

WHAT EVERY PRINCIPAL SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

# INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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E D U C A T I O N

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# Questionnaire: Before we get started . . .

**D**irections: Using the Likert scale below, circle the answer that best represents your on-the-spot belief about each statement. The questionnaire serves as an advanced organiser of sorts for some of the key topics in this book, although items are purposely constructed in no particular order. Discussion of each topic, though, occurs within the context of relevant chapters. Responses or views to each statement are presented in a subsection following the questionnaire (this section begins “Now, let’s analyse your responses . . .”). You may or may not agree with the points made, but I hope you will be encouraged to reflect on your own views. Reflective activities follow to allow for deeper analysis. Elaboration of ideas emanating from this brief activity will occur throughout the text and series. I encourage you to share reflections (yours and mine) with colleagues. I’d appreciate your personal feedback via the email address I’ve listed in the “About the author” section.

SA = Strongly Agree (“For the most part, yes.”)

A = Agree (“Yes, but . . .”)

D = Disagree (“No, but . . .”)

SD = Strongly Disagree (“For the most part, no.”)

SA   A   D   SD   1. To be effective, the principal must have  
been a successful classroom teacher.

- |    |   |   |    |   |
|----|---|---|----|---|
| SA | A | D | SD | 2. Good principals must know how to facilitate best practices in teaching, curriculum, and supervision.   |
| SA | A | D | SD | 3. It is reasonable to expect a principal to serve as a presenter in a professional development session.  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 4. It is reasonable to expect principals to know as much or more about wait time, Bloom's Taxonomy, and differentiated instruction than teachers. |
| SA | A | D | SD | 5. It is reasonable to expect principals to lead disciplinary instruction in mathematics, biology, English, history, and so forth.                |
| SA | A | D | SD | 6. The principal should spend many hours on the job in the classroom each day.  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 7. The principal should be the most important instructional leader in a school.   |
| SA | A | D | SD | 8. The principal is the single greatest factor in determining the extent of student achievement.  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 9. Instructional leadership should take priority over other forms of leadership.  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 10. I am comfortable facilitating instructional leadership in my school.  |
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Before we analyse your responses, consider that our beliefs about what we do greatly influence our actions. Although we realise that what we profess and say we believe—our “espoused theories”—are not always congruent with what we do—our “theory-in-use”—articulating beliefs is important (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). For example, if you believe that a principal need not have been a successful teacher, then you will likely maintain that instructional improvement, although certainly important, can be facilitated by or delegated to others. In other words, you might say, “I don’t have to have been a teacher in order to understand the importance of teaching and learning, and in order to facilitate an instructional program.”

I believe that such an assertion is not only wrongheaded, but potentially detrimental to the education of boys and girls in schools. I believe that the principal serves as the foremost instructional leader in the school building. Your commitment to instructional improvement must not only be strongly articulated but must also be reinforced with experience in the classroom. I don’t think that you had to be the “teacher of the year,” but I believe that at least 3 to 5 years of successful teaching experience is imperative, not only to gain legitimacy in the eyes of teachers (i.e., you have “walked the talk”) but also so that you understand the instructional challenges faced by teachers with firsthand experience.

I believe that operational managerial, strategic, collaborative, and cultural leadership abilities are certainly important but that prior experiences with fostering such leadership, although an asset, should not necessarily be the sole precondition for assuming the principalship. Instructional leadership, however, demands, in my view, that you are committed to high standards of academic excellence, set high expectations for student success, and have had some firsthand experience with effective teaching or instructional strategies. Now, I don’t mean to say that all good teachers would make successful principals. Not all good teachers are fit for the principalship. Other forms of leadership qualities, dispositions, and competencies are certainly necessary. What I am saying is that the principal must have a good experiential sense of the instructional process in order to effectively facilitate best teaching practices that promote high achievement for all students.

The principal is not the sole instructional leader. Rather, a good principal identifies a community of instructional leaders who collaborate as a learning community to examine teaching practices that best promote student learning. Principals, therefore, at their best facilitate good instructional practice. To do so, however, requires experience as a teacher in some context at some time. When it comes to promoting instructional excellence, there's nothing like experience.

These ideas are fundamental. Consider the following reflective questions as you consider the meaning of instructional leadership:

### **Reflective questions**

1. Which of the belief statements above resonates the most with you?
2. Which of the views expressed above do you disagree with? Explain.
3. If you believe that a principal need not have been a teacher, how can the principal gain instructional legitimacy with teachers, and more importantly, what must she or he do to positively influence student achievement?
4. Recall principals you have known, and consider the degree to which they had experience in the classroom. Which principals served as good instructional leaders, and did their experience in the classroom help or hinder their role? Conversely, consider principals who have little, if any, classroom experience, and explain how successful they have been as instructional leaders. What other factors are important in order to promote instructional leadership?

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Examine these quotations on the importance of an instructional leader. What do they mean to you?