Reframing community partnerships in education: Uniting the power of place and the wisdom of people*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315732640>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* 2nd ed., 163–188. SAGE Publications.
- Hale, C. R. (2017). *Liberating research: A guidebook for critical, feminist, and activist research practice*. Routledge.
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2014). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226644>
- hunter, I., Emerald, E., & Martin, G. (2013). *Participatory activist research in the globalised world: Social change through the cultural professions*. Springer.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4>

- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316630383>
- Lave, J. (1991). *Situating learning in communities of practice*. In L. Resnick, J. Levine, & S. Teasley (Eds.), *Perspectives on socially shared cognition*, 63–82. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10096-003>
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511815355>
- Little, J. W. (2006). *Professional community and professional development in the learning-centered school*. National Education Association.
- Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning*. The Wallace Foundation.
- Mendels, P. (2012). The effective principal. *Educational Leadership*, 69(8), 54–58.
- Mette, I. M., Anderson, J., Nieuwenhuizen, L., Range, B. G., Hvidston, D. J., & Doty, J. (2017). The wicked problem of the intersection between supervision and evaluation. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 9(3), 709–724.
- Mette, I. M., Cormier, D. R., & Oliveras, Y. O. (2024). *Making a difference: Instructional leadership that drives self-reflection and values the expertise of teachers*. Rowman & Littlefield. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781475872279>
- Mørck, L. L. (2010). Expansive learning as production of community. *Ethnography and Education*, 5(2), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811011201312>
- Murphy, J., & Louis, K. S. (2018). *Positive school leadership: Building capacity and managing change*. ASCD Yearbook.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.4050030216>
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 et seq. (2002). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/1/text/pl>
- O'Connor, M. C., & Allen, A. (2010). Reflection, learning, and teaching discourse. *Educational Researcher*, 39(3), 163–165.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- Rigby, J. G., & Tredway, L. (2015). Actions matter: How school leaders enact equity principles. In M. Khalifa, N. A. Witherspoon, A. F. Osanloo, & C. M. Grant (Eds.), *Handbook of urban educational leadership* (pp. 426–440). Rowan & Littlefield.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications.
- Shelton, S. V. (2011). *Strong leaders strong schools: 2010 school leadership laws*. National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://doi.org/10.59656/el-sb2176.001>
- Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(1), 31–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670509353043>
- The Wallace Foundation (2013). *The school principal as leader: Guiding schools to better teaching and learning*.
- Tredway, L., Militello, M., & Flessa, J. (2025). *Leading and learning together: Cultivating school change from within*. Teachers College Press.

- Tredway, L., Militello, M., Simon, K., Hodgkins, L., Argent, J., & Morris, C. (2019). *Tools for equitable observations*. East Carolina University.
<https://education.ecu.edu/projecti4/resources/>
- Tschannen-Moran, M. (2014). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools*. Jossey-Bass.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2015). Faculty trust in the principal: An essential ingredient in high-performing schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(1), 66–92. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-02-2014-0024>
- Wenger, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. Wenger-Trayner & Associates.
- Whitford, B. L., & Wood, D. R. (2010). *Teachers learning in community: Realities and possibilities*. SUNY Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book518>
- Wood, D. R. (2010). Professional learning communities: Teachers, knowledge, and knowing. *Theory Into Practice*, 49(2), 175–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840701593865>
- Yurkofsky, M. M., Peterson, J., Mehta, J. D., Horwitz-Willis, D., & Frumin, M. (2020). Research on continuous improvement: Exploring the complexities of managing educational change. *Review of Research in Education*, 44, 403–433.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x20907363>
- Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic conversations: Classroom talk that fosters critical thinking and content understandings*. Stenhouse Publishers.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032680514>

Author Biography

Lyndsay Britt is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Elizabeth City State University, where she teaches in the Master of School Administration program. Her scholarship is in university-district partnerships and leadership in rural education. She has experience in secondary mathematics teaching and has served in multiple K–12 public school leadership roles, including assistant principal and principal.