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Delicious irony of leadership

Most of the principals I know are tired! They are expected to manage a building, take care of transportation issues, keep the lunchroom clean and quiet, and attend to stakeholder concerns while serving as an instructional leader who focuses staff on high levels of learning for **all** students despite second languages, special needs, or emotional or behavioral issues. One administrator told me that even though he wants to be an instructional leader, 95% of his day seemed to be focused on managing the building leaving little time or energy for the educational conversations and activities that led him to become a principal in the first place.

One task of leadership within a learning community is the development of collaborative interactions and relationships. Collaboration requires a different type of leadership — namely distributed leadership. Distributed leadership means that leadership is not viewed as a formal role but as a set of skills and behaviors that many individuals perform in order to move the group forward. Therefore, one way to help a school focus on important educational work is to build the leadership capacity within the school (Lambert, 2003). Building leadership capacity means engaging teachers, among other stakeholders, in the work of leadership.

The learning principal **creates experiences for teachers to serve as instructional leaders within the school**. The challenge of high levels of learning for all students cannot be met when there is only one leader in the school — all educators need to be encouraged to lead others to focus on improving teaching and learning.

How can this be accomplished? First, the principal **creates experiences for teachers to lead schoolwide committees that make decisions about curriculum, instruction, resources, and professional development**. When teachers lead, they also need the authority to make educational decisions that matter within the school beyond the placement of the microwave or organizing the staff luncheon.

Leadership: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.

Encouraging leadership capacity also means **establishing school guidelines that support new practices**. Many schools function as egalitarian cultures in which “being the nail that sticks up” is not sanctioned. The principal is responsible for working with teachers to establish norms of collaboration that support the development of teaming. The principal will want to help teachers develop leadership skills which ensure that educators can make

joint decisions, resolve conflicts, and build trusting relationships with colleagues.

The principal can **create experiences for teachers to serve as mentors, master teachers, and instructional coaches** while ensuring that they have the skills to function effectively within these roles. These roles support a focus on high-quality instruction for more staff members without putting an additional burden on the principal.

Here is the delicious irony of leadership — a principal will be a more effective leader when helping others to serve as instructional leaders rather than trying to do it all alone.

REFERENCE

Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.