

The Principal as Instructional Leader

A Practical Handbook

Third Edition

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Introduction to the Third Edition

Whether you are a new principal or a veteran principal, this book is written for you. This third edition of *The Principal as Instructional Leader: A Practical Handbook* offers guidance and provides suggestions for the work that matters most—supporting and cultivating a professional learning community. This book digs deeper into the practical applications of the work of the principal as instructional leader. As you browse the table of contents, you will see just about every aspect of what we know is the work of the instructional leader covered.

The third edition also includes expanded coverage of confronting marginal teaching; teacher evaluation related to teacher quality, Race to the Top, and valued-added issues; and the relationship between professional learning and teacher evaluation focusing on the classroom evaluation.

In schools that thrive, the principal is able to support a learning community by engaging key stakeholders in the process of building a vision, and sustaining a culture in which adult learners grow and develop as professionals who excel in the classroom and who are able to reach every student the majority of the time.

Great principals are adept at the art of making classroom observations that become meaningful experiences for teachers. These principals conduct both informal (unannounced) and formal (announced) classroom observations with the intent of supporting teacher growth and development. Principals feel at ease walking into teachers' classrooms because they understand the processes that encourage conversations in the pre- and postobservation conferences, and they have tools to help them collect usable data to fuel postobservation conferences.

Great principals are able to extend learning by providing professional learning opportunities for teachers. With fiscal constraints, principals need to be able to secure resources within their buildings by tapping into the expertise of their teachers and other school personnel.

This book situates the principal as the instructional leader of the school and as such, the principal must be in the position to support the learning of his or her staff. This book provides many resources for school principals, regardless of level—primary, elementary, middle, or high school. Resources include

- a guide and process to re-envision the school’s vision and mission
- discussion guides for the preobservation and postobservation conferences
- classroom observation forms to collect data in a standards-based classroom
- activities to help assess the developmental stages of teachers
- professional development activities and exploration of peer coaching, action research, and the portfolio
- a sample plan of remediation and the steps needed to support struggling teachers

Because teacher quality is at the forefront of school systems, more coverage has been added on working with marginal teaching and the steps that principals will need to take to support the struggling teacher and when to, as expressed in the field, “cut bait.”

Although the duties of instructional leadership cannot be delegated, more coverage has been added on how the principal can better work with the administrative team to widen the sphere of instructional support as no one single principal can do it all.

A more detailed discussion about teacher quality and its relationship to teacher evaluation is offered to keep up with many of the Race to the Top initiatives.

I hope you enjoy this new edition.

1

The Principal as Instructional Leader

In This Chapter ...

- Instructional leadership—what is it?
- Instructional leaders
- Make a commitment to learning
- Provide connectivity and cohesion
- Build strong teams of teacher leaders
- Understand change
- Organization of the book

Very few people would disagree that the work of a school principal is multifaceted, hectic, and fraught with uncertainties and that, given the ongoing pressures for accountability, the very work of the principal as instructional leader is shifting to ensure “results” in the form of increased student scores on standardized tests. Myriad day-to-day activities take principals away from the important work of instructional leadership because these activities need administrative detail and attention to ensure the overall effective management of the school. However, no matter how important this “other” work is, Hoy and Hoy (2006) assert, “Schools are about teaching and learning; all other activities are secondary to these basic goals” (p. 1).

Learning Forward (2011) holds firm that “leaders develop their own and others’ capacity to learn and lead professional learning, advocate for it, [and] provide support systems”; for the principal, this means assuming the responsibility for learning with conviction at a steadfast speed (p. 28).

The Principal as Instructional Leader: A Practical Handbook examines the work that must be accomplished by principals as the instructional leaders of their schools. Very specifically, this book examines learning and leading as principals develop a vision and culture that support the supervision of the instructional program, professional development, and other processes to help teachers further improve their teaching. However, the concepts and most of the tools presented in this book can assist all school personnel who coach and mentor teachers in improving their instructional practices.

The principal must be in a position to promote continuous learning and development of teachers who are challenged to teach students to higher standards of accountability. Tirozzi (2001) indicates, “The principals of *tomorrow’s* schools must be instructional leaders who possess the requisite skills, capacities, and commitment to lead the accountability parade, not follow it” (p. 438, emphasis added). To accept this challenge, principals need to be able to

- Set the tone for their buildings;
- Facilitate the teaching and learning process;
- Provide leadership and direction to their schools’ instructional programs and policies;
- Spend significantly more time evaluating staff and mentoring new teachers;
- Sustain professional development for themselves and their staff members; and
- Nurture personalized school environments for all students. (p. 438)

Tomorrow is too late. Principals must be able to lead in the present because school systems will always look to their principals for direction, guidance, and the commitment to make learning for teachers and students a top priority.

What gets in the way of principals’ paying full attention to the work of instructional leadership? Principals in the field have many responsibilities: attending to student discipline, intervening with angry parents, completing paperwork and reports needed by central office to comply with special education rules and regulations, administering the testing program, tracking the results of standardized testing, and seeing to the maintenance of

the physical plant. Principals are the stewards of their buildings, overseeing the operations of the school—the instructional program, the budget, the facilities, the discipline program, the community outreach efforts. The list of a principal’s responsibilities never ends.

The principal does not need to walk alone. Many principals have the assistance of assistant principals, lead teachers, department chairs, grade-level leaders, instructional coaches, master teachers, and other instructional support personnel who help to ensure the orderly operations of the school. However, some principals do not have full- or part-time assistance from school personnel assigned to work alongside them. Regardless of the configuration of personnel who assist the principal, the final responsibility for the success of the instructional program and its people—teachers and students—rests squarely on the shoulders of the principal. This is a sobering proposition given the demands of accountability.

There is a need for optimism for those who are in or aspire to the position of principal, and there is a need to elevate the work of the principal as an instructional leader. The instructional leadership of the principal is worth the effort and worthy of a recommitment by those who lead in concert with teachers to improvement and effectiveness. The guiding premises needed to achieve instructional improvement and teacher effectiveness are embedded in the day-to-day work of the principal and rooted in the reasons an individual sought and accepted the position of principal.

Instructional Leadership—What Is It?

Deriving the meaning of the term *instructional leadership* is elusive. The complex construct of instructional leadership has been written about and researched from the perspective of the work of those in the position of the principal (Sergiovanni, 2006), the traits and characteristics of principals (Yukl, 2006), school effectiveness (Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983), change (Murphy, 1994a), and school improvement (Murphy, 1992, 1994b). Included in this search for meaning have been numerous movements (transformative leadership, shared decision making), preparation standards for principals (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996), the call for moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1996), the development of learning communities (Barth, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1999; Lambert, 1995; Zepeda, 2012), the need for an ethic of care (Barth, 2001; Noddings, 1992), and so goes the list.

Leadership that focuses on instruction has a strong purpose and an equally strong commitment to student learning. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2011) provides a construct for instructional