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Learn more about NSDC's standards, www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

REFERENCES

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Ensuring quality teaching: What can the principal do?

I recently worked with a high school principal who was stymied by the goal of improving instruction in his school. He knew instruction was one of the keys to improving student achievement, yet he wasn't quite sure how to start.

Tucked into the seminal research on collegiality conducted by Judith Warren Little (1981) was research that identified critical principal behaviors that promoted collaboration and changes in classroom instruction. The four leadership practices were:

1) Announcing and describing desired norms and practices: stating expectations for high-quality instruction;

2) Modeling or enacting the desired behaviors: discussing instruction, requesting feedback on the principal's performance, conducting useful observations of classes, and providing time;

3) Sanctioning the desired behaviors: Reinforcing, endorsing, and encouraging expected behaviors with incentives, such as released time or positive evaluations, visible and public praise for collegial or experimental efforts, and "absorbing inevitable failure encountered in experimentation" (Little, 1981, p. 13); and

4) Defending the desired norms and behaviors from "countermovements within the school or from impositions from outside the school" (p. 13): the principal must defend against the descent back to the status quo. This action requires courage and conviction and

involves identifying common ground among competing demands.

So, what can the principal do to support quality teaching? The principal **promotes a culture of innovation that continuously improves teaching.** That goal can be accomplished by *creating an environment of trust, risk taking, and support.* Educators must feel that they can experiment with new practices and be safe from criticism or poor evaluation if those

experiments don't go well. Reanalysis of research in Chicago showed that an environment of trust was one of the most important elements in schools that improved (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

The principal also needs to **encourage, protect, and support staff members who implement innovative strategies.** Curiously, sometimes teachers criticize colleagues who implement new practices. The principal

needs to be ready to protect the risk takers.

Finally, the principal must **assist staff members to learn from implementation mistakes.** Fullan describes that when people try to learn any new behavior there is an inevitable *implementation dip* — things get worse before they get better. The principal must be prepared for missteps as staff experiment with new strategies and help teachers reflect on and learn from those experiences. (See Page 4 for more on the implementation dip.)

The principal plays an important role in creating an environment that encourages and supports quality teaching.

Quality Teaching

Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.