

Instructional Leadership for Malaysian Polytechnics System

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on emphasizing the leader as the polytechnic's instructional leader. The paper presents a framework that conceptualizes instructional leadership as a two-dimensional construct comprised of instructional leadership practices and leadership processes in Malaysian Polytechnics perspective. The instructional leadership practices described include: (1) framing and communicating polytechnics goals; (2) supervising and evaluating instruction; (3) coordinating curriculum; (4) developing high academic standards and expectations; (5) monitoring student progress; (6) promoting the professional development of lecturers; (7) protecting instructional time; (8) developing incentives for students and lecturers; (9) respecting integrity of the lecturers; (10) role models in school; and (11) creating a culture of continuous improvement. The instructional leadership processes described is: communication; decision making; conflict management; group process; change process; and environmental interaction. The Malaysian Polytechnics therefore needs leadership development programs that will provide the necessary learning experiences that can induce instructional leadership behavior. Training and development programs for vocational technical institutional leaders should therefore focus on getting principals to show personalized interest in individual staff members and pay attention to their needs for growth and improvement.

Keywords: instructional, leadership, Malaysia, polytechnic, professional development

INTRODUCTION

The comeback of the key as the school's instructional leader is directly attributable to the effective schools research. Edmonds, Rutter, Brookover, and Lezotte all found that instructional effective schools are characterized by strong instructional leadership. Although research from related areas (e.g., management, change theory, implementation) as well as predictable wisdom underscore the pivotal role played by principals, it was not until the effective schools findings were spread that policy makers, district administrators, and leadership trainers began to focus on the principal's role in coordinating, developing and controlling instruction. The confluence of research findings related to the leadership role of the principal has proved so powerful that school district practices as well as pre- and in-service training programs for principals are now becoming shaped by the expectation that principals will act as instructional leaders in their schools.

Instructional leadership is a tough effort. To do it well, a school administrator must be knowledgeable (Roundtable & Hallinger, 2012); facile with statistical data (Lunenburg, 2010); capable of connecting with teachers on formal and informal levels (Instructional, Is, & Important, 2005); and knowledgeable about and able to implement the specific moves and strategies that are most effective for improving student achievement (P. Hallinger, 2005). Nonetheless, the expectation that school administrators demonstrate characteristics of instructional leaders is nearly undoubted.

In this part we nearby a framework which conceptualizes instructional leadership as a two dimensional construct comprised of leadership practices and leadership processes. This framework makes it possible to consider ways in which instructional leadership varies in different school contexts and how principals can exercise strong instructional leadership using quite different leadership styles. In this framework instructional leadership practices represent the substance of the principal's instructional leadership role (P. Hallinger & Davis, 1996). These practices include:

- i) Framing and communicating school goals
- ii) Supervising and evaluating instruction
- iii) Coordinating curriculum
- iv) Developing high academic standards and expectations
- v) Monitoring student progress
- vi) Promoting the professional development of teachers
- vii) Protecting instructional time
- viii) Developing incentives for students and teachers

In contrast to this substantive focus, instructional leadership processes represent the guiding activities by which the various functions are implemented (P. P. Hallinger & U, 2007). These leadership processes include:

- i) Communication
- ii) Group process and Decision making
- iii) Conflict management
- iv) Change process
- v) Environmental interaction

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Framing and Communicating School Goals

Studies of instructionally effective schools designate that a school has a clearly defined mission; This mission often focuses on improving student achievement. The importance is on a few school-wide goals around which staff energy and school resources can be mobilized. A few coordinated school-wide objectives, each with a controllable scope seem to work best. This makes coordination of goals less difficult and also facilitates effective communication of the school's mission. In instructional schools, the principal plays a key role in conceptualizing the school's goals, obtaining staff input on goal development, and in framing goals in such a way that they are easily translated into classroom objectives. The principal can communicate school goals by referring to them often and in a variety of school contexts. The importance placed on the school's goals by the principal, however, is also communicated by the substantive decisions made by the principal during the school year. Staffing, resource allocation, staff development, and curricular decisions all reflect the operational priorities of the principal. In instructional effective schools, principals are able to maintain a somewhat higher level of reliability in their goals and operational decisions than is found in typical schools.

Supervising and Evaluating Instruction

Principals in effective schools usually observe classroom instruction in their role as supervisors. Although they stress informal observations, these principals also maintain a high level of accountability with respect to classroom instruction. They work with teachers to ensure that classroom objectives are directly connected to school goals and review classroom instruction using as many sources of information as possible -- formal and informal classroom explanation, lesson plans, and student work products. Finally, they offer concrete, constructive suggestions to teachers, assisting them in improving their instructional practices.

Monitor Student Progress

A key instructor leadership function carried out by principals in effective schools is the common monitoring of student progress. The principal uses a variety of information on student learning (e.g., student work products, curricular tests, standardized tests) to assess the school's instructional program and progress towards school goals. Teachers use this information for diagnostic purposes, adjusting their instructional strategies and pacing based upon student progress. The normal monitoring and feedback of student performance results reinforces the norm of staff accountability for student learning and the trust that schools can make a difference.

Coordinating Curriculum

School effectiveness is also related to a high degree of alignment among instructional objectives, curricular materials and testing instruments. Numerous studies conducted during the 1970s and 1980s have discovered a surprising variation across schools in the degree to which the students are exposed to the content tested on standardized tests used to assess school effectiveness. As instructional leaders, principals can work to insure that curricular materials used in their schools are consistent with the school's instructional objectives, that such materials are commonly reinforcing, and that instructional objectives are aligned with the instruments used to monitor student progress.

Protecting Instructional Time

Policies and enforcement practices that reduce tardiness, absenteeism, and truancy increase learning time for students. Principals can also increase student opportunities to learn by protecting classroom instructional time from interruptions due to public address announcements, by working with teachers to develop a more effective classroom management and Instructional practices, and by reducing the number of non-instructional school activities that influence on classroom time.

Promoting Professional Development and Instructional Improvement

Principals can support the professional growth of teachers in a number of ways. They can work with the teacher directly by conducting in-service like workshops for their staffs and by working in the classroom with

teachers who are learning new skills. They can also support the development of teachers indirectly by making them aware of staff development and training programs, distributing research and curricular reports, arranging for teachers to observe their colleagues teach, giving public and private recognition to teachers' efforts to improve instruction, and allocating resources to instructional improvement activities.

Developing High Standards and Expectations

In effective classrooms and schools, high expectations are maintained for all students. These expectations are embedded in school-wide policies and standards and are reflected in the behavior of adults throughout the school. Principals promote high expectations for students indirectly through the expectations they hold for themselves and their staffs. In addition, they shape school-wide expectations more directly through the policies they develop in such areas as grading, reporting student progress, promotion, retention, remediation, student grouping, and classroom instructional practices.

Providing Incentives for Students and Teachers

An important aspect of the school learning climate is the nature of the school rewards systems. Principals in instructional effective schools do not leave the task of rewarding students only for individual teachers; they develop incentives for learning that are school-wide in orientation. These include honor rolls, award assemblies, certificates of merit for attendance and behavior, mention in the school newspaper and/or newsletter, pictures, displays or other forms of recognition in the lobby, as well as the personal word of encouraging mentor pat on the back. Similarly, instructional leaders find ways to reward or recognize teachers for their efforts. Some of these are informal -- private words of praise; others are more formal such as recognition before peer, nominated for an award, or letters to the personnel files of teachers.

LEADERSHIP PROCESSES

Communication

Among the processes, communication is especially important. Regular use of systematic communications is essential to building productive working relationships between the principal and staff and among teachers. Also, as instructional leadership assumes greater importance for principals, this change in role behavior must be communicated and reinforced regularly in interactions with staff and parents. Communication must be integrally connected with each of the leadership functions, and overall school communications should clearly reflect the importance of instruction. Given the preference among principals for live, face to face communication, it seems more important that principals make the best use of routine events (e.g., faculty meetings, supervisory conferences, student assemblies, PTA events) to communicate the school's mission and their own priorities related to curriculum and instruction. In addition, instructional leaders create opportunities in which they can communicate the substantive information related to the various leadership functions (e.g., visits to classrooms, faculty retreats, task force or grade/department meetings).

Conflict Management

The development of a strong goal consensus and a common language within the school regarding curriculum and instruction increases the probability that the conflict will be produced channelled in the organization. Recognizing the varying concerns of different groups of teachers and parents is the first step principals must take in developing a school mission, a coordinated curriculum, or a school-wide reward structure. Conflict is a predictable consequence of the process of building a more effective school since the movement towards a common set of assumptions of what the school should be doing and how that might occur may result in a slight reduction in individual teacher autonomy. Thus the ability to manage conflict so that group consistency is improved and school norms develop which support the ability of school-wide goals are critical for principals interested in instructional improvement.

Group Process and Decision Making

The effective schools findings, taken as a whole, suggest that instructional effectiveness is greater when teachers teach within the context of common work structure (i.e., common goals, a coordinated curriculum, a school-wide discipline system). Many of the leadership functions discussed earlier involve the development of school-wide policies which make it easier to provide effective instruction in classrooms. For example, school policies regarding student behavior and absenteeism, scheduling, public address announcements, and time allocated to instruction in various subject areas require greater consensus than is typically found in schools. In order to bring about such a change without encroaching on the ability of teachers to maximize their creativity in classroom instruction, special attention should be paid to developing collaborative organizational decision making processes.

Strong leadership does not require principals to make all decisions, nor does collegiality require that all decisions be made by the group. The role of the teachers and principal in the decision-making process should, however, be clearly specified before the process begins. Likewise the orientation of the groups should be toward completion of a task, not maintenance of group relations. Principals should promote a feeling of freedom of group members to make contributions and suggestions and of rough equality of participation with each other. Principals should also make certain that group processes lead to some real or symbolic conclusion.

Change Process

Organizational conditions in schools that discourage change need to be clearly understood. Major changes in instruction and curriculum, also, are more likely to be successfully implemented if they are based on collegiality and collaboration rather than solely on line authority. Thus, significant input from teachers, students and parents is recommended in the development of the school mission and goals. Likewise, teacher involvement in the definition of the content of the school's curricular objectives and materials is a necessary step in the change process if principal expects effective implementation of instructional and curricular innovations.

Environmental Interactions

The last of the leadership processes contained in this framework of instructional leadership is environmental interaction. This leadership process variable is comprised of the principal behaviors designed both to connect the instructional processes and the curriculum of the schools with its environment and to protect instruction and curriculum from fluctuations in that environment. It recognizes that principals play an important role in interpreting the needs and demands which abound in the school's environment. The principal more than any other staff member in the school is expected to mediate those environmental expectations and incorporate them into the school's program. Conversely, the principal as a "boundary spanner" is also in a position to influence the expectations and desires of the parents, the community, and the district office. Both of these roles suggest the important role played by instructional leaders in: 1) obtaining input from the environment (e.g., the school community) in defining the school's mission; 2) communicating the mission both inside and outside the school to key audiences; and, 3) buffering the school's program from central-office and community pressures which might impede the accomplishment of the school's mission.

LEADERSHIP IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING (TVET)

The polytechnic is one of the organizations that implement the Education Training (TVET) in accordance with the mission of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET). TVET is concerned with the gaining with knowledge and skills for the world of work. Based on previous studies, it is difficult to find a definition or discussion leader vocational technical education and training (TVET). During the term European education and training policy in the terms preferred 100 (Cedefop, 2009). European Glossary on Education series developed by the Eurydice Network as a source of reference in providing all-round understanding and comparing how different education systems in Europe work. Volume four (Eurydice, 2002) provides coverage of the terms used to refer to the national level management personnel, monitoring and support. However, research public education leadership and strategy are often included in various leadership positions and functions such as principals, deputy team manager, unit heads and teachers (as the leader of the class). Leadership design is also available in TVET. Regional Centre for Vocational Regionale Opleidingen Centra (ROC Netherlands) show how leadership can be regarded as a term that covers a variety of leadership position levels, functions and duties. Skills Framework for vocational and technical professions were developed by Cedefop and the Finnish Board of National Education (Cedefop, 2009). It defines TVET as a leader or person in charge of a number of institutions such as technical and vocational secondary vocational institutions and further education colleges or training centers that provide continuing education and vocational training. TVET leadership position may have very different responsibilities and challenges of educational organizations become increasingly challenging.

CONCLUSION

This imitation model of instructional leadership has presented eight elements and five processes that research and the experience of polytechnics administrators have identified as crucial to leadership in polytechnics. In these areas, setting instructional goals has been found to be the most important because it potentially involves all the other areas of concern and brings past experience into planning for future contingencies. The addition of these tasks means that an instructional leader is both a conceptualist and a nuts-and-bolts person. Leaders are not just an idea-people or, on the other hand, those who execute the district will, but they are professionals who use both research and practical innovations, cooperating with other professionals—teachers and staff—to further student learning. Strong instructional programs may be developed in a similar way by leaders' expecting, contributing to, and rewarding continuous improvements in teaching, learning, and leading. It is a challenge worth the effort.

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