The Role of Principal as Instructional Leader

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Introduction

The role of principal is perhaps one of the most dynamic, influential and expansive roles in education. The role has evolved drastically over the past several decades and has been dominated by discourse around the role of principals in school improvement and effectiveness (Horng & Loeb, 2010). This context has shaped the education landscape, not only at the academic level, but also at the political and legal level, as much policy has been written worldwide with the intent of supporting school improvement through the accountability framework (Robinson, Rowe, & Lloyd, 2008). This shift has resulted in the propulsion of principal as school manager to principal as school leader, particularly in the area of instruction, as a means to achieving the ultimate goal of school improvement and increased achievement of educational outcomes. The research itself on this role shift is quite diverse and it is already clear that there is no consensus on the topic about the role of principal as instructional leader in school reform (Robinson et al., 2008). It is also clear that principals have been charged with improving student achievement, while still running an orderly school (Fullan, 2001). The question is: has this been the right change?

Purpose

This exploration seeks to find clarity about whether or not the concept of "principal as instructional leader" is a valuable construct with sufficient merit and data to support it. The following questions identified in the next section will frame this examination.

Research Questions

1. What does the research say about the role of principals as instructional leaders?

2. What evidence or data is there that supports the view of principal as instructional leader?

3. What, if any, other models help to provide further direction to the role of principal in the current educational context?

4. What are the general characteristics of effective administrators in the current educational landscape?

These questions are all similar in their focus to explore the role of principals in improving schools and address whether or not the dominant model is the best fit or if other characteristics and models ought to be taken into consideration in order to provide an effective framework that captures the role today.

Methods

The research for this study relied on peer-reviewed articles in the broad area of principal as instructional leader and the effectiveness of that role. There were a number of search terms used in order to adequately cover all the seminal authors who discussed the role of principal as instructional leader. These search terms included: principal, instructional leader, instructional leadership, student achievement, school improvement, accountability, achievement, leadership, impact, school effectiveness, and a combination thereof. There were several connections between different sub themes and topics that emerged

while searching. These search terms revealed most of the articles that were used in this study. From there, additional articles and authors were identified in reference lists within those articles.

A meta-synthesis of the literature was performed to complete this study. The synthesis was done by analyzing the body of literature, while ensuring seminal authors on the topic were included. In addition, experts in the field were consulted to ensure that no essential perspectives were overlooked. In total, eleven key articles and reviews were selected and then examined. In order to increase the validity and credibility of the literature review, these sources were all primary, rather than secondary sources. After evaluating the varying perspectives, gaps in the literature were identified, as were areas for further research.

Literature Review

To situate this literature review within the context of the questions that it seeks to answer, it is important to initially examine the literature and determine what it says about the role of principal as instructional leader. The first two questions will be explored before answering the other questions. Given the variance in opinions with regard to instructional leadership, there are a number of different perspectives that were evident in the literature.

The articles and their respective authors were grouped by like terms with regard to their general position on instructional leadership and how they contributed to the research on the topic. The review will begin with perspectives that are critical of instructional leadership and that primarily point out challenges and limitations of it, as a model to support student achievement. The next focus will be on perspectives that acknowledge the value of instructional leadership as a construct, and the authors suggest minor revisions for instructional leadership, if any. Lastly, perspectives are presented that are focused on the benefits of instructional leadership and offer specific areas for consideration in the field in order to better understand the role of principal as instructional leader and what that means in practicality. These headings serve as an organizational tool to help synthesize the literature in the field of instructional leadership as it relates to principals and student achievement.

Limitations and Challenges

Fink and Resnick (2001) discussed the limitations of the role of principal as instructional leader due to the fact that it is an additional responsibility beyond all previously existing roles held by principals. By drawing insights based on the common structure of American school districts, they pointed to the fact that most districts have two "lines"; one line is the administrative line and the other is the school support line. They described the administrative line as being the path that most principals are on, and as being heavily influenced by administrative tasks and responsibilities that are less aligned with instruction and learning or working with teachers to support them. The administrative line is more concerned with the day-to-day functioning of the school. They suggested that these types of tasks eat up most of the principals' time and they become less familiar with teaching. Any concerns or action needed around instruction is referred to those in the school support line (Fink & Resnick, 2001). This approach is further strengthened by the growing sentiment for teacher autonomy and a desire by teachers to assert their professional judgment, without critique, especially from administrators whom they see as irrelevant or at least lacking knowledge in the area of teaching. The school support line described by Fink and Resnick is the one that is responsible for curriculum, instruction and professional development of teachers. Just as administrators lose familiarity with the classroom, Fink and Resnick argued that those in this line are unacquainted with the functioning of a school, making them incompatible for administration. It is for these reasons that Fink and Resnick suggested the model of instructional leadership where principals remain in control of all school-based concerns and the coaching of teachers is incompatible due to the fact that they have lost touch with classroom reality.

However in noting this dilemma, Fink and Resnick (2001) proposed an alternative framework. This framework requires relationships of mutual support at all levels of education from the classroom to the principal, superintendents, curriculum supports and professional development departments (Fink &

Resnick, 2001). Their work was primarily based on their experiences in their district and schools, which is important work to do, but has not been substantiated through research. Their work does, however, reveal flaws in the current model of principal as instructional leader, specifically that it is difficult to achieve given the already high demands of principals. Furthermore, the fact that their proposed framework to address this issue has not been researched reveals that this area requires further investigation.

Similarly, Duke and Stiggins (2008) challenged the existing beliefs around instructional leadership by pointing to a deficit in the area of assessment capacity and understanding by principals. They suggested that while the current concepts, ideas and training programs around instructional leadership for principals are important in contributing to improved student outcomes, they still lack in one key area which is foundational to truly improving teaching and learning. Specifically, principals need to be provided with the skills, training and education to support teachers in using and developing quality assessments in their classrooms (Duke & Stiggins, 2008). They suggested that while backgrounds and experience in teaching methods, observation and aligning curriculum are important, principals are missing the ability to measure the effectiveness of any changes made in the area of instruction. Duke and Stiggins not only indicated that it is important for principals to support teachers at the classroom level, but also at the program level; additionally, they need to support the school as a whole in examining the effectiveness of programs within the school and to ensure alignment of effective practices. Finally, they pointed to the importance of principals being literate in analyzing, interpreting, understanding and communicating assessment data that is from a larger level, be it division, provincial or other large scale assessment. The goal of these types of assessment is to determine whether or not the school is meeting the standards and how it compares to other jurisdictions (Duke & Stiggins, 2008). This assessment environment reveals that there are multiple lenses through which administrators must view assessment in order to fulfill their obligations effectively. Most notably, this requirement reflects the differing perspectives that exist when it comes to the principal as instructional leader. Duke and Stiggin's emphasis on the need for assessment leadership poses a challenge to the conventional view of instructional leadership and at the very least suggests the current approach is incomplete and requires further development. However, further research also needs to be done in the field of assessment and the principal as instructional leader.

Horng and Loeb (2010) focused on the connection made over the years between strong leadership, and school and student achievement. They even suggested that since the emergence of the school improvement and instructional leadership movements, new programs have evolved that emphasized the role of principals as instructional leaders (Horn & Loeb, 2010). Along with these developments, there was also a characterization of the ideal instructional leader that became clear in the research. Horng and Loeb described this principal as having been a very strong teacher who is directive, skilled in curriculum and instruction, one who, as principal, spends a lot of time in the classroom, provides feedback to teachers and can also model effective instruction. They, however, questioned the use of this model in today's current educational reality. They argued that it was ill-suited to the demands of education and administration today, where the expectations of providing feedback in a variety of areas, even if they had the skills, is not logistically possible (Horng & Loeb, 2010).

Horng and Loeb (2010), instead, offered an alternative to instructional leadership as it has been conceived thus far. The model they described was focused on organizational management being the catalyst for instructional improvement, rather than the principal's involvement in those classes from day-to-day. Some of the ways this could be achieved was through hiring high quality teachers for the job, assigning the teachers they have to the right classes, ensuring that they have the resources and supports to teach as effectively as possible, removing or developing less effective teachers, supporting retention, and offering up opportunities to support teacher development (Horng & Loeb, 2010).

Horng and Loeb's (2010) research included studies of principals' effects on teachers that they conducted at Stanford University with over 1,900 administrators and 32,000 teachers. The key finding in their research was that simply focusing on the classroom is too narrow of a confine for instructional leadership. Their research found that schools with improved academic performance were more likely to have strong organizational managers. Other behaviours exhibited by principals that exemplify organiza-

tional managers include using professional development both as an incentive for ambitious teachers and as support for struggling or ineffective teachers, both of which support retention, but more importantly student achievement (Horng & Loeb, 2010). The most staggering finding in their research was that there was no positive correlation between time spent observing teachers in the classroom and the climate for learning in the school (Horng & Loeb, 2010).

Alternatively, they found that principals who work to facilitate collaborative environments for teachers are more likely to have teachers who seek advice from administrators on how to improve their teaching. They found that poor organizational managers were more likely to have their staff seek outside support (Horng & Loeb, 2010). In essence, organizational managers support teachers and ultimately effective instruction more indirectly, rather than directly through the strategies they employ, their hiring practices and by connecting teachers with the necessary resources and supports to teach effectively (Horng & Loeb, 2010). Not only does Horng and Loeb's (2010) research reinforce the notion that the lens of instructional leadership is too narrow, but it suggests a model that provides a realistic and viable alternative to the current construct of instructional leadership that is focused solely on the classroom and curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, Horng and Loeb provided credible empirical data and research to support their claim, which again, shows the strength and validity of their conceptualization.

In another study, Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2009) examined the activities that principals did and where they spent most of their time. This study was done as a longitudinal study to determine how principal's actions in the school affected student achievement. In doing so, they found that most principals who spent the majority of their time doing tasks that were centred around organizational behaviour showed better achievement results within the school than those who focused on the narrow conception of principal as instructional leader (Horng et al. 2009). They directly observed where the principals spent their time, based on six broad areas: administrative duties, organization management, day-to-day instruction, instructional program, internal relations, and external relations. Horng et al.'s research showed that most of the principals' time was used to deal with student discipline issues, managing budgets, and overseeing student services. As for the six broad areas, most time was attributed to administrative duties (30%), organization management (20%), and day-to-day instruction and instructional program (10% combined) (Horng et al., 2009). This is crucial because with the focus on the role of principal as instructional leader, less than 10% of their days were devoted to that role. However, time is not the only correlate of significance.

Horng et al. (2009) concluded that principals who spent more time on organization management have higher student achievement outcomes over a three year period were more likely to have parental support, and staff who felt that the climate was improving. Conversely, principals who focused more on day-to-day instruction with activities such as teacher and classroom observations were less likely to be perceived by staff and parents as improving the learning environment (Horng et al., 2009). Their point was not that instructional leadership decreases student achievement; rather when it becomes the sole or dominant goal and action of a principal, it can be at the detriment of the larger organizational management duties that need to happen within a school, such as staffing, which is indirectly related to the instruction occurring within a school.

Horng et al.'s (2009) research was based on various sources of data, collected from principals using both ethnographic and self-report research methods in over 65 schools. Their research was a significant contribution to the literature as it created new research based on a broad sample, with regard to the daily activities of principals. However, it was only a snapshot from one particular week in the school year, in one district, in Miami, Florida. It also lacked the context behind the principals' actions, which may have provided insight as to why only 10% of time was dedicated to instructional practices.

Supportive Critique for Instructional Leadership

Hallinger and Heck (1998) authored one of the foremost papers on the principal and school effectiveness during the infancy of instructional leadership. In their comprehensive study, they examined the relationship between principals and student outcomes and the ability of researchers to study it. They maintained that from the period of 1980-1995 there had been a great deal of progress in the develop-

ment of the model of instructional leadership. However there were several limitations because of their inability to implement the model and effectively research it using both methodological and conceptual approaches. Hallinger and Heck (1998) believed that the most important research was yet to come.

Hallinger and Heck's (1998) research was not action based, but rather a collection of the research up until that point in time. They consulted all of the major works from 1980-1995 in the field, essentially from its infancy till where it was at that point in time. Their main contribution to the literature was that it provided an effective summary of what had been learned up until then while also providing some key insights as to where the research and literature needed to go.

Fullan (2000) examined the actions of principals in relation to change. He claimed that there had been limited investigation into what principals did in order to support instructional leadership and that most of the research to that point had been focused on the principal as being central in improving schools without examining what they did. Similar to Duke and Stiggins (2008), and Fink and Resnick (2001), Fullan also found that principal's responsibilities had expanded in recent years, particularly with increased accountability for improvement on standardized assessments. Fullan suggested that there is a need for strong collegial relationships and professional learning communities in order to effectively support improvement. He also posited that there needed to be a greater emphasis placed on training, recruitment, development and support of school principals, in order to have effective principals in schools. In Fullan's view, instructional leadership was part of what effective principals did, but it was not the only thing. They also focused on inclusiveness, efficient management, and providing support. Fullan's work laid the foundation for school effectiveness literature with his strong belief that in order to have effective schools, effective principals are required. His work moved beyond the discussion of whether or not the principal ought to be involved with instructional leadership to the characteristics that effective principals employ (Fullan, 2002).

Fullan (2000) conducted research on the body of literature that was available on the role of the principal in school reform up until that time. His use of qualitative research was refereed and research based, which validated the findings in his study. The fact that his research was quite comprehensive and inclusive of a substantial amount of literature further validated his findings. Once again as with other authors in the field, his findings suggested that the role of principal as instructional leader is too narrow a confine for the reality of the principal's work, albeit it is an important element.

Elmore (2000) offered support for instructional leadership as a means for supporting increased student achievement. He also pointed out its challenges and limitations. Elmore discussed the role of the principal within the literature and its alignment with instructional leadership. He examined the existing literature and analyzed it in order to come up with his own perspective. According to Elmore, it was not instructional leadership in itself that was the challenge; rather it was the difficulty in ensuring consistent implementation across the board. He suggested that many principals see the instructional leadership role as something that does not apply to them or something that is only for those who are interested in it. In any case, it is not viewed as essential for all principals and as part of their responsibility (Elmore, 2000).

This finding is similar to Fink and Resnick (2001), in that they too proposed the idea that principals deviate from the role of instructional leadership. They suggested it was due to a disconnection from teaching and learning because of the principals' primary role of running the school and meeting administrative demands. Despite the fact that Elmore (2000) found instructional leadership as having had limited effect due to inconsistent implementation, he still maintained that it ought to be implemented as the cornerstone of instructional improvement and that all other leadership should branch out from there.

Beyond Instructional Leadership

Hallinger's (2011) article on principals and their role in instructional leadership, was an attempt to better understand the ways in which school leadership, particularly principals, affect learning and how our understanding of that has developed over time. By examining evidence from several contemporary empirical studies, Hallinger drew strong inferences about how leadership affects learning. The only drawback in his study was the fact that it is difficult to understand the contexts in which different types

of leadership may exist. Nonetheless, in this research review, Hallinger suggested that there have been substantial improvements in the role of principals and their impact on learning. Rather than taking the conventional approach of just choosing one lens to determine which leadership theory has the most effective impact on student learning (such as adopting solely instructional leadership or transformational leadership, shared leadership, or distributed leadership), Hallinger instead suggested a simpler yet broader framework to understand the ways in which leadership affects learning. He posed his model of "Leadership for Learning" which is comprised of a number of features from the aforementioned leadership theories, while taking into consideration the valuable features of these theories to create a much more viable and well-rounded model of leadership that is not confined to one theory (Hallinger, 2011). This reveals from yet another perspective, the challenge in solely adopting one perspective in order to encapsulate the responsibilities of a principal as a leader.

In further exploring Hallinger's (2011) concept of leadership for learning as it related to principals, it is evident that it is a combination of three different avenues: vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and people. To focus solely on principal as instructional leader would devalue the importance of their ability to share a vision within the school to the staff, students and community as well as their ability to build capacity in others and provide the support for the growth necessary to positively impact student learning. These diverse areas show the complexity and importance of an inclusive perspective on the principals' role in supporting student achievement.

Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) conducted their research on how school leadership influences student learning, with specific attention to what they called "The Four Paths". Leithwood et al. too, were driven by the lack of coherence in the literature about the relationship between leadership and student learning. The findings from their research were that principals affect students by their behaviour in four paths: rational, emotional, organizational, and family-centred. All of these paths have significant impacts on student learning, and Leithwood et al. argued that this reconceptualization of the way school leadership and student achievement is viewed is key as it challenges current notions of the heavy emphasis on instruction. In fact, they make a case that the rational and emotional paths have just as significant an influence on student achievement in schools, based on the variables of discipline and academics (Leithwood et al., 2010).

This research is significant in terms of its contributions to the literature as it suggests that the trend toward instructional leadership is perhaps too narrow of a conception, or that it should not be the only means by which principals view their role as an agent of increasing student achievement. Their findings pointed out that organization had little impact on achievement. From this perspective, decisions for instructional leadership should not solely be based on student achievement. Instead they believed that other variables should be considered, like collective teacher efficacy, teachers' trust in others, whether or not there is a computer at home, and both the disciplinary and academic climate that exists in the school (Leithwood et al., 2010).

There were, however, limitations in the research, such as the ability to measure leadership practices and the variables they chose to represent the four paths. Apart from that, the research was conducted by the use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies through the use of teacher surveys from 1,445 respondents in 199 schools, census data, and provincial achievement results. There were no influences or biases through funding or external measures.

In an attempt to determine the links between leadership and student achievement, Robinson et al. (2008) set out to determine the impact that different types of leadership had on student achievement, and more specifically which leadership actions had the greatest impact. They emphasized the desire for researchers and policy-makers alike to determine the relationship between leadership and achievement by noting the five research reviews that had been done to date on the topic. They attributed this focus to a few different factors, the first being policy makers' desire to close the gaps between high and low achievers, particularly along ethnic and socio-economic lines. The second factor they proposed in establishing a link between the two was the public confidence in leaders, including at the school level, to help solve educational problems. The previous two factors were substantiated by the third factor of the influence

of principals in improving schools, as evidenced in research regarding school turn-arounds, particularly lower performing schools in low socio-economic settings. The last factor was the desire from public and politicians alike to see value in public education through the achievement of outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Despite the differing reasons for wanting to establish a connection between leadership and student achievement, Robinson et al. claimed that there was a disconnect between the qualitative and quantitative evidence that supports the connection between student achievement and leadership. In their findings Robinson et al. maintained that qualitative research provided more evidence linking the two, whereas the quantitative evidence was weaker and often indirect, such as the creation of the right conditions for teachers and students to achieve positive results. They felt that this contradiction creates a challenge for the educational landscape as there is an increasing demand from policy makers for stronger student achievement results from school leaders, but the research is saying that they have less impact than many would like to believe (Robinson et al., 2008).

Rather than just examining whether or not leadership impacted student achievement, Robinson et al. (2008) decided to look at different types of leadership and how they impacted achievement. Their research, which consisted of reviewing all of the existing studies in the field in the form of a meta-analysis, focused on the two dominant leadership styles in the research: transformational leadership and instructional leadership. Having examined the studies, they generally found instructional leadership to have a larger influence than transformational leadership. However, they attributed this finding partially to the fact that transformational leadership research tended more to focus on social outcomes, whereas instructional leadership research focused more so on academic outcomes, making it difficult to discern the effectiveness of the two (Robinson et al., 2008).

What they did observe was that higher performing schools had leaders who embodied a common set of characteristics. These characteristics were establishing clear goals, promoting and taking part in professional development, planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, strategically using resources, and keeping a positive and productive culture for learning (Robinson et al., 2008). The underlying theme was that the closer that leaders' work aligned with the primary purpose of teaching and learning, the more likely the leaders were to have a positive impact on student achievement. While some elements had higher impacts, they were all necessary and represented different needs within those contexts (Robinson et al., 2008).

Despite the fact that they were limited in their research to only the studies that looked at specific types of leadership, Robinson et al. (2008) managed to identify a common set of leadership practices that surpassed the particular styles by themselves. This process was valuable as it revealed the challenges in unitary constructs of leadership that have dominated much of the research. However, this study revealed that there is more to be done in the area of the effects of leadership on student outcomes, and of identifying the practices that best support students and teachers (Robinson et al., 2008).

Building upon the findings of Robsinon et al.'s (2008) study, Helen Timperley (2011) further examined the five characteristics of instructional leaders in settings where their student achievement progress rates were three times higher than expected in order to better understand the practices of these leaders and what set them apart from other principals. She studied five elementary school principals in her study. Timperley questioned the principals and the staff about their perceptions of the principal as instructional leader and what they did to practice instructional leadership. She then examined the five characteristics of instructional leaders, as described in Robinson et al.'s (2008) study, where she determined that the principals in her study felt the strongest resonance with promoting and participating in teacher professional development. As she further examined this characteristic, she found that not only did they promote and participate in professional development, but also they were the ones who were responsible for it and they played a significant role in leading the growth of teachers. The principals she examined all had a deep level of declarative knowledge in their ability to understand and talk about teaching and pedagogy with teachers as well as procedural knowledge in their ability to help teachers make improvements in their instruction, both of which spoke to a sophisticated understanding of teaching and learning (Timperley, 2011).

Timperley (2011) suggested that the disconnect between literature and practice in the field of instructional leadership, could be attributed to an underestimation of the depth of skills that are necessary to truly be an instructional leader. Through her examination of the five school principals, she felt it was clear that in order to be a strong instructional leader, there must be a combination of both declarative and procedural knowledge. She stated that this was in contrast with the current preparatory model of transformational leadership, which focuses heavily on relationships. This is not to say she did not feel relationships were unimportant, rather that they were a prerequisite skill in employing both types of knowledge. Furthermore, she stressed that learning was at the root of all relationships with staff, and that this dynamic influenced the types of relationships that were formed by principals; all of these learning opportunities were intent on helping teachers grow to help students grow (Timperley, 2011).

While Timperley's (2011) findings are important as they note the disconnect between practice and theory regarding instructional leadership, there are challenges in the study. She noted that there is the potential for her findings to turn the principalship into a heroic position, due to the vast knowledge required to effectively become an instructional leader. However, she stated that having knowledge of teaching shouldn't be equated with heroics, and that if the knowledge base was not present, then it was imperative to distribute leadership to those with the expertise in a given field to ensure that leadership is leading professional growth for teachers or organizations (Timperley, 2011). She identified that the lack of existing research on the types of knowledge required for principals in the model of instructional leadership need to be addressed as well (Timperley, 2011). Finally, she felt that it was important that administrator capacity building programs ought to evolve to include this as well. In addition to these limitations, the other challenge was the selection of five administrators whose schools were selected because progress had been made. It was not a wide enough sample for these claims to be accepted as valid, although it is a start. The fact that only five were involved, does not substantiate her claims to a degree where they can be held as true.

Similar to Timperley (2011), Reitzug, West, and Angel (2008) examined the practices of principals and how they contribute to increased student achievement. Reitzug et al.'s phenomenological study examined twenty principals in order to determine how their daily tasks supported instructional leadership and also what their perceptions were of instructional leadership. These principals were interviewed in depth and then the data were analyzed. In prefacing their study, they summarized the body of literature on instructional leadership as being focused on the following core principles: high expectations for teachers and students, overseeing instruction, progress monitoring through assessment, coordinating curricular expectations, promoting a climate for learning, and creating a supportive work environment, all while promoting and supporting reflection, inquiry and professional growth (Reitzug et al., 2008).

In their study, Reitzug et al. (2008) found four different iterations of instructional leadership: relational, linear, organic and prophetic. They stated that relational instructional leadership is the by-product of relationship building, wherein students feel respected, and have a stronger self-concept and self-efficacy, and relationships create the conditions for instructional leadership to occur on its own. The linear perspective was causal and focused on implementation of structures, interventions, processes, and actions to achieve desired results, such as curricular alignment, scope and sequence, progress monitoring, bench marking, using data to inform instruction and other similar practices. Organic instructional leadership was found to occur when looking at the school as a whole, and by being responsive to issues that arise as teachers and the school learn and grow. This practice is driven by teacher inquiry while valuing teachers' capacity for self-reflection and growth. Organic instructional leadership is seen through activities like peer observation, action research of school issues, grade/issue alike teams, co-planning, and data analysis (Reitzug et al., 2008). The final lens for instructional leadership was what they called prophetic, which is characterized by a higher purpose beyond test scores, but rather focused on the purpose of education, creating vision, moral leadership, instilling values of democracy, and self-actualization where all are challenged to reflect on their actions and beliefs in order to evoke consciousness reflection of those beliefs (Reitzug et al., 2008).

The results from Reitzug et al.'s (2008) study revealed general acceptance of instructional leadership so that it has transcended all areas of the principalship to a point where it is not just about the *what*, but

the *how* of instructional leadership. The study, similar to Timperley's (2011), is limited in its sample size. It does reveal some larger trends regarding thinking about the model. In order to further validate these findings, it would be valuable to do a larger study with an increased number of participants.

Most recently in 2013, Michelle Prytula, Brian Noonan and Laurie Hellsten published research on administration and school effectiveness. Their research examined how principals have perceived the increase and changes with regard to large-scale assessments in Saskatchewan. They conducted their research by using surveys collected from ninety-nine principals, over half of whom had been administrators for under ten years. The data was gathered through open-ended responses to the following three questions: how have large-scale assessment pressures affected the role of the principal?; how have assessments influenced teaching and learning in the school?; and what do principals believe are the best ways to improve student assessment scores? (Prytula, Noonan, & Hellsten, 2013).

Overall, their findings revealed that principals in Saskatchewan responded positively to large-scale assessments, and that assessments were catalysts for improvements of both teaching and learning in the classroom. Principals could use the data in many ways, including (in decreasing levels of popularity) to improve test scores by increasing collaboration amongst teachers and parents, to improve teachers and teaching, to increase parent and student accountability, and to gain increased support from the Ministry of Education (Prytula et al., 2013).

This research is significant as it revealed for the first time the attitudes of principals in Saskatchewan toward large-scale assessment and its implications during a time where the role of principal is ever increasing. It created a new lens through which we can view instructional leadership from a local perspective in Saskatchewan. It was, however, limited in the fact that it only had 90 respondents out of approximately 755 within the province.

Implications and Recommendations

In viewing the wide scope of research in the field of instructional leadership, it is clear that there are differing perspectives. In response to the questions posed for this review there were several trends that emerged. With respect to the first question, which asked what the literature says about the role of the principal as instructional leader, there is little debate that the principal has the ability to influence student learning. The challenge arises when it comes to determining whether the influence is direct or indirect on student learning, and which characteristics have the highest correlation to improved student outcomes. Furthermore, the extent to which principals understand and believe in the model of principal as instructional leader has garnered some attention, as many of the studies focused on principals' perceptions of the role and what they viewed as valuable.

Even though there is inconsistency with regard to what the role of the principal as instructional leader is (as posed in the second research question), there is a significant amount of evidence that supports the principal as the instructional leader. In all of the literature reviewed that examined the principal in that role, the only times where the principal was not assumed to be the best fit occurred in situations where they would be able to assign responsibilities to the person who best fit the position, making their impact more indirect. Given the fact that much of the literature was focused on how the principal affects learning and how it fits within their role and other duties, it was not a matter of whether or not it was their responsibility; this finding lends support to the role of principal as the instructional leader. The biggest drawback for evidence in support of the principal as instructional leader was the position held by Leithwood et al. (2005) that most of the research in the field is largely qualitative and lacks the external validity to make it credible. This limitation outlines the most significant shortfall in the literature, which is both the emphasis and overuse of qualitative data and the lack of quantitative data.

Throughout the review, several researchers pointed out differing models or alternative views of instructional leadership. No matter the model, they all maintained some responsibility for learning within the principal's control. Besides instructional leadership, the other model of leadership that came up the

most frequently was transformational leadership, followed by organizational leadership. It was not that these different models were mutually exclusive, rather that they were different aspects of the role of principal in improving student outcomes, while taking into consideration the scope of the role of principal.

Finally, there was much to be said in the name of characteristics of effective administrators. Many authors had identified their own lists of common traits, frequent practices, and theoretical frameworks to understand and view the role of principal and what made them effective. Robinson et al.'s (2008) list was one of the most influential as it was adopted by others in their work, such as Timperley (2011). Reitzug et al. (2008) conceptualized four different frameworks for instructional leadership that emphasized different views on how to go about improving student achievement, while taking into consideration differences in strengths and leadership tendencies. Elmore (2000) proposed a balance between instructional leadership and distributed leadership in order to de-romanticize the work of principals and make the work more attainable.

As a result of these findings, there needs to be greater emphasis placed on the role of principal and aligning it with the literature and research as there is a disconnect between the literature and practice. In reality, most administrators find their time taken up by the daily demands of administration. The benefits of instructional leadership will not be achieved without the development and growth opportunities provided for principals to actualize their potential in that role, while also being provided with the time, structure and support to allow this to happen in their schools. This requires systemic change but is attainable, and given the qualitative evidence found in the literature, it would be worthwhile to commit to this at both the division and ministerial levels.

Conclusion

The field of instructional leadership has grown tremendously over the past few decades. It has evolved from a theory to a reality for many school principals who have adopted and internalized its beliefs and components into their practice. Although there is still contention about what practices best support instructional leadership, there has been a general consensus in the literature that supports its adoption in terms of the notion that principals and school leaders ought to be focused on the business of teaching and learning. There is still speculation about what those practices are, and how much other factors like relationships, play a part in the promotion of student achievement. Further research is also required to articulate how to best prepare principals for success in their positions, and which characteristics and practices have the strongest ties to improved student achievement when adopted by principals. As the literature evolves, the research will seek answers to these questions as well as create new ones.

These questions ought to be focused on the practices that principals employ that have the strongest correlation to student achievement, while valuing relationships with all stakeholders and ensuring that the people bested suited for leadership positions are given opportunities to lead as well. Just like the numerous renderings of lists, characteristics, frameworks, and theoretical perspectives, leadership in education is complex and it will require ever-changing, critical and research-based perspectives that are rooted in practice to continue to be relevant in a field as complex as education.

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