The influence of teachers' expectations on principals' implementation of a new teacher evaluation policy in Flemish secondary education

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Abstract The implementation process of teacher evaluation policy is often problematic. In this regard, it is crucial to understand principals' sensemaking of teacher evaluation policy since their understandings influence the implementation process. While a growing body of research shows that principals strongly shape teachers' policy understanding, little is known about the way principals' sensemaking is influenced by teacher expectations about new policy. This qualitative study, drawn from interviews with principals and teachers in 13 secondary schools, indicates that the new teacher evaluation policy in Flanders (Belgium) is implemented by principals and supported by teachers in various ways. The findings of this study show this was the result of the process of discrepancy reduction between the initial standards principal set and the expectations that teachers had for the implementation of the policy. These findings underscore the complexity of teacher evaluation and help policy makers to understand that "the best" implementation of the teacher evaluation policy probably does not exists. Moreover, this offers important insights for principals in how they best lead the implementation of teacher evaluation.

Keywords Teacher evaluation · Policy implementation · Discrepancy reduction theory · Principals · Teachers

1 Introduction

Following the professionalization approach to educational accountability (Leithwood 2001), many governments took initiative to implement teacher evaluation in education (Ovando and Ramirez 2007). However, because this initiative often comes from governments rather than from local school actors, the implementation process in schools is often problematic (Timperley and Robinson 1997). Although the importance

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of the principal for the implementation of educational policy on teacher evaluation is widely recognized, research on the role of the principal when implementing and conducting teacher evaluation is limited (Tuytens and Devos 2010; Coldren and Spillane 2007; Davis et al. 2002; Halverson et al. 2004; Sinnema and Robinson 2007). Yet, exploring how accountability mechanisms are mediated by principals' understanding of the policy is crucial for grasping how policies influence the practice in schools (Spillane et al. 2002a). In this regard, recent scholarship in a number of disciplines investigates the role of implementers' sensemaking in the implementation process (Lin 2000; Spillane 1998, 2000; Yanow 1996). This sensemaking perspective on policy implementation can help to analyze implementation agents' "misinterpretations", which are often portrayed as willful efforts on the part of the implementing agents to sabotage the policy (McLaughlin 1987) or as implementers' attempts to use policy to meet their own goals and agendas (Berman and McLaughlin 1978). Research following this approach has shown how principals make sense through their own pre-existing perceptions, knowledge, and structures (Halverson et al. 2004; Spillane et al. 2002a) or through the collective and organizational context of the school (Evans 2007; Louis et al. 2005). However, until now, it is unclear how teachers' expectations regarding the implementation of policy in their school mediate the sensemaking process of principals. In line with Stein and Brown (1997), this study supposes that teachers and principals interact about new policy, negotiate meanings about the nature of the policy, and try to come to a shared understanding of the policy. This process by which shared understanding of individuals and groups evolves is called collective sensemaking (Coburn 2001). However, while interpreting the new policy-and before this shared understanding is established-discrepancies may occur between teachers' expectations of teacher evaluation and initial standards that principals set for the implementation of teacher evaluation in their school. Following the adaptive self-regulation process (Tsui and Ashford 1994), the initial standards of principals must be reconciled with teachers' expectations or demands. That is, the principal's agenda of policy implementation may be either consistent or conflictual with the expectations of teachers about the implementation of the teacher evaluation policy in their school. This involves the modification of standards over time using the discrepancy reduction process (Tsui and Ashford 1994). This discrepancy reduction perspective can be useful to look at sensemaking of principals because it may uncover the interaction process between teachers and principals and can disclose how principals get influenced (or not) by discrepant teacher expectations. In this regard, this study will analyze how principals make sense of the new teacher evaluation policy in Flanders based on the process of discrepancy reduction between their own standards and teachers' expectations.

2 Context for this study

The new teacher evaluation policy was implemented in 2007 in secondary education in Flanders (Belgium). Traditionally, teacher evaluation was not performed on a regular basis in Flemish secondary education (Devos et al. 2004). The new teacher evaluation policy obliges schools in Flanders to evaluate all their teachers every 4 years. The evaluation procedure takes 4 years for every teacher and follows a three-step program. First, the teacher evaluation process starts with the appointment of an evaluator per

teacher. This evaluator needs to be higher in rank than the teacher. In practice, this means the teacher's principal or assistant principal is the evaluator. The evaluator is the person that actually executes the evaluation. A second step in the teacher evaluation process is the agreement on a job description for the teacher. This is an individualized document that describes which tasks a teacher has and how he/she is expected to fulfill these tasks. The job description is the basis for the further evaluation process. In this evaluation process, regular feedback has to be provided to the teacher and if necessary, the teacher has to receive help to improve his performance. Those regular feedback moments are often called performance appraisal conversations in which both the teacher and the evaluator can speak freely. Finally, every evaluation period is concluded with a performance evaluation by the evaluator of the teacher. This performance evaluation has to result in an evaluation report in which a final conclusion (satisfactory or unsatisfactory) is drawn. In case of a final conclusion "unsatisfactory", teachers can appeal against an unsatisfactory evaluation. When teachers receive two negative evaluations in a row, they are dismissed.

This new policy on teacher evaluation in Flanders was imposed by the Flemish government with the main intent to appreciate and improve teachers' practices. Hence, punishing teachers for their shortcomings or failures was not the main goal. However, dismissal of teachers by this teacher evaluation system is not excluded in cases where a teacher does not show improvement after receiving help to improve his/her performance (Department of Education 2007). So, the evaluation procedure needs to lead to appraisal, but also to an equitable assessment of teacher performances. In this regard, the policy in Flanders fits the broader international trend of combining both formative purposes and summative purposes of teacher evaluation (Stronge 1995; Colby et al. 2002).

The Flemish teacher evaluation procedure imposes only this general set of rules on the schools. It does not offer an elaborated instrumentation for schools to use and thereby places the responsibility with the school (Tuytens and Devos 2010). This is in line with current teacher evaluation policies which place a high responsibility with the principal to implement and conduct teacher evaluation (Coldren and Spillane 2007; Ovando and Ramirez 2007). However, following this trend, new policy can be vague and ambiguous or send conflicting messages, which can create uncertainty about its meaning.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Principals' sensemaking

The responsibility for policy implementation in schools rests mainly with the principal (Hope and Pigford 2002). He or she is held accountable for creating conditions to facilitate the policy implementation which includes interpreting the policy, translating it into action, and leading his/her teachers towards implementation (Cosner 2011; Forsyth and Tallerico 1998; Retallick and Fink 2002). Yet, policy makers are often not aware of local actors' concerns or interpretations of the new policy. Accordingly, the intended policy is often very different from the policy in use (Ball and Bowe 1992; Halverson et al. 2004; Smit 2005). Conventional accounts for educational policy implementation failure often refer to the inability of principals or their unwillingness to change.

However, it has become clear that principals do more than embrace, oppose, or circumvent educational policy implementation (Spillane et al. 2002b). In this regard, recent research explained the difference between intended policy and policy in use as a result of the construction by local actors of a personal system of knowledge, experiences, skills, attitudes, etc. which shape local actors' way of dealing with policies (Kelchtermans 2007; van den Berg et al. 1999). Spillane et al. (2002b) identified this as "the cognitive framework of implementation". According to them and other authors (Coburn 2001, 2005; Weick 1995), action is based on how human agents interpret, adapt, and transform their environment and make meaning of information. Several recent empirical studies of policy implementation (e.g. Coburn 2001; Spillane 2000) have applied interpretive perspectives to document how sensemaking processes (i.e. processes by which implementers interpret what a policy is demanding of them and what to do (or not to do) in response to the policy (Weick 1995) explain policy implementation outcomes. In this regard, various researchers have investigated how different dimensions of these sensemaking processes influence implementation. Some studies concentrate on implementing agents' prior knowledge (Cohen and Weiss 1993) and experience (Greeno et al. 1996) and the analogies that implementing agents' draw between new ideas and their existing understandings (Spillane 2000). Studies on principals' sensemaking in this area have examined how beliefs, values, expertise, and prior knowledge of school actors shape a number of principals' activities and practices (Anagnostopoulos and Rutlegde 2007; Bruch 2007; Evans 2007; Spillane et al. 2002b). Other studies suggest that sensemaking is shaped not only by individual beliefs and values, but also by the collective and organizational context. Some call this the social and situated dimensions of cognition (Brown et al. 1989; Lave and Wenger 1991; Zerubavel 2000). Work on this social or situated perspective concentrates on how aspects of the social situation influence implementing agents' sensemaking (Coburn 2001; Lin 2000; Spillane 1998; Yanow 1996). Although existing research showed that teachers' sensemaking can be shaped by principals (Coburn 2005), it is unexamined in the literature how teachers can influence principals' sensemaking. Both principals and teachers may have their own ideas about the implementation of a policy in their school. Principals set standards for the implementation of the policy in the school, which can be similar to or discrepant with the expectations that teachers have about the implementation of the policy in their school. Following the adaptive self-regulation process (Tsui and Ashford 1994), principals' standards of policy implementation must be reconciled with the demands and expectations of teachers. This involves the modification of standards, by going through the discrepancy reduction process (Tsui and Ashford 1994).

3.2 Discrepancy reduction process

Although a detected discrepancy motivates a person to alter his or her behavior in order to reduce the discrepancy (Carver and Scheier 1981), in a school or managerial context, the discrepancy reduction process is probably far more complex. Tsui et al. (1995) described two discrete categories of discrepancy reduction strategies for the managerial context: "constituency-oriented" and "self-oriented". A manager using constituency-oriented strategies attempts to address discrepant expectations directly. Self-oriented strategies focus on the manager's own feelings rather than addressing the discrepant expectations directly.

Constituency-oriented response strategies Tsui et al. (1995) identified three constituency-oriented response strategies which involve the following: (a) actual changes in behavior, (b) expectations of constituents, or (c) evaluations of constituents. A manager using the first strategy changes his or her own behavior so that it is more consistent with constituents' expectations. Such changes may involve exerting extra effort or changing actions. A second strategy for reducing discrepancies is to influence constituencies to change their expectations. The idea is to bring the constituents' expectations more in line with the managers' own behaviors and standards. In this case, both the behavior and the expectations remain unchanged, but the evaluation or interpretation of the behavior is altered. In the third constituency-oriented strategy, managers follow a course of action and explain the reason(s) for their actions to their constituents. In other words, the manager offers a social account or provides a rationale for an action taken or to be taken (Bies 1987). Managers using this strategy do not aim to alter behavior or to influence teachers' expectations. Rather, they aim to increase understanding, if not acceptance, of their actions.

Self-oriented response strategies Self-oriented response strategies, on the other hand, do not directly address discrepancies but may serve to protect a manager in some fashion. Following Tsui et al. (1995), managers using this kind of strategy may reduce discrepancies in their mind by: (a) distorting available feedback, (b) lowering his/her standards, or (c) avoiding the discrepancy. The first self-oriented strategy is distortion of available feedback so that it confirms the success of a manager's efforts (Taylor et al. 1984). A manager can distort negative feedback of constituents so that it conveys incompatibility by reasoning as follows: "I think they want what I want". This serves as a kind of defense mechanism (Katz and Kahn 1966) which results in the manager's behavior becoming less and less adaptive. Another self-oriented way to respond to a detected discrepancy in performance is to lower one's standards so that expectations are consistent with outcomes. By following this strategy, managers can view themselves as meeting their now reduced standards. A third self-oriented strategy is to avoid dealing with or thinking about the discrepancy entirely. Tsui et al. (1995) suppose it is possible that managers behaviorally avoid the source of discrepant feedback (e.g. avoid seeing constituents with onerous expectations) or avoid thinking about the information by disengaging (perhaps in the hope that the problem will disappear or that the constituents' feeling will change with the passage of time). While this strategy again may function as a self-protective esteem-maintenance device, it has no effect on the actual discrepancy.

3.3 Purpose of study

This study analyzes how principals make sense of and implement a new teacher evaluation policy. More specifically, this study investigates if discrepancies between principals' standards for policy implementation and the expectations that teachers have about the policy implementation in their school can aid the implementation process. Three research questions are formulated to guide this study:

(1) Which discrepancies occur between the principals' standards for policy implementation and the expectations that teachers have about the implementation of the teacher evaluation policy in their school?

(2)   How do principals respond to these discrepancies?
(3)   Does the discrepancy reduction process affect principals' implementation of the teacher evaluation policy and the extent to which teachers support the policy implementation in their school?

4 Methods

Evidence for this study was collected in Flanders during the 2010–2011 school year. This study took place during the third year of implementation of the policy on teacher evaluation for secondary education that was issued by the Flemish government in 2007. For this study, 13 secondary schools were selected randomly from a list of 1065 secondary schools provided by the Flemish Ministry of Education. Schools were stratified by region, educational network, and type of education. In this sample, there are two public schools, two subsidized municipal schools, and seven subsidized private schools. This division mirrors the proportion of each educational network in the population. In each school, the principal and three teachers were interviewed. Teachers were nominated for the interview by the school principal. Yet, principals were required to nominate a least one beginning teacher (i.e. teachers with up to 3 years of experience in the school) and one experienced teacher (i.e. teacher with more than 3 years of experience in the school). In addition, principals were asked to nominate only teachers with whom he/she already conducted at least one performance appraisal conversation (if applicable). The principal was interviewed since he/she is the main actor to implement teacher evaluation. Moreover, in Flanders, it is the principal who takes the role of evaluator and actually executes the evaluation. In total, six female and seven male principals were interviewed who had between 1 and 16 years of experience as principal of their current school. Teachers had between 2 and 34 years of job experience in their current school.

   In order to understand how principals make sense of a complex teacher evaluation policy, we opted for a qualitative research methodology. More specifically, a case study design was used. Case studies provide opportunities to explore practices in depth and understand the complex interactions that characterize local systems (Stake 1995). Semi-structured open-ended interviews were used to collect the principal and teacher data. The interviews lasted on average 1 hour. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interview protocols that were used were based on a review of the literature on teacher evaluation, sensemaking, and discrepancy reduction theory. Principals were asked about their initial standards for implementation of the teacher evaluation policy at the time the policy on teacher evaluation was legislated and about their current standards (2 years after the legislation) for implementation. In addition, principals were asked about teachers' reactions to the initial implementation steps of the policy in their school and the way they tackled these reactions. Teachers, on the other hand, were asked about their expectations of the implementation of the policy in their school and were asked if their expectations changed until now. Furthermore, principals and teachers were questioned about the advantages and disadvantages of the policy, the feasibility of the policy, their experience with the implementation of the teacher evaluation system in their school, and possible effects of the teacher evaluation system. Especially, with

regard to the expectations and experiences teachers had with the implementation of the teacher evaluation system in the school, we explicitly asked teachers to describe also how their colleagues reacted towards the implementation of the teacher evaluation policy and how they think the majority of teachers in the school experienced the implementation. Exemplary interview questions were as follows: "Can you describe how you experienced the introduction of the teacher evaluation system in your school?", "Do you think your colleagues experienced this new system in the same way as you did?", "Can you describe how your colleagues reacted to this new policy?". Since we found that the teachers interviewed in each school shared the same experiences and expectations and stated most teachers in the school reacted in the same to the implementation of the policy, those interview questions grasped the "global" staff perspective.

Based on the analysis of the interview data, "empirically grounded types" were constructed (Kluge 2000). Empirically grounded types can be defined as types based on the analysis of empirical data (here, interview data) and theoretical knowledge. In the process of type construction, different stages of analysis need to be followed (Kluge 2000). First, a coding scheme was developed based on the theoretical framework. In a next step, principals' and teachers' responses were coded using NVIVO8. Third, after the interviews were coded thematically, categorical dimensions were constructed based on the analysis of what individual principals said in relation to what teachers reported on in the interview. This approach helped to analyze empirical regularities and to group the cases. In a final step, we analyzed meaningful relationships and constructed the different types.

The triangulation of the interviews with the principals and the teachers provided multiple sources of data to understand the principals' sensemaking. The first author and a second researcher (who was not familiar with the study) coded the interviews. The second coder was trained to grasp the meaning of the coding scheme. The coding scheme was explained to the second coder by giving an example of each code. In order to make sure that the distinctions between each code were clear to the second coder, the first and second coder coded one interview together and discussed coding inconsistencies to reach an agreement. The intercoder reliability was 0.86, which is in accordance with the standard of 0.80 (Miles and Huberman 1994). The interviews were analyzed using cross-case analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). In the cross-case analysis, the interviews of principals and teachers were combined with each other.

5 Results

5.1 Discrepancies between principals' standards and teachers' expectations (research question 1)

The interviews showed that, in most cases, teachers' expectations of the implementation of teacher evaluation in their school were discrepant from the initial standards their principals set for the implementation of the policy. In total, three types of discrepancies were identified between the expectations that teachers had and the standards that principals set for themselves (Table 1). Both aspects-the standards principals initially set for policy implementation and the kind of expectations teachers had-are discussed in what follows.

Table 1 Principals' initial standards for implementation and teacher expectations

	Principal standards	
Teacher expectations	Formative standards	Formative and summative standards
Summative expectations	Type I Cases D and G	Type II Case B, C, E, F, I, J, K, and L
Formative and summative expectations	Type III Cases A, H and N	No discrepancy

Principals' initial standards for policy implementation In order to understand how principals' sensemaking is influenced by the expectations of teachers, it was necessary to know how principals welcomed the teacher evaluation policy before teacher expectations came into play (time 1). In the interviews with principals, differences in principals' initial standards for implementing this policy were noticed. In general, two groups of principals could be identified based on the initial standards they set for policy implementation. The first group of principals aimed at implementing the teacher evaluation policy in a formative way, while the second group of principals wanted to install the new teacher evaluation policy in both a formative and a summative way. None of the principals initially aimed at implementing this policy solely in a summative way. The first group of five principals (cases A, D, G, H, and N) indicated during the interview that they were satisfied with the legislation of the teacher evaluation decree because it gives them the chance to appreciate teachers for their performance in a formal way. One principal said the following:

> "I was happy with the implementation of this policy. I always believed in the power of appreciation. Without this policy principals don't take the time to really talk with their teachers. Because of this system you talk with them and you help them in improving their practice." (Principal, case H)

Most principals within this first group indicated they like to focus on the formative aspect of teacher evaluation because they experienced in the past that it works to appreciate teachers. Most principals already did some informal performance appraisal conversations before the decree was issued and had positive experiences with it.

The second group of eight principals (cases B, C, E, F, I, J, K, and L), on the other hand, aimed at implementing this new teacher evaluation policy in both a formative and summative way. One principal said the following:

> "In the beginning I tried to implement this system in two ways. First, I thought it could really help teachers to improve their practice through a formative assessment of their teaching practice. Secondly, I thought I should also install this system to evaluate teachers and – when necessary – give them a negative evaluation. I believed this could lead to an adjustment of their practice or even dismissal." (Principal, B)

The results did not demonstrate why both a formative and summative manner was used for implementation. While some principals stated they really believe a

combination of both formative and summative assessment is necessary, others referred to private organizations were performance evaluation seems to work. Finally, some principals indicated they should set both formative and summative standards because the decree on teacher evaluation prescribes it.

Teachers' expectations about the implementation of the policy in their school In the majority of schools, teachers indicated they (as their colleagues in the school) were concerned about the implementation of the teacher evaluation. Almost all teachers indicated they initially hoped that the system would not lead to more control of their teaching practice. Moreover, some teachers said most teachers in the school feared to justify their performance and to be punished for their shortcomings. One teacher said the following:

> *"Teachers feel quickly attacked. This is typical for teachers. At the beginning we felt threatened by the performance evaluation system. We feared to be supervised and controlled. Moreover, we felt uncomfortable because we're not used to talk about our performance."* (Teacher, case J)

Nevertheless, differences were found in the expectations teachers had across the schools. Again, two groups of cases were identified. In the first group of ten cases (cases B, C, D, E, F, G, I, J, K, and L) teachers said during the interview that most teachers in the school reacted with reluctance to the introduction of the new teacher evaluation policy. Teachers within this group had mainly summative expectations about the new teacher evaluation policy. Although within each case expectations of teachers slightly differed, the majority of teachers within those cases were not happy with the fact that the principal would evaluate their teaching performance. One principal stated the following:

> *"In our school, every performance appraisal conversation is preceded by a classroom observation. So, I asked: 'Propose an hour on which I can visit your classroom'. For a lot of teachers this was very difficult in the beginning. And some showed me clearly they didn't like it or found some excuses to escape from this classroom evaluation."* (Principal, case D)

The majority of teachers within cases A, H, and N, on the other hand, had also formative expectations about the teacher evaluation policy. While within this group of teachers, not everyone had the same expectations, the majority of teachers said teachers reacted rather moderately to the introduction of the new teacher evaluation policy in their school. These teachers said most teachers expected the teacher evaluation policy would lead to appreciation or an improvement of their teaching practice, while they considered the possibility of a sanction as well. One teacher explained:

> *"Most teachers said: 'Ok, no problem. I do my work well, so I've nothing to be scared of'. In fact, most teachers know they do their job fine so it should be a positive evaluation. However, we all knew for some teachers a negative evaluation was possible ..."* (Teacher, case G)

Types of discrepancy Based on the kind of standards principals set for policy imple-
mentation and the expectations that teachers had, three types of discrepancies could be
identified (Table 1). Within type I, two cases were identified in which teachers expected
the teacher evaluation policy would be installed in their school in a summative way
while the principal planned to install teacher evaluation in a formative way. Within type
II, eight cases were identified in which teachers had the same summative expectations as
in type I but the principal planned to install teacher evaluation in both a summative and
formative manner. Finally, within type III, three cases were identified in which teachers
expected teacher evaluation would be installed in both a formative and summative way,
although the principals planned to install teacher evaluation in a solely formative way.
The interviews showed these different types of discrepancies were almost directly
altered by the principal. However, this was different in every case. In the next section,
the ways principals tried to reduce these discrepancies will be described.

5.2 Principals used response strategies (research question 2)

The results showed that both constituency-oriented and self-oriented response strategies
were used by principals across the different cases. While for type II discrepancies, both
constituency-oriented and self-oriented response strategies were used, only
constituency-oriented strategies were used to respond to type I and III discrepancies
(Table 2).

Table 2 Type of discrepancy and discrepancy response strategy

	Constituency-oriented response strategies		Self-oriented response strategies		
	Changing behavior	Explaining reasons	Distortion feedback	Lowering standards	Avoiding problem
Type I (formative standards, summative expectations)					
D		x			
G					
Type II (formative and summative standards, summative expectations)					
B					x
C		x			
E					x
F					x
I					x
J					
K			x		
L		x			
Type III (formative standards, formative and summative expectations)					
A					
H		x			
N					

Constituency-oriented strategies The interviews showed us that eight principals (cases A, C, D, G, H, J, L, and N) used one or more constituency-oriented response strategies to alter discrepancies. Both the "explaining reasons" strategy and the "influencing expectations" strategy illustrated the way principals in the different cases responded to discrepancies. Some principals indicated clearly they tried to influence the expectations of teachers to bring the teachers' expectations more in line with their own way of dealing with the new teacher evaluation policy. In these cases, the principal did not change the way he/she implemented the new policy but he/she tried to alter teachers' interpretation of the new teacher evaluation policy. One principal said:

> "I noticed teachers feared the performance and evaluation conversations. I told them during the first performance appraisal conversations it is nothing to be scared of. For us the goal of performance evaluation is to appreciate teachers, not to sanction them." (Principal, case G)

Furthermore, principals tried to explain the reasons for their actions as a way to respond to the discrepancies. These principals clearly offered a rationale for the implementation of the new teacher evaluation policy and had a strong belief about the finality of this new teacher evaluation policy. Using this strategy, principals did not aim to alter the behavior or to influence teachers' expectations. Rather, they aimed to increase teachers' understanding about the new teacher evaluation policy. One principal said:

> "In the beginning teachers told me they had difficulties with me supervising their lesson planning, their performance in the classroom, … But I must do that. Otherwise I can't evaluate them … So I first explained this to them. I told them it is necessary for them and for the school as an organisation. After a good communication on that they understood it and they also experienced in the interviews that the system is not against them but for them." (Principal, case C)

Self-oriented strategies The interviews showed that five principals (B, E, F, I, K) responded to discrepancies using one of the three self-oriented response strategies. One principal responded to the discrepancy by distorting the feedback he/she got from teachers, and four principals avoided the problem as a way of reacting to the discrepancies. The principal who used the "distortion of feedback" strategy wanted to install performance appraisal and performance evaluation conversations as prescribed by the new teacher evaluation policy but felt that teachers' expectations were discrepant with the principal's own standards. As a result, the principal distorted the feedback he/she got from teachers. The principal said:

> "I think some teachers felt uncomfortable. After I had a performance appraisal conversation with them, some said: 'Honestly, I didn't sleep well last night'. So (laughs) I think some didn't liked it and they are still not used to that. I think a lot of teachers thought I wanted to control them with this system, while this was not my main goal. On the contrary, we want to see it as something positive; as a tool for improvement, as they want." (Principal, case K)

Although the discrepancy was altered in the principal's mind, the interviews with teachers in this case show that the discrepancy between teachers' expectations and the standards of the principal still existed. One teacher explained:

> "The evaluation system leads to a kind of control, isn't it? In our school it's perceived like this and it is also used in that way. We feel as we are supervised and it feels like our principal observes our classroom to see if we are doing well. And … Yes, I think not everyone here is happy with it." (Teacher, case K)

Finally, four principals avoided teachers' discrepant expectations by abandoning the policy or postponing the implementation of the policy. The ones that abandoned the implementation of the policy did not see any advantages in implementing this policy in a formal way. One principal stated:

> "I must say, I tried to implement this teacher evaluation policy but it didn't work. Teachers got stressed by it because it is too formal. Therefore I decided not to implement the evaluation system." (Principal, case B)

The ones that postponed the implementation of the policy referred to a lack of time or indicated it is not feasible to evaluate all their teachers. One principal said the following:

> "I must say I haven't had the time for performance appraisal conversations with my teachers, nor to discuss their job description with them, let alone to have performance appraisal conversations. I did some performance appraisal conversations and some teachers will have thought: "Oh no, dear God". But honestly, how would you react? Suddenly you got an invitation of your principal to talk about your performance … Who likes to be evaluated after years of experience? I know I should implement this policy but first I need to find the time for it." (Principal, case I)

While using this kind of strategy may function as a self-protective device, it clearly had no effect on the actual discrepancy. In this regard, it was interesting to see that teachers in these cases indicated that the finality of the teacher evaluation policy is still unclear for them. One teacher stated for example:

> "I don't really know what to expect from this policy… When we heard about this performance evaluation in the beginning a lot of teachers panicked. Some were also invited to a performance appraisal conversation, others were not invited. And lately we don't hear anything about it. Teachers, who begin to work here, do not know it." (Teacher, case I)

5.3 Policy implementation as a result of the discrepancy reduction process (research question 3)

Based on the analysis of the discrepancy reduction process, schools in this study could be classified in four different types of policy implementation based on the extent: (1) to

which the teacher evaluation policy was implemented by principals and (2) to which teachers supported the implementation (Table 3). In what follows, these four different types of policy implementation will be discussed.

Full policy implementation, supported by teachers At the time of the interview, three principals (cases C, J, and L) implemented job descriptions, performance appraisal conversations, and performance evaluation conversations as stipulated in the decree on teacher evaluation in Flanders. Principals in this group decided to implement all formal aspects (including performance evaluation conversations) of the teacher evaluation policy. In other words, principals installed this new teacher evaluation policy as both a tool for improvement and a tool for sanctioning teachers. The analysis suggested this can be explained by their belief in the power of both formative and summative assessment and their past experiences with underperforming teachers. One principal stated for example:

> *"On the one hand I'm convinced of the benefits of teacher appraisal because I believe you can only motivate teachers to do it good or even better when you also appreciate them for the good things they do. On the other hand I think this not always enough. You also need to control teachers in a way to make sure they are all going in the same direction. If this is not the case I need to say: 'Stop, you need to change or …' Otherwise it isn't fair towards other teachers who do make an effort to be a good teacher."* (Principal, case C)

Furthermore, these principals were also motivated and capable in dealing with discrepant teacher expectations. Most teachers in these cases expected the teacher evaluation policy would be installed to sanction teachers only, while principals wanted to implement this policy in both a formative and summative way (type II). Nevertheless, principals within this group succeeded in altering this discrepancy: (1) by explaining teachers why both formative and summative assessment is necessary, (2) by telling them that sanctioning teachers is not the primary goal or (3) by using a combination of both the explaining and influencing strategy. As a result, principals within this group could hold on to their initial standards for policy implementation, implement the policy as it was intended by the government and their teachers supported the way the policy was implemented in their school.

Full policy implementation, not supported by teachers One case (K) was identified in which the principal implemented job descriptions, performance appraisal conversations, and performance evaluation conversations in a formal way. However, in contrast to the teachers in cases C, J, and L, the teachers in case K did not support the implementation of the teacher evaluation policy in their school. The analysis suggested the principal implemented the teacher evaluation policy both in a formative and summative way because of a sense of duty to implement this policy as stipulated in the decree. Instead of having past experiences with teacher evaluation or having a strong belief in the power of both formative and summative assessment in teacher evaluation, the principal in case K set formative and summative standards for the implementation of policy mainly to meet the policy rules. As a result, the principal perceived teacher evaluation as an administrative burden.

Table 3 Policy implementation as a result of the discrepancy reduction process

	Full implementation of the policy, supported by teachers	Full implementation of the policy, not supported by teachers	Partial implementation of the policy, supported by teachers	No implementation of the policy
Cases	C, J, L	K	A, D, G, H, N	B, E, F, I
Principals' initial implementation standards	Teacher evaluation as a formative and summative tool	Teacher evaluation as a formative and summative tool	Teacher evaluation as a formative tool	Teacher evaluation as a formative and summative tool
Teachers' first expectations	Summative expectations	Summative expectations	Summative expectations/Formative and summative expectations	Summative expectations
Discrepancy type	Type II	Type II	Types I and III	Type II
Response strategy	Constituency-oriented	Self-oriented	Constituency-oriented	Self-oriented
Discrepancy	Reduced	Avoided	Reduced	Avoided
Principals' current standards	Retained standards	Retained standards	Retained standards	(Temporally) no standards for implementation
Interpretation of teacher evaluation	Teacher evaluation as a positive activity	Teacher evaluation as an administrative burden	Teacher evaluation as a positive activity	Teacher evaluation as a threatening control tool
Way of policy implementation	Formal implementation of job descriptions, formal performance appraisal and evaluation conversations	Formal implementation of job descriptions, formal performance appraisal and evaluation conversations	Implementation of job descriptions and performance appraisal conversations (performance evaluation conversations are rather a formality)	Against the implementation of the policy, principals don't see any benefits
Teachers' acceptance of the teacher evaluation system	Teachers accept the teacher evaluation system in their school	Teachers do not accept the teacher evaluation system in their school	Teachers accept the teacher evaluation system in their school	Teachers do not know if the policy will be implemented in their school

> *"I know we have to implement this teacher evaluation policy. I also try to do this although I know it isn't necessary to go through the whole evaluation cycle with all my teachers. It takes a lot of time but I know it is something were the central inspection will look at ..."* (Principal, case K)

As it occurred also in other cases, teachers in this case initially had mainly summative expectations about the implementation of the policy in their school while the principal wanted to implement the policy in both a formative and summative manner. The interviews with the principals and teachers showed that the principal did not succeed in altering this discrepancy. Although the principal indicated in the interview that he/she noted teachers had discrepant expectations, he/she used a self-oriented strategy to respond to the discrepancy. More specifically, he/she distorted the feedback he/she got from teachers. As a result, the discrepancy remained unchanged. In other words, the principal's actions were not in line with what he/she stands for, which led to uncertainty and confusion among the teachers in the school. As a consequence, teachers still think the teacher evaluation policy is meant to sanction them, while the principal's main focus is the formative assessment of teachers' practices (negative performance evaluations are exceptionally). Although the principal could hold on to his/her initial formative and summative standards, the policy isn't implemented as it was intended by the government and teachers did not accept the way the policy was implemented in their school.

Partial policy implementation, supported by teachers Furthermore, five principals (A, D, G, H, and N) made efforts to design and implement job descriptions. Moreover, they organized performance appraisal conversations with a reasonable large group of teachers in their school which they planned to finish for all these teachers by the end of the year. The performance evaluation conversation and report-in which a final conclusion ("satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory") is drawn-is seen as a formality. One principal reasoned as follows:

> *"We plan to finish the performance evaluation conversations this year but it will be a formality. The majority of teachers functions well ... apart from some tiny things to work on. Moreover, these weaknesses should be discussed in the performance appraisal conversation. The performance evaluation isn't neces-sary. In our school no one would be evaluated in a negative way and teachers know that. Every teacher will get a formal final conclusion 'satisfactory'."* (Principal, case D)

The way of interpreting and implementing teacher evaluation by these principals can be explained by their strong belief in the power of appreciating teachers and experi-ences with appreciating teachers in the past. Principals within this group indicated the finality of the teacher evaluation system lies in the improvement of teachers' classroom practice by appreciating teachers' work and helping them in the enhancement of their weaknesses. These principals seemed to use the performance appraisal conversations to stimulate professional learning and self-reflection and think this system gives them the chance to communicate with their teachers about their daily practices. One principal explained the following:

"We use the teacher evaluation system to appreciate our teachers. It's a tool for improvement. Before the decree on teacher evaluation was issued, we also did that and we saw that it works. Why should we change that?" (Principal, case G)

Moreover, the results of this study showed these principals were motivated and capable to alter discrepancies between their own standards and the expectations teachers had. Although principals within this group had to deal with different teacher expectations (types I and III), all principals succeeded in reducing the discrepancy by using one or two constituency-oriented response strategies. The results demonstrated principals influenced teacher expectations in order to bring these expectations more in line with their own standards. In addition, some principals explained to their teachers clearly why this teacher evaluation policy is necessary or used a combination of both constituency-oriented strategies. In these cases, teachers indicated during the interview that they understand why performance appraisal conversations are useful and that it is clear for them now that the teacher evaluation policy will only be used to appraise and improve their practices. To conclude, principals within this group could hold on to their initial formative standards and implemented only the formative aspects of the policy. Although they didn't implement the policy as it was intended by the government, principals approached teacher evaluation as a positive instrument and teachers in the school are satisfied with the implementation.

No policy implementation Finally, four principals (cases B, E, F, and I) were identified who did not implement the teacher evaluation policy at the time the interviews were recorded. Some principals indicated they postponed the implementation, while others had decided to abandon the policy completely. The analysis suggested their way of implementing the policy can be explained by their lack of motivation and incapability in reducing discrepancies in a constituency-oriented way. The lack of motivation of these principals to implement the policy was apparent from their negative attitude towards the new policy, as one principal said:

"This teacher evaluation policy is a superfluous measure. If you try to implement it; they will try to punish you for administrative or procedural errors. To be honest, I don't want to do that. This is not feasible." (Principal, case F)

Furthermore, it seemed these principals are incapable of reducing discrepancies in a constituency-oriented way, as one principal said:

"Even if you don't have the intention to punish teachers, they automatically feel as if you want to do that from the moment you write things down on paper. If you need to formalize those things, teachers go into a defense mode. Everything you try to do, returns to you as a slap in the face." (Principal, case B)

In other words, the interviews showed these principals initially planned to implement this new teacher evaluation policy in both a formative and summative way. However, teachers' summative expectations changed their idea. In response to these summative expectations, none of these principals used constituency-oriented strategies to respond to discrepant teacher expectations. They all avoided the implementation of

the policy by prolonging the implementation or abandoning the policy completely. Also, this became clear from the answers principals gave about their current standards for implementation (time 2). Principals' previous expectations completely changed, and they saw the proposed teacher evaluation system as a threatening instrument to sanction or punish teachers for their bad performance. According to them, this teacher evaluation policy leads to frustration and anxiety among teachers. Therefore, they decided not to implement the policy as prescribed or decided to prolong the implementation. One principal said for example:

> "If they should ask me to become Minister of Education, I would abolish this policy directly. I experienced it frightens teachers because it tries to fire tenured teachers, which is impossible!" (Principal, case B)

To conclude, principals within this group moved away from their initial standards for policy implementation, did not implement the policy, or prolonged the implementation. As a result, teachers did not really know what to expect from the teacher evaluation policy.

6 Discussion and conclusion

First, the results of this study demonstrated most teachers initially feared that the teacher evaluation policy would be implemented in their school in a solely summative way, namely, to hold teachers accountable for their performance. This result is in line with Tuytens and Devos (2009) who found teachers are somehow concerned about the way their school will implement the new Flemish teacher evaluation policy although they are fairly positive towards the new teacher evaluation policy. Consistent with Stronge and Tucker (1999) and Morgado and Sousa (2010), this study found that most teachers feared to be controlled and sanctioned through the new teacher evaluation system in their school. In other words, they had summative expectations about the implementation of the teacher evaluation policy in their school. This result is in line with those of Flores (2012) who found teachers have rather a negative picture of the implementation process of teacher evaluation in their school. Yet, this study also identified schools where the majority of teachers had both formative and summative expectations about the implementation of the new teacher evaluation policy in their school. These teachers expected that the teacher evaluation policy would lead to appreciation and improvement of their teaching practices although they considered the possibility of being sanctioned for bad performance as well. This study could not identify which factors accounted for these differences in teachers' first expectations. School leadership (e.g. Tuytens and Devos 2010; O'Pry and Schumacher 2012) and different individual factors of teachers (e.g. knowledge of the teacher evaluation policy, previous experiences with performance appraisal or evaluation or with evaluators, etc.) may account for differences in teachers' initial perceptions on teacher evaluation.

Second, this study showed principals' initial standards for policy implementation varied across cases and-in some cases-changed as a result of the discrepancy reduction process. Two groups of principals could be identified based on the kind of standards they initially set for policy implementation, before teacher expectations came

into play. A first group of principals aimed initially at implementing this policy in a formative way, whereas the second group of principals set initially both formative and summative standards for the implementation of the policy. No principals were found who only set summative standards. Consistent with previous research, this study found principals' standard setting was based on various beliefs and prior experiences (Coburn 2001, 2005; Spillane et al. 2002a; Anagnostopoulos and Rutlegde 2007).

Third, this study showed, consistent with the literature on sensemaking and policy implementation, that the local interpretation and implementation of the teacher evaluation policy varied substantially from school to school (Halverson et al. 2004; Spillane et al. 2002b). As described in the results, the teacher evaluation policy was not always implemented as it was intended by the policymakers (Ball and Bowe 1992; Smit 2005). Some principals opted for a full implementation or both formative and summative approach of the policy, others chose to implement the policy partially or in a solely formative way. Finally, also, principals were identified who did not implement the policy at all. In line with other researchers (e.g., Tuytens and Devos 2014; Middlewood and Cardno 2001), this study showed the way of implementation of the teacher evaluation system was associated with principals' interpretation of the policy. As in the study of Cardno (2001), principals were identified who perceive teacher evaluation as a satisfying experience, as a threatening control tool, or-as an alternative to these two extremes-as nothing more than a formal procedure or administrative burden. However, this study did not find that principals' initial standards for policy implementation or teachers' expectations accounted for this difference. Yet, the results of this study suggested that the extent of principals' efforts to satisfy conflicting expectations of teachers was associated with the way they finally implemented the policy. In line with Tsui et al. (1995), this study found some principals clearly made efforts to alter discrepancies between teachers' expectations and their own standards by using one or two constituency-oriented response strategies (explaining reasons or influencing expectations), while other principals seemed to escape from this difficult situation by using esteem-oriented response strategies (distortion of feedback or avoiding discrepant feedback or problem).

Furthermore, this study showed that depending on the kind of response strategies principals used, teachers supported the teacher evaluation system or not. More specifically, the results of this study suggested that the implementation of the teacher evaluation policy is more supported by teachers in schools in which principals engage in constituency-oriented response strategies than in schools in which principals engage primarily in esteem-oriented strategies. Explanations for principals' choice for either constituency-oriented or esteem-oriented response strategies could be found in the kind of discrepancies that existed between teachers and principals as well as in principals' motivation and capacity in altering such discrepancies. While both constituency-oriented and self-oriented response strategies were used to respond to discrepancies in which principals set both formative and summative standards, only constituency-oriented strategies were used to respond to discrepancies in which principals set only formative standards. This result suggested that the kind of discrepancy can be possibly related to the type of response strategy used by the principal. It was probably easier for principals to alter discrepancies in a constituency-oriented way if they aimed at installing teacher evaluation in a solely formative way, while teachers feared that the teacher evaluation system could have also summative purposes. On the contrary, it

might have been more difficult for principals to convince teachers-who feared the summative purposes of teacher evaluation-that the main purpose of teacher evaluation is appreciating and improving teachers' practices while dismissal of teachers is not excluded. Furthermore, the results of this study showed that principals, who succeed in dealing with conflictual teacher expectations in a constituency-oriented way, seemed to be more capable in holding on to their initial standards of policy implementation, in being honest to their teachers and in clearly communicating the goals of the teacher evaluation system to their teachers. This result suggested that not only the type of discrepancy but also the capacity and motivation of principals in reducing discrepancies may be important to look at if researchers or educators want to understand principals' sensemaking and policy implementation. Therefore, this study showed, in line with Tsui and Ashford (1994), that it is crucial to look at both personal and contextual factors that may influence the extent of and the manner in which self-regulation activities may be carried out. Possible personal sources of motivation for self-regulation are the managers' belief in their personal efficacy and managers' sense of self-esteem and self-monitoring as well as several interpersonal factors such as: the kind of power relation between the manager and the constituent, the manager's orientation towards conflict situations, and the degree of interpersonal trust between managers and their constituents. Moreover, several job variables (e.g. the interdependence, ambiguity, and scarcity of directly provided or spontaneous feedback in the job) and organizational variables may systematically affect the self-regulation process such as the degree of hierarchical orientation and the nature of the communication climate in the organization (Tsui and Ashford 1994). Since this discrepancy reduction perspective sheds light on several context factors in the implementation process in this study, it should be taken into account for analyzing educational implementation processes in further research. It could be interesting, for example, to investigate which individual factors of principals are associated with the kind of discrepancy response strategies principals engage in. It could be that principals with a higher sense of self-efficacy engage more in constituency-oriented response strategies than in esteem-oriented response strategies, for example, or the that the orientation of principals towards conflicts is associated with the kind of response strategies they engage in. On the other hand, it could be valuable to look at the relation between factors related to the teachers within the school and the kind of response strategies principals engage in. Depending on the persistence of teachers and unanimity of teachers' expectations about the new policy, it is, for example, probably easier for principals to engage in either constituency-oriented or esteem-oriented response strategies.

7 Limitations

Several limitations of this study cause us to be prudent about the findings. A first limitation is that the study was conducted at the initiation of a new evaluation system in Flanders. The new evaluation system was still under development at the time; therefore, further research at a more developed stage of the evaluation system is desirable. In this regard, also, longitudinal research with a collection of data on multiple moments would be beneficial to fully understand possible changes in the sensemaking process through the entire policy implementation and institutionalization process. Second, the sample

was limited. The research took place in only 13 schools. Moreover, these schools are all secondary schools. It would be useful for further research to use larger samples, spread over different educational levels. In this regard, we should be careful about the findings and we do not claim generalizability of these findings. A second limitation is that only three teachers were interviewed to gain insights in the expectations of teachers and the acceptance of teachers within the school. Thirdly, the study findings rely on self-report of teacher and principals by means of semi-structured interviews. Most research on teachers' and principals' sensemaking of policy implementation uses in-depth interviews combined with observations. Real observations would have added the perspective of the interactions that reveal information on how principals' sensemaking is shaped through social interactions in daily practices. Moreover, this study focused solely on the influence of teachers' expectations on principals' sensemaking, thereby neglecting the expectations of other stakeholders within the school and their pre-existing perceptions, knowledge, and structures (Halverson et al. 2004) which can possibly influence principals' sensemaking. Further research could elaborate this topic by taking into account expectations of different stakeholders in the school, besides those of teachers. Finally, the discrepancy response strategies investigated here were derived from Tsui et al. (1995). The interviews with principals and teachers showed that principals used both constituency and self-oriented response strategies. However, no principals were identified who changed his/her behavior (constituency-oriented) or lowered his/her standards (esteem-oriented) as a response to discrepant teacher expectations. It is possible that principals use these strategies and/or a variety of other methods which current analysis did not capture. More research is needed to identify additional strategies, based on both teachers' and principals' own perspectives, which principals employ to respond to incompatible expectations.

8 Implications for school principals and policy makers

Despite the limitations of this study, the results of this study make a contribution to the understanding of implementing teacher evaluation and the situated sensemaking of educational policy on teacher evaluation. By bringing together research on sensemaking and discrepancy reduction theory, this study revealed the importance of principals in this implementation process which offers important insights in leading a policy implementation which works and is supported by teachers in the school. More specifically, this study stressed the importance of considering teachers' initial expectations about new policies. Explicitly and actively *soliciting information about teachers' expectations* may be essential in order to detect possible discrepancies between own standards and the expectations of others. In this regard, principals could try to bring the expectations of teachers more in line with own standards without simply giving in to teachers' expectations or manipulating teachers' expectations. In line with Tuytens and Devos (2012), this study shows that especially *a clear communication* on what the purposes are of the teacher evaluation system and the provision of enough teacher participation opportunities in the implementation are key in leading an effective implementation of teacher evaluation.

Furthermore, this study reconfirmed the complexity of the local implementation of teacher evaluation. Therefore, policy makers should *be aware of the fact that "one*

effective or best teacher evaluation implementation" probably does not exist. It is clear that it is not desirable that principals avoid or abandon teacher evaluation or implement teacher evaluations systems which are not supported by teachers, as was found in some cases in this study. Yet, simply stating that a solely formative (partial implementation) or both formative and summative implementation (full implementation) of the teacher evaluation policy is the only and best option, is impossible. Since both implementations seem to have effect and are supported by teachers, in their specific context, policy makers should keep on giving principals enough freedom and responsibility to interpret policy and implement their teacher evaluation system. In that way, principals can develop and install a teacher evaluation system which is appropriate and adapted to the context of the school (e.g. the group of teachers, the principal). However, this is only recommended when sufficient competency development for policy implementation is guaranteed at the local level (Tuytens and Devos 2014).

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