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Running on Empty? Finding the Time and Capacity to Lead Learning

Philip Hallinger[1] and Joseph F. Murphy[2]

Abstract

In recent years, policy changes in American education have refocused a spotlight on principal instructional leadership. Although in previous eras the professional literature exhorted principals to "be instructional leaders," there were few sanctions if they failed to do so. In the current policy context, however, instructional leadership has assumed a central rather than peripheral place in the hierarchy of roles played by principals. Today principals who fail to engage this role proactively and skillfully do so at their own risk. Yet history suggests that neither policy mandates nor good intentions will penetrate the "force field" that stands between the principal and the tasks involved in leading learning. A more strategic and coherent approach is needed by principals who wish to enact this role in practice. This article reviews the evolution of instructional leadership as a model for principal practice, examines barriers to its successful enactment, and proposes strategies that school leaders can employ to reduce the gap between intentions and reality.

Keywords

principal, instructional leadership, capacity, time management, leadership for learning

Policies embedded in *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* represent the culmination of three decades of almost continuous education reform in the United States. Starting with the *A Nation at Risk* report in the early 1980s, federal policymakers have increasingly sought to direct the improvement of America's education system from Washington. A central factor mediating the success of federal and state policy efforts at educational reform lies in the leadership capacity of the nation's school principals

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and teachers (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). While effective leadership cannot guarantee successful education reform, research affirms that sustainable school improvement is seldom found without active, skillful instructional leadership from principals and teachers (Fullan, 2006; Hall & Hord, 2002; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

In recent years, acceptance of this tenet among policymakers has refocused the spotlight on principal instructional leadership (Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). This has, for example, resulted in accountability policies that mandate more comprehensive systems of teacher and principal evaluation and raised the bar in terms of standards of performance (Leithwood, 2001; Silva, White, & Yoshida, 2011). Indeed, these policies require the replacement of principals (and teachers) in underperforming schools that fail to demonstrate improvement. Observers assert that these school accountability policies have transformed instructional leadership from an option into a necessity for America's school administrators (Murphy, 2008; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Silva et al., 2011).

Yet, even as the spotlight on instructional leadership has intensified, it would be short-sighted to overlook a less obvious but equally powerful set of constraints that also shape the role behavior of school principals (Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008). Scholars have, for many years, described forces that draw principals *away from rather than toward* engagement in instructional leadership (e.g., Barth, 1990; Cuban, 1988; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Marshall, 1996, 2004; May, Huff, & Goldring, 2012; Murphy, Hallinger, Lotto, & Miller, 1987). Any policy-driven effort to foster sustainable instructional leadership in American schools must take these forces into account or accept the predictable consequences of principals who suffer from unfulfilled expectations, disappointment, guilt, and burnout (Barth, 1990; Bridges, 1967; Donaldson, 2006; Horng et al., 2010; Marshall, 1996, 2004). Thus, we assert that if America's education policymakers wish to employ instructional leadership as an engine for school improvement, more comprehensive and practical solutions must be employed that do not leave principals "running on empty."

This article is located at the intersection of policy-driven demands for principals to exercise instructional leadership and the forces that limit the fulfillment of these expectations. In the first section, we summarize findings from a synthesis of 40 years of research on instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2011). Then, the article examines structural and cultural forces that bear on principals as they seek to enact the instructional leadership role in practice. Finally, we explore strategies that offer the possibility for school leaders (i.e., principals and others) to engage this role in a fashion that is both productive and sustainable.

Instructional Leadership: Historical Evolution of a Practice-Based Construct

Instructional leadership is a practice-based rather than a theory-driven construct, with wide, if not deep roots in American education (Bridges, 1967; Lipham, 1961; Uhls, 1962).

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More than 50 years ago, James Lipham (1961) asserted that effective principals were associated with effective schools. However, it was during the 1980s that we began to observe a sea change in thinking about instructional leadership. More specifically, renewed interest in instructional leadership took inspiration from findings that emerged from research on instructionally effective schools (e.g., Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

In retrospect, the effective schools movement yielded two important legacies. The first was to provide *substantive empirical support* for conventional wisdom that instructional leadership was associated with school improvement (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The second was to stimulate succeeding generations of increasingly sophisticated, large-scale, international empirical research aimed at understanding if and how instructional leadership contributes to school effectiveness and improvement (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

Thirty years later there is substantial consensus on the importance of instructional leadership in efforts to raise and sustain the quality of teaching and learning in schools (see Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2009; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis, Dretzkea, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). While this represents *empirical* confirmation of a long-standing tenet of American education, we note that this was not the case elsewhere in the world. It is only in the past decade that instructional leadership and its alter ego "leadership for learning" have attained broader international currency (Bell, Bolam, & Cubillo, 2003; Hallinger, 2011; Southworth, 2002; Witziers et al., 2003).

This body of research, while still limited in several respects, does offer insights that go beyond the profession's understanding of this role in the 1980s. During the 1980s, the state-of-the-art in instructional leadership was expressed in attempts to define the role and describe relevant workplace practices (Bossert et al., 1982; Dwyer, 1986; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, Murphy, Weil, Mesa, & Mitman, 1983). Thirty years later, researchers have made demonstrable progress in establishing how this role contributes to the quality of student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008).

Today, we view instructional leadership as an influence process through which leaders identify a direction for the school, motivate staff, and coordinate school and classroom-based strategies aimed at improvements in teaching and learning. The current state-of-the-art concludes that instructional leadership:

- Affects conditions that create positive learning environments for students (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008; Witziers et al., 2003)
- Creates an academic press and mediates expectations embedded in curriculum standards, structures, and processes (Bryk et al., 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010).

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- Employs improvement strategies that are matched to the changing state of the school over time (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Mulford & Silins, 2003).
- Supports ongoing professional learning of staff, which, in turn, facilitates efforts of schools to undertake, implement, and sustain change (Barth, 1990; Hall & Hord, 2002; Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008).

This description of the means by which instructional leadership affects school improvement is consistent with what scholars have termed a *mediated-effects* model of leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Leadership effects on learning are achieved *indirectly* by affecting people, work structures and processes, and school culture (Bossert et al., 1982; Bryk et al., 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008; Witziers et al., 2003). Even while affirming the importance of leadership, this model implicitly argues *against* a heroic conception of the principal's role (Hallinger & Heck, 2011).

Barriers to Exercising Instructional Leadership

> When I come to these leadership workshops, I often leave with feelings of guilt and shame. Why is it that when I return to *my school*, I can't seem to keep a focus on what I am told are my most important responsibilities? Is there something wrong with me? (Tony Ciaglia, Middle School Principal, New York, 1986)

This quote from a New York middle school principal aptly expresses a sentiment undoubtedly shared by many American principals, past and present. It highlights the gap between the intentions of principals to lead learning and daily professional practice in schools. We wish to highlight three factors that bear on the intentions of principals who seek to enact the instructional leadership role. These include expertise, time to lead, and the normative environment of the school. As depicted in Figure 1, we propose that these represent key contingencies that shape the instructional leadership practice of principals. As such, they must be considered in any personal or systemic plan to strengthen instructional leadership in schools.

Expertise to Lead Learning

The effective schools literature (e.g., Bossert et al., 1982; Cuban, 1988; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger et al., 1983) described principals as instructional leaders who were "hip deep" in curriculum and instruction, with the capability to create a shared vision of learning focused on results for students. The literature conveyed an image of principals who were not only passionate but also highly knowledgeable and confident about engaging in the development of teaching

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Figure 1. Putting intentions to lead learning into practice

and learning in their schools. Research has subsequently affirmed the importance of expertise in teaching and learning as an underpinning for principals who seek to enact this role (Goldring et al., 2008).

Consequently, over the past 15 years, the accountability movement has wrought changes in the human resource processes of education systems, both in the United States and abroad (Leithwood, 2001). For example, both criteria and processes used for principal selection and evaluation look very different in 2012 when compared with modal practices of the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, goals, content, and methods of professional education for school leaders have undergone transformation, with an increased focus on developing the expertise to lead learning in schools (Hallinger, 2003).

Yet even with enhanced systems of leadership selection, development, and evaluation, we assert that it is no longer possible for principals to "know everything" needed to lead learning in this era of rapid change (Barth, 1990; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). It has long been observed that even the most skillful high school principal cannot be knowledgeable in all of the disciplinary domains that comprise the secondary school curriculum. Yet we suggest that there is even a premium on expertise in teaching and learning at the elementary school level. We recall the episode of the television show *Who's Smarter than a 5th Grader?* in which the middle school principal "flunked out" because he didn't know the author of *Gulliver's Travels*. Successful instructional

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supervision and curriculum leadership require skill sets that typically go beyond those possessed by any one individual in the school (Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007).

Moreover, school size and structural complexity must also be taken into account when principals seek to put their educational expertise into practice (see Marshall, 2004). In secondary schools, the efforts of principals are diffused by the need to lead across several layers in the school's management structure (Martin & Willower, 1981). These structural conditions limit the capacity of principals to enact two particular instructional leadership functions: *managing the instructional program* and *coordinating the curriculum* (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Thus, it is not surprising to find that *principal* instructional leadership is more often identified as a feature of elementary schools (Bryk et al., 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson et al., 2008). Consequently, we view expertise as a necessary but insufficient condition for the successful exercise of instructional leadership. Other features of the school context must also be considered.

Time to Lead

We believe that most principals have a strong intention to improve teaching and learning in their schools. So what is stopping them? Observers have noted that the intention to engage in the tasks of instructional leadership often conflicts with tasks involved in the day-to-day management of schools (Cuban, 1988). For example, both scholars (Horng et al., 2010; Martin & Willower, 1981; May et al., 2012) and practitioners (Barth, 1980; Marshall, 1996, 2004) have aptly described the hectic task environment in which principals work.

The principal's typical workday consists of a continuous stream of brief, fragmented, problem-oriented interactions, most of which are initiated by others (e.g., Horng et al., 2010; Martin & Willower, 1981). Principals who begin the morning with an intention to visit classrooms often find themselves waylaid by students, teachers, staff, and parents with urgent problems to be solved. The "classroom visit" that requires an uninterrupted block of time is postponed. Or the principal intends to spend an hour refining the leadership team's proposal for a school-wide professional development program, only to be called away to an urgent and unexpected meeting at the central office. One way or another, the principal finds it difficult to maintain a focus on key instructional leadership tasks in the face of an unrelenting series of requests, crises, and meetings initiated by others (Barth, 1980; Cuban, 1988; Marshall, 1996, 2004; Horng et al., 2010; May et al., 2012).

This portrait of the principal's work life is surprisingly consistent with descriptions of middle managers in corporate settings (Covey, 2004; Martinko & Gardner, 1990; Mintzberg, 1973). Apparently, finding the time to lead represents a cross-sector leadership challenge. Middle managers in most organizations find themselves "dancing to a tune" largely chosen and played by superiors and subordinates (Covey, 2004; Cuban,

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1988; Mintzberg, 1973). This contrasts with the textbook image of the principal. Thus, we highlight the fact that principals operate in a normative environment composed of values, expectations, and cultural norms. Any attempt by the principal to become more intentional at self-management is likely to encounter "pushback" from the school's culture. With this in mind, we next examine features of the normative or cultural environment in which principals lead.

Normative Environment of the Principalship

Despite a tradition in American education that has emphasized instructional leadership as a desirable feature of principal practice, scholars have long noted a gap between professional rhetoric and reality. For example, 45 years ago Bridges (1967) wrote,

> Of the seven major task areas for which principals have responsibility, curriculum and instruction has generated the most sound and fury. On the one hand, the principal has been exhorted to exert instructional leadership, while on the other hand, he has been told flatly that such a role is beyond his or any other human being's capacity. (p. 136)

Gaining leverage on understanding this disconnect between prescriptions and intentions to lead with observed principal practice has challenged scholars and school leaders for decades (see, e.g., Bridges, 1967; Cuban, 1988). A particularly insightful analysis of this paradox is found in Larry Cuban's (1988) reflection on the evolution of leadership roles in American schools. Cuban asserted that

> embedded in the *DNA* of the principalship is a managerial imperative. Efforts taken by principals to act in ways that depart from this managerial or conservative orientation are likely to face overt and covert resistance from above and below, as well as inside and outside the school. (p. 37)

Cuban offered a detailed explanation for why and how the normative environment in which principals work constrains their intentions to lead learning. He asserted that that principals who would lead learning have limited formal authority to act and must contend with professional norms that decree the classroom as the domain of teachers. Thus, principals sometimes informally trade authority over curriculum and instruction for compliance by teachers on other issues.

Kim Marshall later provided a useful elaboration on this paradox from the perspective of a practicing school principal. Like Tony Ciaglia in the earlier quotation, Marshall was acutely aware of the disconnect between his intention to lead learning and his daily actions. He described in painful detail both his addiction to busily solving

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other people's problems and his inability to fulfill his intention to work with his teachers in ways that would impact teaching and learning. He referred to this as HSPS (hyperactive superficial principal syndrome). In Marshall's own words,

> I realized that the biggest barrier was in my own head. I actually felt shy about going into classrooms for an in-depth look. It was as if there was a force field around each room. . . . I knew what I wanted to do. I knew how to do it. And I knew how important it was. But I just couldn't get started. (Marshall, 1996, p. 340)

It is also the case that most school systems have traditionally placed a higher priority on managerial efficiency and political stability than on instructional leadership (Cuban, 1988). This is reflected in norms implicitly understood by both principals and system administrators. Principals typically have received few formal rewards for actively engaging in curriculum and instructional change and suffered few sanctions if they ignored this domain. Conversely, central office supervisors are likely to address community or management-related problems through quick, firm communications to the principal.

Consistent with these observations is the finding that promotions into administrative positions have often been more associated with gender, political clout, and visibility than instructional leadership expertise or potential (Cuban, 1988). Thus, the norms in most school systems still reinforce the informal negotiation of treaties with teachers concerning domains of practice, further inhibiting instructional leadership (Cuban, 1988; Marshall, 1996, 2004). While there is evidence of recent changes with respect to this obstacle in the United States (see Schoen & Fusarell, 2008; Silva et al., 2011), it is too soon to tell how deep and long-lasting they will be. These normative challenges represent key barriers, even for principals who possess the intention and expertise to lead learning.

We conclude that Tony Ciaglia's earlier lament finds support from other well-trained, experienced principals who also report difficulty in fulfilling their intentions to lead learning. These reflections suggest that neither expertise nor time to lead by themselves can explain this paradox. Any "solution" that enables principals to engage the instructional leadership role must also take these norms into account.

Bridges's (1967) reprise of the assertion that the instructional leadership role of the principal is "beyond his or any other human being's capacity" (p. 136), further raises the question of "role sustainability." Donaldson (2006) asserted that any proposed leadership role for principals must not only contribute to the development of school capacity and student performance but must also be sustainable for those who lead. Our operative conception of the instructional leadership role cannot make such imposing demands on individuals that they are unable to sustain the effort over the medium to long term. Otherwise instructional leadership will remain the domain of a few extraordinary individuals who are able to overcome the odds in order to produce a positive impact on teaching and learning.

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Moreover, we further note that the possibility of sustainable instructional leadership appears least likely among principals working in those schools where the need is greatest (Leithwood, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2008; Murphy, 2008). In those contexts, even principals who possess both the will and the skill to lead will soon find themselves "running on empty." This frames the challenge posed in the title of this article and is the focus of the concluding section of the article—Finding the Time and Capacity to Lead Learning.

Finding the Time and Capacity to Lead Learning

We began this article by highlighting the importance of instructional leadership both as a policy imperative and as a practice-oriented means of fostering improved learning for students. Then we analyzed three challenges facing principals who seek to engage the instructional leadership role. Policy mandates for principals to "be instructional leaders" take place in the context of these challenges. Any "solution" must, therefore, successfully address these barriers. Is there a way out of this organizational *cul de sac*? In this section, we propose three strategies that, *when used in concert*, have the possibility to create the time and capacity to lead learning in schools:

- Clarify your personal vision and supporting "habits"
- Articulate a collective instructional leadership role
- Enable others to act

We emphasize the phrase "when used in concert" because meeting the challenge of finding the time to lead learning *cannot* be achieved simply by adjusting one's personal habits. As suggested above, the personal habits of leaders are shaped by the normative environment of the schools. *Thus, any solution must be multifaceted and target both personal and organizational points of leverage for change.*

Clarify and Align Your Personal Vision and "Habits"

As noted above, a key issue involves "finding the time" to lead learning. One useful tool in understanding the time challenge that all leaders face has been offered by Stephen Covey (2004). Consistent with the research cited above on the work activities of school leaders, Covey observed that middle managers face a constant stream of requests that divert them from focusing on tasks they view as essential to organizational success (e.g., leading learning in schools). Although many of these requests (i.e., tasks, problems, crises) feel *urgent* to those who bring them to the principal, they vary widely in terms of their *importance*. Thus, Covey asserts that a fundamental time management error of many managers lies in their tendency to be driven solely by task urgency without differentiating the varying degrees of importance of task.

Thus, Covey proposed a framework that analyzes work tasks both by *urgency and importance*. In Covey's terms, "urgency" is a function of the perceived need to address

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a task "now" or in relation to an impending deadline. "Importance" is assessed primarily in reference to the task's contribution toward valued personal and organizational goals and the development of personal and collective capacity. This clarifies why the literature so often exhorts leaders to articulate a clear personal vision. The leader's vision becomes a filter for assessing the *importance* of tasks.

This has several relevant consequences when applied to the tasks involved in leading learning in schools. First, as noted earlier, principals often find themselves focusing on urgent problems, but with a sense that they are not accomplishing their most important goals related to teacher development and student learning. Unfortunately, many of the tasks associated with instructional leadership fall into the category of *important but not urgent* activities.

For example, who will even notice if the principal fails to take time out for his/her own professional learning? Who will care if the principal fails to "get into classrooms" to observe teaching and learning and offer feedback to teachers? Will anyone complain if the principal is unable to take time out to coach middle-level leaders? How will staff react if the principal forgets to schedule the annual weekend leadership retreat? Who will notice if the principal postpones (indefinitely) the meeting to develop schoolwide rubrics for student assessment in key areas? Would anyone feel disturbed if the principal cancelled the meeting of grade-level leaders to examine the cross-grade implications of state test results? Although these "instructional leadership" activities may be important to development of the achievement of key school goals, none are likely to be perceived as *urgent* by the staff with whom the principal works. Therefore, these tasks tend to be crowded out by others that seem to demand a more immediate response.

Covey (2004) asserts that the "solution" starts with leaders understanding their core purposes and then aligning their actions more intentionally. In his words, leaders should *begin with the end in mind*. In Covey's language, the challenge of "finding the time" to enact the instructional leadership role begins with a clear personal vision and proceeds with giving greater attention to activities that will achieve that vision. Since differentiating the "importance" of different tasks appears central to *self-management*, Covey suggests that a clear personal vision is the foundation for creating the time needed to lead. In Covey's words, without a bigger "yes" inside, it is difficult to say "no" to the "urgent" requests of others.

A personal vision of leading schools should be grounded in a clearly defined set of personal values and directed toward a meaningful set of purposes (Barth, 1990; Covey, 2004). Values guide decision making and approaches to problem solving, either implicitly or explicitly; explicit articulation of one's core values is the preferred mode (Leithwood et al., 2008). Learning to use one's values, beliefs, and expectations in concert with the mission of the school is, therefore, a fundamental prerequisite for leading learning.

Articulating a learning-focused vision that is shared by others creates a platform for all other leadership strategies and actions. But visions written down on paper only come to life through routines and actions that are enacted on a daily basis (Barth, 1990;

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Dwyer, 1986; Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008). Thus, Covey further proposed that in order to "find time to lead" we must align our activities to our vision. The vision first defines what is important. Then we develop "habits" composed of daily and weekly tasks that lead toward making the vision come alive in our actions and interactions. Principals make 1,200 decisions every day. Enacting the instructional leadership role requires the leader to find ways to use those decisions to promote learning and teaching.

It is interesting to note that this perspective is highly consistent with qualitative descriptions of successful instructional leadership. For example, 25 years ago, Dwyer (1986) observed, "Successful principals use routine behaviors to progress incrementally toward their goals. Principals are busy people doing many things simultaneously. They design their routines to achieve their purposes" (p. 15). Thus, leadership for learning is not embodied in a dramatic presentation to the faculty on effective teaching or the announcement of a new curriculum enhancement. Rather, it is evident in the principal's daily, intentionally directed activities that improve conditions for learning and create coherence across classrooms in the school. Thus, instructional leadership is enacted in the hallways during conversations, when taking tickets at the lunchroom door, in meetings with staff, during staff development days, and in PTA meetings. All of these represent venues in which the instructional leader helps create a coherent picture that connects purposes to activities and decisions.

Aligning actions to one's personal vision is, however, only the first step toward creating more time. One of Covey's central insights was that effective time management for leaders in the workplace can never be attained without engaging and impacting others. This is consistent with our earlier observation that the normative environment of the school shapes the behavior of principals. Thus, "time management" solutions (e.g., increase delegation) must be complemented by measures that both increase the capacity of others to lead and that change the expectations of others in the school.

Articulate a Collective Instructional Leadership Role

Any realistic strategy for leading learning in schools must expand the leadership role beyond the principal (Barth, 1990; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Spillane et al., 2007). Thus, we find that an increasingly important purpose of leadership in this era lies in developing the "school's collective capacity for leadership" (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 2006; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Murphy, 2005; Spillane et al., 2007). We suggest that this represents one possible avenue out of the *cul de sac.*

When we consider the expertise needed to lead learning, the normative pressures that draw principals away from classrooms, and the conflicting demands on principal time, it becomes clear that instructional leadership cannot be a solo performance. Hall and Hord (2002) observed that "principals can't do it alone." Recent research has revealed the importance of sharing (Barth, 1990) or distributing leadership (Spillane

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et al., 2007) so as to engage others in both formal and informal leadership roles. Thus, it is essential to reformulate instructional leadership both as a collective identity and in terms of a set of shared functional responsibilities.

Frameworks that assist in thinking about the range of instructional leadership responsibilities are available (see, e.g., Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Porter, Murphy, Goldring, & Elliott, 2008). These frameworks are also useful in terms of developing a common language for discussing roles, responsibilities, and tasks and for communicating these to staff more broadly. Thus, we suggest that one key step in reshaping the normative environment in which principals lead learning lies in formalizing shared responsibilities of administrators and teachers in leading learning.

At the same time, however, the methods and effects of sharing leadership vary across schools. For example, a recent study of school improvement in 200 elementary schools tracked change in patterns of collaborative leadership, school capacity, and student learning outcomes over a 5-year period (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). The findings offered relevant insights both into the importance of shared leadership instructional leadership as well as conditions that impact on its development. First, analysis of these data confirmed an association of stronger collaborative leadership with positive change in school learning results over time. Second, stronger leadership appeared most important in schools with the greatest need. Third, it was observed that efforts to strength collaborative instructional leadership were *weakened* by turnover in the principal. Thus, the authors concluded that some level of stability in formal leadership by the principal can be a positive force in ensuring the development of leadership among others. Thus, we conclude that shared leadership can, over time, become a powerful approach to changing the normative environment in which instructional leadership is enacted.

Enable Others to Act

The enterprise of education is centrally concerned with the development of human capacity. Leadership for learning should be focused on capacity development as well. The most direct support for this perspective emerged recently in a meta-analysis of school leadership effects studies (Robinson et al., 2008). Robinson et al. (2008) produced the startling finding that the largest effects of instructional leadership were derived through principal support of and involvement in the professional learning of teachers.

This perspective also finds explicit support in research on organizational change. For example, Fullan (2006) observed that “it has become increasingly clear that leadership at all levels of the system is the key lever for reform, especially leaders who focus on capacity building and develop other leaders who can carry on” (p. 33). We suggest that capacity development is not only a means of achieving improved learning outcomes but also an avenue leading out of the time management *cul de* sac.

For example, take the example of delegation, a key strategy designed to increase the time for leaders to focus on “important” tasks. It is useless to recommend that

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leaders employ delegation unless staff have the capacity to perform their new roles and responsibilities. Thus, not surprisingly, several of the time management strategies recommended by Covey center on personal and collective capacity development.

Kotter (1996) also identified capacity development as a key factor in efforts to bring about changes in organizations. He proposed that capacity development as a means of "enabling people to act." Examples of enabling people to act in the context of schools include the following:

- *Shared vision of learning*, which provides a common set of values for decision making and action
- *Common school goals with targets*, which focuses efforts on a set of school-level priorities
- *Common language of teaching and learning*, which enables more effective communication around action steps and collective ownership of innovations
- *Team leadership structures*, which enable staff to implement shared instructional leadership responsibilities
- *School-wide assessment rubrics*, which act as tools for focusing teaching and learning around desired standards and outcomes
- *Curriculum frameworks*, which create a form of connective tissue between classrooms, departments, and school units
- *Coaching*, which ensures that staff have the capability to engage new perspectives and translate goals into actions.

All these represent "tools" that can both create greater collective capacity and spread the tasks of leadership beyond the principal. Note, however, that each of these "strategies" requires an investment of the leader's time in activities that are *important but not urgent*. When implemented "in concert" they will over time reshape the normative environment of the school with respect to expectations for leadership, and create more "time to lead."

Conclusion

This article has focused on a central challenge facing American school principals, past and present: finding the time and capacity to lead learning. The observations of scholars (e.g., Bridges, 1967; Cuban, 1988; Donaldson, 2006; Dwyer, 1986) and practitioners (Barth, 1990; Ciaglia, 1986; Marshall, 1996, 2004) affirm that this has been and continues to be a persisting leadership dilemma in schools. Nonetheless, the accountability movement of the past decade has increased the urgency of finding ways out of this organizational *cul de sac* (Murphy, 2008; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

Both the importance and difficulty involved in finding a resolution of this dilemma motivated us to address this problem. While we support efforts that support the capacity of principals to lead learning, policy mandates must be considered in light of the contexts in which school leaders work. Thus, we wish to add our voices to others who

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have cautioned against well-intended but impractical measures to mandate instructional leadership, even as we reaffirm its importance.

The more specific message of this article is, however, directed toward leaders working at the school level. Our goal was to understand this challenge more clearly and identify perspectives and tools that principals might find useful in finding the time and capacity to lead learning. Of course, if the "solution" was simple, it would have been implemented long ago. Indeed, we noted earlier that "finding the time to lead" is a cross-sector challenge for middle managers. This should give both encouragement and pause to those who seek to lead learning in schools.

We wish to close by highlighting the fact that enacting leadership in practice is always challenging. Covey (2004) encourages leaders to become more intentional in aligning personal vision and actions. Dwyer (1986) asserted that successful instructional leadership consists of the mundane and repetitive routines that comprise the leader's workday. He observed that successful instructional leaders were able to inject their intentions (i.e., vision, goals, core values) to lead learning into the daily tasks in which all school leaders engage. They were able to create coherence through explicit reference to core values about learning and teaching when making decisions and solving the many discrete problems that attend their daily work. These observations remind us again that the capacity to leadership lies at the intersection of our intentions and actions. Thus, we close by paraphrasing Mahatma Gandhi. We encourage principals (and teachers) to "be the change" you want to you see in your school.

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