Instructional Leadership

Understanding Instructional Leadership

1.1. Definitions
1.2. Characteristics of effective instructional leadership
1.3. Knowledge and skills of instructional leaders
1.4. Barriers to becoming an effective instructional leader & strategies

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Discussion Questions

1. Define 'instructional leadership' in your own words.
2. Distinguish among education, instruction and learning.
3. Who is an instructional leader?
4. How would you evaluate the practice of instructional leadership in your school?
5. What specific leadership characteristics of school leaders could be considered as 'instructional'?

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Definitions

- Studies indicate a substantial relationship between leadership & student achievement. Leadership has significant effects on students' learning second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum & teachers' instruction.
- Of all school factors, the effect of leadership on student achievement has been significant.
- However, the question, "What type of leadership is more effective & impactful to students' learning?" has been the concern of educators & researchers.

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- The importance of instructional leadership was recognized in the 1970s, yet it was not well understood due to the term defined differently by different researchers.
- There are two views of scholars on instructional leadership. The "narrow" conception-those actions that are directly related to teaching and learning or observable behaviors such as class room supervision and the "broad" conception which entails all leadership activities that affect student learning.

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- Instructional leadership is a series of behaviors that was designed to affect classroom instruction. It is the main duty of school principals & supervisors.
- Instructional leadership refers to a series of behaviors designed to affect classroom instruction. Such behaviors include principals informing teachers about new educational strategies and tools for effective instruction, and assisting them in critiquing them to determine their applicability in the classroom.

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- The concept 'instructional leader/learning leaders' is a relatively new concept that emerged in the early 1980's that called for a shift of emphasis from principals being managers/administrators to instructional or academic.
- Effective school leadership today need to combine the traditional school leadership duties such as teacher evaluation; budgeting; scheduling; & facility maintenance with a deep involvement with specific aspects of teaching & learning.

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- Studies showed that effective schools usually had principals who stressed the importance of instruction, who exercised instructional leadership.
- Hence, instructional leadership is a critical aspect of school leadership. Thus, the work of instructional leaders is to ensure that every student receives the highest quality instruction each day.
- Instructional leadership (IL) is aimed at improvement of the quality of teaching & for the improvement of students' learning.

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- IL encompasses those action that a principal takes or delegates to others to promote growth in student learning. It comprises:

  -defining the purpose of schooling

  -setting school goals

  -providing resources needed for learning to occur

  -supervising & evaluating teachers

  -coordinating staff development programs, &

  -creating collegial relationships with & among teachers

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- Hallinger & Murphy (1985) described instructional leadership in a model that consists of many specific functions within three broad categories (unlike other definitions the model expanded the concept out of the classroom):

  -defining the school mission;

  -managing the institutional program, &

  -promoting school climate

- Some writers also described IL through its focus on a culture of high expectations for all students in which instruction comes first.

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- Some other writers (e.g., Jenkins, 2009) talk about learning communities in association to instructional leadership in which school leaders lead learning communities, e.g. meet on a regular basis; collaborate to solve problems & takes responsibility for what students learn.
- In sum, instructional leadership facilitates direction and support for a school's instructional program.
- IL is practiced by a school head who makes sure that common goals are understood & that every one feels accountable for one's own performance.

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- Instructional leadership could also be exercised by school teachers. Carl (1991) stated that the principal of a successful school is not the instructional leader but the coordinator of teachers as instructional leaders.
- Hence, instructional leadership involves actions that school principals take or delegates to others to promote growth in students' learning.

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Characteristics of effective instructional leadership

- Instructional leadership requires the possession of several characteristics & skills that help improve the over all performance of a school in terms of delivering quality education.
- The following are widely cited as effective instructional leadership characteristics:

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- Principals' walking around
- Periodic instructional program implementation & monitoring
- Conduct regular meetings with staff
- Plan for supervision is prepared cooperatively by the staff & monitored by principal
- Openness to new ideas
- Active documentation of instructional practice & materials to make informed decision

On top of the above listed characteristics there are indicators of active instructional leadership.

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Question:

Do our school leaders exhibit these characteristics?

1.3. Knowledge & skill of Instructional Leaders

- Despite the fact that the concept of instructional leader is well known, currently there is scarcity of literature depicting particular behaviors an instructional leaders need to exhibit and set of skills they need to possess.

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- Whitaker (1997) identified four skills essential for effective instructional leaders: resource provision skill; instructional resource supplying skill; communication skill; & creating a visible presence (e.g. modeling behavior of learning and designing programs)
- The instructional leader also needs to have up-to-date knowledge on three areas of education: curriculum, instruction, & assessment.

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- Lashway(2002) recommends the following skills for instructional leaders to master:

  -Interpersonal skills

  -Planning skill (e.g. clear identification of goals & vision)

  -Instructional observation skills (e.g. feedback provision)

  -Research and evaluation skills (e.g. action research)

  - Analytical skills

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- Moreover, the following are behavior patterns of instructional leaders:

  -They provide a sense of vision to their school

  - They engage in participatory management

  -They provide support for instruction

  -They monitor instruction, &

  -They are resourceful

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1.4. Barriers to becoming an effective instructional leader & strategies to overcome them

- Lack of skill & training
- Lack of teacher cooperation (may emanate from distrust of the ability of a school head-leader/follower relationship
- Lack of time
- Lack of support, & commitment
- Lack of vision, will, or courage (e.g. willing to take risks, accept constructive feedback, & willing to change

….cont'd Instructional Leadership functions

- Communicating school vision & mission
- Managing curriculum & instruction
- Shaping & maintaining a conducive school culture
- Allocating adequate resources
- Parental involvement in students' learning
- Quality monitoring
- Supervision of instruction