There has been little research into what teachers think makes an effective leader. And there have been few practical guides for leaders to become more effective. This article describes the everyday strategies of principals practicing exemplary instructional leadership and how these principals influenced teachers.

In our study of 809 teachers from public elementary, middle, and high schools in diverse regions of the United States, teachers used open-ended questionnaires to describe the characteristics of their principals (strategies, behaviors, attitudes, and goals) that influence their classroom instruction. Teachers also described their thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. All retained their anonymity.

Our research shows what teachers define as the characteristics of effective leaders, paving the way for professional development to help leaders become more effective.

**EFFECTIVE LEADERS:**

- Avoid restrictive and intimidating approaches to teachers, as well as approaches that elicit “dog and pony shows” based on narrow definitions of teaching. Administrative control gives way to collegiality.
- Believe in teacher choice and discretion. Teachers are not criticized or forced to teach in limited ways.
- Integrate collaboration, peer coaching, inquiry, collegial study groups, and reflective discussion to promote professional dialogue.
- Embrace growth and change. These leaders believe change is a journey of learning and risk taking.
- Respect teachers’ knowledge and abilities, seeing the teacher as “intellectual rather than teacher as technician” (Little, 1993, p. 129).
- Are committed not only to enacting school improvement and reform, but also to enhancing professional community in schools (Louis & Kruse, 1996).

In addition, instructional leadership is embedded in school culture; it is expected and routinely delivered.

We found that in effective principal-teacher interaction about instruction, the result is inquiry, reflection, exploration, and experimentation. Teachers build repertoires of flexible alternatives rather than rigid teaching procedures and methods.

**THEMES**

There are two major themes that principals exhibit in effective instructional leadership: Talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth. Principals whom teachers say are effective leaders...
Effective principals "hold up a mirror," serve as "another set of eyes," and are "critical friends" to teachers. They use a range of strategies described here, and use them frequently.

**Talking with teachers to promote reflection**

Effective principals value dialogue that encourages teachers to reflect on their learning and practice. The study revealed five primary talking strategies:

1. Make suggestions. Do this during post-observation conferences and informally, day to day. Suggestions must be purposeful, appropriate, and non-threatening. Principals should listen carefully, share their own experiences, use examples and demonstrations, give teachers choices, contradict outdated or destructive policies, encourage risk taking, offer professional literature, recognize teachers’ strengths, and focus on improving instruction.

2. Give feedback. Effective principals “hold up a mirror,” serve as “another set of eyes,” and are “critical friends” to teachers. Feedback focuses on observed classroom behavior, is specific, expresses caring and interest, provides praise, is problem solving, responds to concerns about students, and stresses the principal’s availability for follow-up talk.

3. Model. Demonstrate teaching techniques in classrooms and during conferences. Model positive interactions with students. Teachers viewed these forms of modeling as impressive examples of instructional leadership.

4. Use inquiry and solicit advice/opinions. Question teachers and solicit their advice about instruction.

5. Praise. Focus on specific and concrete teaching behaviors.

As a result of leaders who used these strategies, teachers reflected more and used a greater variety of teaching strategies, responded to student diversity, planned more carefully, and took more risks. Teachers reported positive effects on their motivation, satisfaction, self-esteem, efficacy, sense of security, and feelings of support.

In addition to the strategies discussed above, principals enhanced teacher reflective behavior by distributing professional literature, encouraging teachers to attend workshops and conferences, and encouraging reflective discussions and collaboration with others.

**Promoting professional growth**

Effective instructional leaders use six strategies to promote teachers’ professional development:

1. Emphasize the study of teaching and learning. Provide staff development opportunities that address emergent needs. Encourage teacher input, allow discretion in attending, and support innovation. Principals who were identified as effective leaders in the study often participated in staff development sessions.

2. Support collaboration among educators. Networks are essential for successful teaching and learning. Model teamwork, provide time for collaborative work, and advocate sharing and
peer observation. Encourage teachers to visit other teachers, even in other schools, to observe classrooms and programs.

3. Develop coaching relationships. Encourage teachers to become peer coaches. Based on two decades of research, Joyce and Showers (1995) concluded that training is effective only when it includes peer coaching in the classroom.

4. Encourage and support program redesign. Encourage teachers to redesign instructional programs and support diverse approaches to teaching and learning. Be flexible on grouping and strategies. Provide resources to support program redesign when possible.

5. Apply principles of adult learning, growth, and development to staff development. Create cultures of collaboration, inquiry, lifelong learning, experimenta-
tion, and reflection consistent with the principles of adult learning and an understanding of teachers' lives, roles, and motivation (see for example, Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998).

6. Implement action research to inform instructional decision making. Use action research. Effective principals in the study are working to conduct staff development as a large-scale action research project, although the efforts are not yet extensive. This is consistent with Calhoun's (1994) thesis that without class and school-based data about learning, teachers cannot determine the effects of what they do in the classroom.

These six strategies resulted in increased teacher innovation/creativity, risk taking, instructional focus, and reflection, as well as positive effects on teachers' motivation, sense of efficacy, and self-esteem.

Overall, our data indicate that each of the instructional leadership strategies enhances teachers’ well-being, emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally.

Today’s successful schools have increasingly become centers of shared inquiry and decision making. In such schools, instructional leadership is shared with teachers, and in its most progressive forms is being cast as coaching, reflection, collegial investigation, study teams, explorations into uncertain matters, and problem solving (Glanz & Neville, 1997). Discussions of alternatives, not directives or criticism, are the focus, and administrators and teachers are working together as “communities of learners” engaged in professional and moral service to students. By making this happen, principals have a direct effect on teachers and classroom instruction (cf. Sheppard, 1996).

REFERENCES

The collegial school leader

School leaders work for a culture of individual and shared critical examination that leads to instructional improvement. Educational leaders should:

Talk about instruction with teachers frequently.

This requires skills, knowledge, attitudes, and personal characteristics different from those routinely taught and developed in many traditional educational leadership programs (Murphy, 1992). Specifically, make suggestions, give feedback, and solicit teachers’ advice and opinions about instruction in an inquiry-oriented approach. Strive to develop cooperative, non-threatening teacher-supervisor partnerships — characterized by trust, openness, and the freedom to make mistakes — that are crucial to analyzing teaching and its effects (Cangelosi, 1991). As instructional leaders, emphasize studying teaching and learning, and be prepared and willing to model effective teaching.

Support collaborative efforts by supporting the development of coaching skills and reflective conversations.

Provide time and opportunities for peer connections. This will send two powerful messages to teachers: that you realize that collaborative processes (in contrast to a principal’s authoritarian approach) elevate teachers as thoughtful, responsible, growing professionals, and that you believe growth and development are most likely to occur with open, mutual, critical dialogue, rather than with judgmental, evaluative criticism (see Freire’s (1985) argument on this point).

Develop a structure (e.g., provide resources and support to redesign programs, apply the principles of adult growth to staff development programs and activities) and core resources (e.g., promote positive school climate and group development, teamwork, collaboration, innovation and continual growth, trust in staff and students, and caring and respect to enhance teacher efficacy (Blasé & Blasé, 1997, 2000; Hipp, 1995).

Enhance these by inspiring group purpose and providing rewards such as praise.

De-emphasize competition among teachers. Professional development programs should teach practicing and aspiring principals how to develop professional dialogue and collegiality among educators. The anchors for such programs should be training in group development, theories of teaching and learning (vis-a-vis both adults and children), action research methods, change, and reflective practice.


