Educational Leadership: A Bridge to Improved Practice
Paula Cordeiro   William Cunningham
Fifth Edition

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LEADING LEARNING
IN SCHOOLS

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LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Building a Collaborative Team

It is July and Maureen Robinson has been appointed principal at Lincoln Elementary School. The school has had three principals in the last 5 years. Most faculty members have been teaching at the school for more than 15 years; however, seven new teachers out of a total staff of 42 need to be hired. Student achievement levels in all core areas in all grades are either flat or have slightly dropped. During recent years, a large number of families from Somalia, Mexico, and Cambodia have moved into the area. The superintendent has asked Principal Robinson to develop a work plan for her first year.

✵ **What broad areas should Maureen Robinson address in her work plan?**

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

We provided an overview of several much-researched as well as more recent theories and models of leadership and management. Those generic leadership and management theories and models are the backdrop for thinking about the unique context of school leadership. This chapter explores the context of schools and what is unique in providing leadership for learning in schools.

Recent research in education has focused on how to improve teaching and learning. Clearly, in order to improve teaching and learning, successful leadership is a prerequisite. Galvanizing and supporting colleagues (teams) to improve learning for children and youths are crucial ingredients for school reform. But what do we know about successful school leadership? A meta-analysis conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found a "substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. . . . [T]he average effect size between leadership and student achievement is .25" (p. 3). Thus, a quarter of the total school effects on student learning can be attributed to leadership. Another key finding from their analysis is that principals can have a negative impact on student achievement, as well. "When leaders concentrate on the wrong school and/or classroom practices, or miscalculate the magnitude or 'order' of the change they are attempting to implement, they can negatively impact student achievement" (p. 5). Their study concludes that there are two key variables that determine whether leadership will have a positive or a negative impact on learning: (1) the focus of the change and (2) the magnitude of the change.

A review of the literature conducted by Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), found that:

> [R]esearch also shows that schools that demonstrated effects of successful leadership are considerably greater in schools that are in more difficult circumstances. . . . [T]here are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. (p. 3)

So, how do these powerful school leaders turn around troubled schools? Are there differences in the skills needed by administrators leading 'troubled' schools compared with schools that have demonstrated success based on multiple indicators? The research literature is beginning to provide some clarity in identifying school leadership models and practices needed by administrators in order to lead successful schools.

Based on their review of the research literature, Waters et al. found that there were certain practices associated with greater student achievement. Figure 1 lists school and teacher practices as well as student factors that influence student achievement. A school leader must drill down in each of these areas. Let's take one area from Figure 1—"instructional strategies." "Drilling down" refers to the need to understand not only what instructional strategies are being used in all classrooms in the school, but also what the research tells us about the impact of certain instructional strategies. Are there certain instructional strategies that should be used to teach a child whose native language is not English? What do we know about children who are literate in their first language versus those who come to us without being able to read and write fluently in their native language? Or what about a child who enters 1st grade without having attended preschool or kindergarten and has little experience with print literacy? What might it mean for

School	1.	Guaranteed and viable curriculum
	2.	Challenging goals and effective feedback
	3.	Parent and community involvement
	4.	Safe and orderly environment
	5.	Collegiality and professionalism
Teacher	6.	Instructional strategies
	7.	Classroom management
	8.	Classroom curriculum design
Student	9.	Home environment
	10.	Learned intelligence/background knowledge
	11.	Motivation

FIGURE 1   School and Teacher Practices and Student Factors Influencing Student Achievement

the learning of a math teacher if she or he knew that in a high school math classroom, the research literature finds a strong positive correlation between the types of problems used by teachers and the achievement scores of their students? What does it look like if teachers use authentic intellectual work in order to raise math achievement scores?

Many school administration books and articles use the metaphor of a principal as an instructional leader. Although it is an interesting metaphor, we really have little understanding of what being an instructional leader means in different types of schools and at different levels. Clearly, a principal of a small elementary school leads instruction in different ways from the principal of a large comprehensive high school. Additionally, a high school principal cannot be an expert in mathematics, chemistry, English, and so on; however, an administrator who is an instructional leader must know what good teaching in mathematics looks like compared to poor teaching, and she or he must know what effective learning for students in any classroom looks like. Let's use a high school math classroom as an example. An administrator who is an instructional leader visits math classrooms to look at student time on task, student–teacher interactions, what "big" mathematical ideas are being taught, what materials were prepared to teach this particular lesson, what skills the teacher wants the students to learn that day, what routines or warm-ups are provided, and how the teacher launches the lesson. Was the purpose and rationale of the learning understood by the students? Was the purpose connected to prior learning? Were the tools and materials available identified? Were expectations set (e.g., learning outcomes, time, and structures)? Was there instruction by whole group, individual, pairs, or small group? At the conclusion of the lesson, did the teacher provide opportunities to make public the learning accomplished by students by sharing what was learned? Did the teacher provide opportunities for students to analyze, share, discuss, extend, clarify, connect, and record thinking strategies? Was a summary of the learning articulated and connected to the lesson's purpose? Can the students articulate the learning/understanding of the mathematical concept being taught? And finally, is meaningful practice in the form

of homework assigned to extend the learning? These are some of the key areas and questions that an instructional leader will note when observing a class.

Whatever the teaching background of the principal, these practices are part of what makes good teaching and can be applied to math or any other subject area. If an administrator is to be an instructional leader, then she or he must ensure that all teachers continuously have opportunities to fine-tune their practice. We know from the adult learning research that attending professional development workshops a few times per year, which has been one of the primary mechanisms afforded to teachers to improve their practice, is not necessarily the most effective way of acquiring new knowledge. Learning transfer is a key issue, and no study has found that more than 10% of what is learned in one-session workshops, without any follow-up, is actually transferred into the workplace (Detterman, 1993). According to adult learning theorist Merriam (2001) "the learning process is much more than the systematic acquisition and storage of information. It is also making sense of our lives, transforming not just what we learn but the way we learn, and it is absorbing, imagining, intuiting, and learning formally with others" (p. 96).

❋ **What structures and activities should Principal Robinson consider if she wants to develop leadership opportunities for the teachers at Lincoln Elementary School?**

ADULT LEARNING

Being an effective school leader requires a deep understanding of how adults learn. It is important for school administrators to not only recruit and hire teachers, but also to ensure that all teachers continue to have optimal opportunities to learn so they can improve their teaching practices. There is no single theory of adult learning; however, there are various models and sets of practices that will prove helpful as school administrators increase their own understanding of how to lead a successful school. According to Mezirow (1991), central to the process of adult learning is critical reflection. He argues that it is our work as adult educators "to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capacity to function as self-directed learners" (p. 137). So, perhaps instead of using "instructional" to describe principal leadership, we should think of "adult educator" as being a more apt metaphor.

Merriam (2001) agrees that two goals of self-directed learning include developing the learner's capacity to be self-directed and deepening the critical reflection done by the learner. If we examine the typical learning opportunities afforded to teachers (workshops, professional development conferences, university coursework, etc.), increasing one's capacity for self-direction and deepening critical reflection are not often the goals. Therefore, designing learning opportunities for teachers is the core role of the school leader. Whether the administrator actually leads the professional development is not the important point. The key

issue is to be involved in designing the opportunity. Too often an outside expert is brought into a school or district to present on a particular topic. These people know little about the context in which they are presenting, have not held critical conversations with school leaders in order to contextualize the work for this school, and, after delivering the workshop, do not return for follow-up. If school leaders do not plan with the consultant on how to address procedural and contextual knowledge issues, then, at best, teachers may learn some declarative knowledge. However, again, we have evidence that, at most, only 10% of what is learned in this type of professional development format is transferred to the classroom. This fact alone has major learning and fiscal implications.

The following research-based findings were synthesized from the adult learning literature:

- Critical reflection is essential to adult learning (Mezirow, 1991).
- Learning can be gradual or it can result from sudden, powerful experiences (Clark, 1993).
- Learning is an interdependent relationship built on trust; thus, relationships are of key importance (Taylor, 2000).
- Action learning and collaborative learning are important strategies resulting in sustained changes in organizational culture (Yorks & Marsick, 1999).
- Power dynamics are a crucial part of learning and people seen as authority figures must state their values and "model questioning their own values" (Cranton, 1994, p. 201).
- Contextual factors that influence the ability to learn well enough to implement the desired solution include the availability of appropriate sources (time, money, people from whom to learn); willingness and motivation; and "the emotional capacity to take on new capabilities in the middle of what could be a stressful challenge" (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 30).

✳ **How might Maureen Robinson integrate these findings into her work plan?**

If the school leader were to take these findings from the adult learning literature and apply them to learning opportunities in his or her school, what might teacher professional development opportunities then include? Throughout the history of the United States, from the one-room schoolhouse to many of today's schools in which classroom doors are closed until bells ring and visitors are infrequent, teaching has been, and still too often continues to be, lonely and isolated work. If a key ingredient of adult learning involves collaboration, then clearly school administrators must develop expertise in identifying powerful learning strategies that will allow teachers to engage in collaborative activities. The work of teachers must be made public. In the next section, we list several learning practices that can operationalize the adult learning research findings discussed.