What are we learning about Supervisory Officer learning?

Learning about how the SO school visit can build Principal and Vice-Principal Instructional Leadership capacity

July, 2015

Background:

This monograph describes a partnership initiated by the Ontario Public Supervisory Officers' Association (OPSOA) and supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Aporia Consulting Ltd. The project focused on the role of the Supervisory Officer (SO) school visit in supporting the Instructional Leadership (IL) capacity of school administrators.

The adaptive challenge:

The Ontario Leadership framework articulates Instructional Leadership as a key capacity for both system and school leaders. IL is defined as leadership functions that support teaching and learning. John Hattie's recent research has found that although most leaders claim to be transformational leaders, it is instructional leaders that have the most positive impact on schools[1]. That said, Grissom, Loeb and Master found that IL as a broad concept is relatively meaningless, unless it is distilled into which behaviours are considered to be IL and which are not[2]. Moreover, this latter research also concluded that time spent broadly on instructional functions does not predict student achievement growth. Aggregating across leadership behaviours masks the fact that some specific IL behaviours are more impactful than others. For example, intentional, deliberate, and sustained teacher coaching by a school leader has positive benefits for student learning, while time spent on informal classroom walkthroughs (by principals) negatively predicts student growth, despite the popularity of the latter as an espoused IL behaviour[3].

Although there has been some work looking at the role of the Supervisory Officer as an Instructional Leader[4], there is an absence of direct research on the role of the SO in terms of supporting the IL capacity of the school administrator. However, one might ask a set of questions parallel to those above about the value added by particular SO behaviours. Specifically, school visits are frequently highlighted as a core SO tool for supporting school improvement and IL capacity for administrators (along with other functions), with some districts mandating the proportion of time that SOs with school responsibilities spend in schools. The question remains as to what exactly such visits entail, since we know from the aforementioned research that where the principal analog is concerned, informal "visits" to classrooms can not only be ineffective, but may actually be detrimental to the learning agenda.

Research has shown that leaders who believe their major role is to evaluate their impact are amongst the most effective[5]. This project grew out of the questions that Supervisory Officers across the province were asking about the impact of their school visits on supporting the IL capacity of principals. School visits are a structure that is highly prevalent, but that there is little research about. As such, this project took up this inquiry question about how the SO school visit contributes to the IL capacity

[1] Hattie, J. (2015). High-impact leadership. *Educational Leadership, 72*, 36-40.

[2] Grissom, J. A., Loeb, S., & Master, B. (2013). Effective instructional time use for school leaders: Longitudinal evidence from observation of principals. *Educational Researcher, 42*, 433-444.

[3] Grissom et al. (2013).

[4] Ontario Ministry of Education (ND). Superintendents as Instructional Leaders. *Leadership Support Letter*.

[5] Hattie, J. (2015).

of school leaders. This question was framed as an adaptive challenge in that the necessary knowledge to answer the question does not yet exist. Because adaptive challenges are heuristic, requiring experimentation and investigation, this question was considered an optimal one to undertake through an inquiry process.

Taking up the adaptive challenge through inquiry:

Project participants included six Supervisory Officers from six different Ontario public school boards (with elementary and secondary school responsibilities), supported by consultants/researchers from Aporia Consulting Ltd. In addition, a representative of the Ministry of Education located himself as an observer and co-learner, with the permission of the group. The six SOs came together to form a learning network, that took up a specific inquiry question: How do I learn which things I do as a SO (in relation to my school visits) make a difference on the Instructional Leadership capacity of principals? These SOs committed to engaging in individual inquiries to learn about this problem on behalf of SOs across the province.

The group operated using this research-based definition of an effective learning community[6]: "The power of the idea of a [learning community] is that members of the group… engage together in adaptive challenges so that their *understanding* of those challenges grows deeper and is more unified. Through their investigations, "next practices" emerge that are then tested… Through such a repeated process, practice grows more sophisticated and powerful and the group develops a tighter sense of camaraderie and common purpose. As a result, they can construct common understanding, share knowledge and experience, and develop common goals." What this means is that the goal of the learning community was to learn more deeply about the adaptive challenge itself, form hypotheses for working through it, and test the hypotheses to determine what works and does not work.

The process involved each SO defining a "learning case", which was a bounded learning space of one or two schools/administrators where the SO believed that s/he could add value in terms of building IL capacity and where what was learned would have transfer potential into other similar contexts. The

> *"Purposeful and precise SO school visits that contribute to the Instructional Leadership of the Principal is very difficult but exciting work requiring an open to learning mindset."*

idea was that each SO would engage with his/her own inquiry over an eight-month period, using the plan/act/assess/reflect model to work through incremental "next best learning moves". These moves were scaffolded and tracked using the template shown below. The moves were intended to be very small, to allow them to be easy to monitor and learn from. For example, a learning move might be "*if I ask Principal X what she sees*

---

[6] Katz, S., & Dack, L. A. (2013). *Intentional Interruption: Breaking Down Learning Barriers to Transform Professional Practice.* Thousand, Oaks: Corwin Press, adapted from Supovitz, J. (2006). The case for district-based reform: Leading, building, and sustaining school improvement. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

to be her greatest learning need in terms of instructional leadership, by asking the following question: What do you think you need to learn in terms of instructional leadership?", *"then I will learn if my assessment of the Principal's learning needs are the same as her own assessment of her needs"*. Subsequent to completing the move and reflecting on what was learned (e.g., *"I learned that Principal X is not confident in having courageous conversations with teachers, which was something I did not know about her before"*), the SO would determine his/her next best learning move (e.g., *"if I model a courageous conversation for the Principal, by… then I will learn…"*). The template required the SOs to separate what they *did* in their move from what they *learned* from their move, and to reflect on the learning both in terms of what they learned *from* the move (i.e., what they learned about Principal X in the example above), as well as what they learned *about* the move (i.e., was the question a good one?), which relates to the transferability of the learning (e.g., would I do this move again as a leader?). SOs were also asked, where possible, to make reference to the Ontario Leadership Framework in reflecting on what they learned about the move in order to label the relevant leadership learning.

Inquiry Question: How do I learn which things I do as an SO (in relation to my school visits) make a difference on the instructional leadership capacity of principals?

PLAN	PLAN	PLAN	ASSESS	REFLECT
My Next Best Learning Move (What will I do next to learn?) "If I… by…"	Success Criteria (What will success for this "move" look like? What do I hope to learn from this move?) "…Then I will learn…"	Evidence (What Conversation, Observation, and/or Product will I look at to evaluate the success of my learning move?)	What happened? What did I find out?	What did I learn FROM this move? "I learned from this move that…" What did I learn ABOUT this move as a transferable leadership practice (in OLF terms)? "I learned that…"

The group had an initial teleconference in June 2014 to plan the project, and then met eight times between September 2014 and May 2015. Initially the plan was to meet primarily via teleconference and only a few times face-to-face. However, very early on in the project the group made the unanimous decision to conduct all meetings face-to-face, despite the fact that this was logistically less convenient for all involved (due to a significant geography spread and face-to-face meetings taking more time). This change is evidence of the very high level of commitment to the project and

engagement in the work from all involved. As one SO said, "this is the most important work I do for my own learning, so it's worth it."

While each SO engaged in his/her own personal inquiry, the purpose of the full-group learning network meetings was for the SOs to share where they were with their inquiry and to gain critical friend feedback from the group. A conversation protocol was used to ensure that the discourse would move beyond "superficial discussions" to "focused learning conversations", which are a planned and systematic approach to professional dialogue that supports leaders to reflect on their practice, gain new knowledge, and use that knowledge to improve practice. SOs would take turns "presenting" their most recent learning moves and associated reflections in their inquiry, with the other members of the group acting as critical friends. The learning conversation protocol was designed as an "intentional interruption"[7] to typical conversation practices in order to ensure that the group would understand each SO's problem more deeply and do a joint analysis of the individual's work. For example, the protocol ensures that there is minimal "story swapping" and that the discussion is focused on the presenter's work only, and it forces the presenter to actively listen (but not reply) in places where s/he might be inclined to defend and ignore what is being said. It also forces people to pull apart and sequence a) clarification (to ensure they understand), b) interpretation (to conceptualize and represent the work at a deeper level), and 3) suggestions (to direct next steps in learning). Suggestions are intentionally left until the end, with the goal being that the suggestions are stronger and more refined because of all the clarification/interpretation work that has been done earlier.

Individual approaches to the adaptive challenge:
Prior to embarking on this project, and in the service of "activating prior knowledge", the participating SOs shared with the group how they were currently doing their school visits. Although most of the SOs shared that they used a fairly consistent school visit structure with each of their schools, this sharing exercise revealed that the six participants showed significant variability on a number of issues related to the school visit, including:

- Number of times per year schools were visited, and whether this was mandated
- Whether agendas/questions were sent to administrators in advance of the visit
- Whether the content/structure of the visit varied based on the time of year
- Who they met with (school administrators only, or school administrators and groups of teachers, such as the School Improvement Team)
- Whether they reviewed student achievement data related to the school's articulated needs
- Whether they discussed the most recent version of the School Improvement Plan with the school administrator(s)
- Whether they discussed the school administrator(s)' agenda for upcoming teacher professional learning opportunities, such as PLC meetings
- Whether they visited classrooms at every visit, and how many classrooms

---

[7] As introduced by Katz and Dack (2013).

- The purpose of visiting classrooms (to observe teaching versus for a social/"political" purpose)
- Who they talked to when visiting classrooms (teachers, students, both)
- Whether they debriefed their walkthroughs in detail with the school administrator(s)
- Whether school administrator concerns (about teachers, students, etc.) were discussed during the visits
- Whether managerial/operational items were discussed at the visits
- Whether they talked with the school administrator(s) about the problems of practice they were currently working though in their Principal Learning Network

Given that the six SOs began the project in fairly different places in terms of their school visits, each chose to focus on the piece of the "school visit challenge" that was most meaningful to them in their own context. As such, different inquiries emerged from this project, including learning how to differentiate the school visit, learning how to build capacity in administrators with a particular learning profile, learning how to support newly appointed administrators, learning how to model for administrators what they might do with their teachers, learning how to influence administrators to learn together, learning how to build principal capacity to lead effective Professional Learning Communities, and learning how to involve school teams in the school visit.

Learning from the project:

Learning from this project has been captured from a variety of data sources[8] in two different ways: A) Learning about the *process* of Supervisory Officers working together in a learning network, and B) Learning about the *content* of the inquiries that the Supervisory Officers worked through (essentially, what have emerged as promising practices related to the SO school visit). These two sets of findings are discussed in turn below.

Learning about the process: Supervisory Officers working together in a learning network

1. The power of a learning network is in each person working on his/her own slice of the problem, with the network aggregating the learning.

As mentioned above, each Supervisory Officer chose to work on the piece of the challenge that was most meaningful in his/her own context. However, the real value of the learning network was that it provided the venue to aggregate the learning. In this way, each SO was learning on behalf of his/her colleagues in the network as well as on behalf of all SOs across the province. The variability in the inquiries done by the group was very valuable, but it is the aggregation (that happened at the group meetings) that allowed the group to learn cohesively, rather than as fragmented individual inquiries.

2. The inquiry template is a vital tool because it works as a scaffold to plan, capture, and label the learning.

---

[8] Data sources included document analyses, group meeting notes, individual interviews, and direct observation.

The template forced the SOs to track and monitor their learning moves. SOs reported that having to use the template ensures:

- That you are accountable to the learning process (because you have to complete and walk your colleagues through the template)
- That you focus on "learning" rather than "doing" (because the template separates what has been done from what has been learned)
- That you articulate your "gut instincts" and learn whether they're right or wrong, by determining whether each move "worked" or "didn't work"
- That you are precise in planning exactly what each move will look like
- That you follow through all the steps of plan, act, assess, and reflect for each move
- That you go deeper with each move that you do (because you have to plan and capture detail)
- That you don't forget about certain moves that you've done (because you have to write them down)
- That you are able to transfer what you've learned to other situations (because the template forces you to think about this)
- That you see exactly what it is you're doing in your practice and how this sometimes contradicts what you think you're doing (for example, the template might make you notice that you have done the exact same thing you tell other people not to do but do not realize you are doing yourself)

"Using the template to document my learning moves has been essential for me to determine if the move achieved its intended outcome in supporting the Principal's leadership. Without the template I would not reflect on the move to the same degree and would assume that my move was successful."

The inquiry template was another form of "intentional interruption" of the way people tend to operate when left to their own devices. Without a structure for documentation, people tend not to be as intentional in planning out learning moves, may focus more on "doing" and less on learning, often forget to monitor and reflect on the moves they have done, and might not think about transferability of moves. The template was an intentional support to encourage the SOs to engage in all of these important parts of the learning process, monitoring all the details of each move through the plan/act/assess/reflect stages, to learn about the success (or lack of success) of each move.

3. Learning moves need to be small.

The SOs involved in the project learned that large moves are very difficult to monitor, because you end up not knowing which part of the move worked or didn't work. They found that it is better to track more tiny, discrete moves because they're easier to learn from. For example, instead of tracking a learning move that says "if I meet with the School Improvement Team during my visit…", it is more conducive to learning if you break that move down into multiple smaller moves that relate to preparing for the meeting with the School Improvement Team, what happens at the meeting

(including specific things you ask and discuss), and follow up from the meeting, to ensure that each component of the visit can be intentionally planned, monitored, and learned from.

4. You need to follow through each row on the template.

The SOs found that they needed to remind themselves about the importance of following through

> *"You need to know when you've made a mistake so you can circle back and try it a different way. The template gives you this evidence, if you track the move all the way through."*

each row on the template (i.e., monitoring the move and reflecting on it). They reported that if you plan a move really well and then do it, but don't monitor whether it's worked or hasn't worked and reflect what you learned from and about it, then you've lost all the power of tracking the move. The SOs recognized that this is what they have often done in their past practice, where they plan something, do it, and then move on to the next plan. In other words, past practice often involved "plan" and "act" without "assess" and "reflect". Again, this is a place where the template is working to interrupt the natural inclination that people have to get stuck in a plan/act, plan/act, plan/act sequence. It pushes the "closing of the loop" to include assess and reflect.

5. Reflecting on both what you've learned FROM a move and ABOUT a move is critical.

The SOs found that it was very useful to separate out what they've learned from and about moves to ensure that they capture both. As mentioned earlier, what you've learned FROM the move provides you with information pertinent to the specific challenge of practice you are working on and how to move forward with it (e.g., what to do for your next move), whereas what you've learned ABOUT the move provides you with information on whether the move itself was a good one and worth replicating, and labels what you are learning about leadership.

6. Using a structured learning conversation protocol ensures that the group adds value to the work of each individual, well beyond what each individual could accomplish on his/her own.

As mentioned earlier, the protocol ensures that "sharing" isn't just about "story swapping". It ensures that the critical friends providing feedback truly understand the problem before making suggestions, as well as that the presenter listens to everything being said without just responding with a gut reaction. The SOs reported that using the protocol to guide the learning networks meetings was very impactful, in that the group's joint analysis of the presenter's work pushes the presenter's thinking significantly beyond where an individual could get on his/her own.

7. Hearing about others' inquiries makes you consider new ideas both for yourself and for your board.

The protocol includes a "personal connections parking lot" component, which asks each member of the group to keep a personal list of thoughts/reflections about their own work while simultaneously listening and providing feedback to others. The SOs reported that it is important to take the parking

lot seriously and make connections to your own work while listening to what your SO colleagues' moves have been. In addition, the SOs regularly shared resources from their boards so they could each pull out pieces that might work for their own system/needs and bring it back to share with their colleagues in their own board. As one SO said, "that's what 'learning on behalf of the system' really means."

8. Documenting your own learning with a template helps you understand what this process is like for school administrators.

Many school administrators (Principals and Vice Principals) are also going through an inquiry process that asks them to work in (and document) small learning moves. The SOs found that engaging in the process themselves helped them understand and relate to the school administrators, and creates more buy-in when they talk about the process. It makes them a more authentic co-learner when they are working through the same process that the school administrators are struggling with.

> *"Going through the same inquiry process as Principals has created tremendous buy-in. I can speak to the process, and they know that I understand it... I can't be a role model for Principals without struggling with it myself."*

9. It's essential to establish group norms early on, to review them frequently, and to take them seriously.

The group established norms for working together at the beginning of the project and revisited them at each meeting. The SOs believed that the norms were crucial to prevent people from judging others or simply engage in superficial story swapping. All participants took the norms seriously, always coming to the table ready to learn together and challenge and support one another, and always leaving with next steps. A group interdependence was evident, where everyone was responsible for coming prepared and learning on behalf of one another.

10. Relationships don't need to come before the work begins; they can develop as you do the work.

Despite many members of the group not knowing one another at the outset of the project, the group bonded very quickly. Some believed that this was because each participant came to the project with an open-to-learning stance. The participants felt that this created an easy culture of trust and willingness to take a risk, and all SOs reported that they felt comfortable and safe either immediately or within a couple of meetings.

11. Think about who you choose to work with when you are learning to hone your skills around the school visit. In other words, select your "learning spaces" intentionally.

The SOs reported that if you are trying a new way of operating your school visits, with the goal of monitoring your moves and learning from and about them, it's important not to try it with the most challenging school administrators. The coalition of the willing (those who you will learn with and

from) will give you small wins, and you will learn things that are more generalizable. They also believe that it is important to start small. As one SO put it, "Don't try out moves with all your administrators at once. Wait until you know they work!"

12. Learning with an "outside" critical friend can be an important part of the learning experience.

The SOs spoke to the value of learning with people from outside their own board. They found that they benefitted from both the varied experiences in the room as well as from learning about the varied contexts in the different school boards represented in the project. In terms of the former, there was significant variability in the group of six SOs, in terms of number of years in the job, prior experiences, and current responsibilities, which created more opportunities to learn from one another. In addition, SOs reported that it was helpful that their SO critical friends did not know the school administrators that they each work with, allowing a fresh perspective and more objectivity when providing feedback. In terms of learning about other boards, the SOs found it helpful to learn about structures and procedures in place in other boards, and to bring relevant pieces back to their own board. They also found it comforting to know that SO challenges were often similar in significantly different contexts. Interestingly, the SOs found that a key difference in this project from what SOs might experience working with colleagues in their own boards is that there was no comparison or competition in the group, allowing for more transparency and vulnerability among the participants.

Learning about the content: Promising practices related to the Supervisory Officer school visit

All six of the SOs who participated in the project reported that, through engaging in their own inquiry, they learned a number of things about how to operate a school visit that supports building school administrator Instructional Leadership capacity. Importantly, they also reported that their inquiry provided them with evidence to support some of the strategies that they were already using in the hopes of encouraging Principal or Vice Principal growth, so that in the future they won't be using those strategies simply based on a "feeling" that they work, but instead based on evidence. SO learnings in relation to supporting the Instructional Leadership capacity of school administrators through the school visit are summarized below:

> *"I am now conscious of the fact that I have evidence for the moves that I make and that my next steps have been dictated by evidence."*

1. Be intentional and deliberate about how various support structures fit together; the school visit does not stand alone.

Very early in the project participants learned that it is difficult to talk about the school visit in isolation of the other work that Supervisory Officers do with Principals. While the school visit is part of the work that a SO does to support the Instructional Leadership capacity of school administrators, it is only one part. While each of the SOs' inquiries touched on the school visit, many other components of

their job that relate to supporting Principal IL were also touched on. As an example, some SOs are differentiating what they do at school visits based on what they learn elsewhere (e.g., at a Principal Learning Network meeting). These connections are intentional for these SOs, as they believe that it is important to see how what they're talking about at the network meeting translates on the school visit. As such, learning about the "school visit" for an SO in this example would likely also touch on the work done at a Principal network meeting. For this reason, none of the SOs involved in this project focused their inquiry on the school visit in complete isolation from the rest of their work. They made explicit and intentional connections between the various structures they use to support administrator capacity building.

2. Think about using school visits as an opportunity to learn about school administrators both individually *and* collectively.

The SOs found that the school visit is an opportunity to learn what you need to do to help a particular school administrator move forward in terms of IL. However, they also learned that school visits can be used as an opportunity to look for trends among administrators that can inform your collective time with them. For example, if you learn that a number of the school administrators are struggling with data use, you might set something up to respond to this for a group of administrators.

3. Look at school visits as differentiated opportunities.

The SOs learned that school visits require differentiation, based on what you learn about each school/administrator. As one SO said, "There's no such thing as what a visit is "supposed" to look like. A template for what you do at Visit 1, Visit 2, Visit 3, isn't possible, because you could never know what Visit 2 would look like before doing Visit 1, and there is no expectation that a particular visit would be the same for different schools." The SOs have also learned that you can't always plan for the differentiation in advance of the visit, as it's sometimes based on something you learn in the moment, and so you need to think about what it means to be responsive and be able to change direction

> "I've broken away from the mould of what a visit is 'supposed' to look like."

quickly. Finally, the SOs have learned that differentiation isn't just about differentiating the content of the visit, but can also include differentiating the level of support you give each school based on what is required. For example, many of the SOs learned that different schools/administrators require different amounts of time and support[9].

4. Think about who's in your "class" and focus your work on them.

A Supervisory Officer's "class" is made up of school administrators[10]. The participating SOs learned that determining what you need to learn as a SO starts with looking at the learning needs of Principals and Vice Principals, rather than looking at the learning needs of teachers (who make up the Principal

---

[9] This is discussed further in point #7.

[10] Asking the question, "Who's in your class?" in the context of professional learning efforts was first suggested by Helen Timperley (personal communication).

> *"My biggest learning has been to focus my work during school visits with the Principal or Vice Principal, because that's who's in my 'class'".*

or Vice Principal's "class"). For example, if a SO participates in a PLC meeting with a school administrator and group of teachers, this would be for the purpose of trying to build the capacity of the Principal or Vice Principal (for example, by learning about his/her needs in leading a PLC or by modeling a particular practice for him/her to observe), rather than for the purpose of the SO simply leading the PLC meeting him/herself to work directly with the teachers on their needs. The issue with the latter (having the SO work directly with teachers) is that it may not impact on the Principal or Vice Principal's IL, as it bypasses the learning of the school administrators. As such, the SOs learned that it is important to ensure that you are working with your own "class", rather than with a class one or two levels down from you (i.e., teachers or students). Those other "classes" are the primary responsibilities of other leaders.

5. Be intentional about the purpose of visiting classrooms during a school visit.

SOs in this project learned that it is important to be intentional about why they are or are not visiting classrooms during a school visit. As one SO said, "Don't visit classrooms 'just because'. Only go into classrooms if it's for a specific reason." These SOs believe that if you visit classrooms and talk to teachers and students, you need to have a clear rationale for doing so. Some of them reported that they used to visit classrooms during every school visit, to interact with teachers or students directly, but that they learned that this is not necessarily their role, given that their "class" is school administrators, not teachers or students (as discussed in the previous point). As such, the SOs learned to think about classroom visits differently. Some will often choose not to go into classrooms as part of a school visit. That said, some of the SOs reported that they will still sometimes visit classrooms during a visit, but for a particular purpose. Sometimes this purpose might be social or "political" (e.g., for optics). Other times it might be related to supporting the school administrator's IL capacity. For example, the SO might want to speak to teachers to model something for the school administrator, or to collect evidence about the school administrator's learning needs to then debrief together. What is most important here is that classroom visits are not happening simply because they've always been part of a SO school visit, but for an intentional purpose that is clearly thought out and articulated.

6. Think about differentiating your school visits even within an individual school.

The SOs learned that it is important to be intentional about the purpose of a particular visit and to keep visits for different purposes separate. For example, they suggest that on days when you are in a school for a school improvement visit, not to let other issues sidetrack you. If you need to discuss school issues (e.g., a parent issue or head lice), do it at another time and don't allow these issues to take over a school improvement visit. The SOs also learned that it sometimes makes sense to even differentiate between an Instructional Leadership visit that's only with the school administrator(s) and a school improvement planning visit, where you engage with a wider segment of the school.

7. The frequency and length of visits depends on the purpose.

Through their inquiries, the SOs learned that a pre-determined number of visits for a pre-determined length of time (e.g., half a day) does not always make sense, as the frequency and length of a visit should depend on the purpose. For example, if the goal is to be more visible or to get administrators/teachers more comfortable with the idea of a visit, more frequent visits (perhaps for a shorter period) might be better. For other purposes a longer visit might be required, but the visits might not need to be as frequent. What is important here is the idea of beginning with the purpose of the visit and then designing a structure that fits that purpose.

8. The kinds of questions asked at a school visit are critical.

Many of the SOs had intentional learning moves in their inquiries that focused on the kinds of questions they asked school administrators during their visits. The SOs learned that there are many different kinds of questions that can be asked for different purposes, and that learning about the research on effective questioning is important. Some also highlighted their learning about the difference between asking a question that truly has the intent of learning something versus one that is really intended for "telling", and how important it is to be aware of the way you are asking questions.

> "I realized that I had to start honing my questioning skills, not my telling skills."

9. Think about preparing administrators in advance of your visit.

The SOs learned that sending out information or questions prior to a visit, which highlight your intention behind the visit, ensures that the school administrators know what to expect and are prepared. This also helps to set the tone for the visit, in terms of what its purpose is. The SOs also learned that sending an email in advance that re-caps your last visit can also act as a good reminder of the previous visit and sets you up for continuity across visits, much like a sustained coaching model.

10. The quality of reflection after a visit can be increased if you have more than your memory to rely on and reflect from.

The SOs learned that it is important to have the opportunity to reflect on a school visit after it happens, and that having only your memory to rely on and reflect from can be problematic. They learned that taking notes during a visit about specific things the school administrator(s) said *and* how you responded can help you reflect more accurately and think about appropriate follow up. They also learned that it can be helpful to sometimes take a critical friend with you on a school visit, as this person can objectively look at your practice and help you think about what you need to work on after the visit for your own learning.

11. Consider sharing the load and creating sustainable support structures.

The participants in this project learned that Supervisory Officers don't have to be the only people who can support school administrators in their learning. Some of the SOs engaged in learning moves that involved connecting a school administrator with a peer for a particular purpose. For example, if

there's a school administrator working through an issue and you are aware of another administrator who might be a good source of support or mentorship for him/her, connect the two so that the learning doesn't all rely on you. Having school administrators work with one another between school visits might also help with continuity when there are longer gaps between your visits.

12. Think about school administrators in an inclusive way.

> *"Vice Principals are often left behind in this process. I learned how crucial it is to include them."*

The SOs learned that it is important to be intentional about bringing Vice Principals into the school visit process. Given that many Vice Principals will be Principals in the future, it is important to start building their Instructional Leadership capacity as well.

13. Be familiar and comfortable with the school's data.

The SOs learned that if you aren't familiar and comfortable with the school's data then it's difficult to support the school administrator(s) in finding the tools to go deeper and better understand the data themselves.

14. Every part of a school visit should be purposeful and intentional.

One of the biggest learnings for all SOs involved in the project relates to ensuring that no aspect of a school visit is done without a specific purpose or intention behind it. For example, if you're doing a walkthrough, why are you doing this? Have you been explicit about the purpose of the walkthrough (e.g., school improvement or something else, such as optics)? If you're meeting with the School Improvement Team, why are you doing this? As one SO said, "Meeting with the School Improvement Team just because it seems like a good thing to do is very different from meeting with them to give you a lens into the work you need to do with the Principal, like seeing how the Principal leads the meeting or modeling something for the Principal."

> *"I know my Principals' strengths and needs as instructional leaders much better because I have been more strategic in my approach using the inquiry framework."*

Finally, if you're asking particular questions, why are you asking them? What are you looking to learn, and what specifically do you plan to ask to ensure you get what you need? These examples highlight that what is most important is ensuring that each aspect of the visit is purposeful and intentional.

In closing:

It is important to underscore that the findings described in the previous section as promising practices related to the Supervisory Officer school visit are just that: promising practices. Although the SOs involved in this project were committed to learning on behalf of all SOs in the province, the fact that there was evidence that certain learning moves "worked" for particular SOs does not mean that those moves are right for everyone. Instead, the intent is for the ideas described in this report to be considered and further investigated by each reader in order for the knowledge to be mobilized in a personal, meaningful way. As part of this intentional knowledge mobilization process, SOs might

begin by explicating their own tacit knowledge about the SO school visit (what they think, believe, feel, and have experienced) and then considering it in relation to what is reported here, looking at how the findings in this report either confirm or challenge their tacit knowledge. The goal is for readers, either individually or as part of a district level internal SO network, to create meaningful new knowledge about the SO school visit through this intersection of "what they know" (i.e., their tacit knowledge) and "what is known" (i.e., from this report).

Appendix A: Project Participants

Supervisory Officers:

Joy Badder (Lambton Kent District School Board)

Peggy Blair (Avon Maitland District School Board)

Michelle Deman (Thames Valley District School Board)

Sylvia Peterson (Durham District School Board)

Jo-Anne Plaunt (District School Board Ontario North East)

Michael Prendergast (Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board)

Other Participants:

Lisa Dack (Aporia Consulting Ltd.)

Sue Greer (Aporia Consulting Ltd.)

Steven Katz (Aporia Consulting Ltd.)

Bruce Shaw (Ontario Ministry of Education)