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Perception vs. Reality: Principal Actions and Teacher Views on Instructional Leadership

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Introduction

If instructional leadership can be summarily viewed as the actions of a leader which have a direct link to instruction, then a more complete definition would also include who is taking the actions and likely directly link the leader's actions to what is instructionally happening with students. Given that the leaders as "actors" can be principals, teachers, and district office administrators, the task to unpack the concept of instructional leadership becomes both multi-faceted and complex. In this paper, we will be examining the perceptions of teachers and the actions of principals around instructional improvement to better understand their interface.

The theory of action shaping this investigation is based on the belief that high quality instructional leadership and high quality classroom instruction are linked, and together they impact students' learning. Thus, when either high quality instructional leadership or high quality instruction does not occur, student achievement outcomes can be variable as a result.

Quality teaching does make a difference in student achievement (Taylor et al., 2005; Pressley et al., 2001; D'Agostino, 2000; Guthrie, Wigfield & VonSecker, 2000). Ultimately, most of what we do in education, including our efforts to improve administrative structures and

the quality of the teaching and learning environment, can be viewed in terms of their implications for enhancing student learning:

The effect of poor teaching on student outcomes is debilitating and cumulative...The effect of quality teaching on educational outcomes are greater than those that rise from students' backgrounds...A reliance on curriculum standards and statewide assessment strategies without paying much attention to teacher quality appears to be insufficient to gain the improvements in student outcomes sought...The quality of teacher education and teaching appear to be more strongly related to student achievement than class size, overall spending levels or teacher salaries (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 3).

Although some students will score high on achievement measures, regardless of the quality of the instruction, the outcome of high quality instruction is high achievement for all learners. Furthermore, some teachers who are naturally gifted instructors or otherwise well-trained are able to provide high quality instruction without high quality instructional leadership. However, knowing that not all teachers possess those kinds of skills makes the need for high quality instructional leadership all the more critical. Instructional leadership is, therefore, the key to student learning, with the teacher's performance functioning as the intervening variable. Ultimately, high quality instructional leadership is imperative to maximize both teacher and student learning outcomes.

The Changing Role of the Principal: From Manager to Leader

Historically, principals have always been responsible for managing a well-run school. Actions such as managing staff, developing rules and procedures, and attending to the general

needs of operating a building have always been a part of the job. However, the concept of schools being more than just a location where learning takes place began to shift in the late 1970s. School effectiveness studies (e.g., Brookover et al., 1978) asserted that “effective” schools are characterized by an ethos or culture which is oriented towards learning, as expressed in high achievement standards and expectations of students, an emphasis on basic skills, a high level of involvement in decision making and professionalism among teachers, cohesiveness, clear policies on matters such as homework and student behaviors, and so on (see Wenglinsky, 2000).

A further shift in the principal’s role, beginning in the mid-1990s, also began to include the expectation that they will also provide instructional leadership for teachers. Many theorists (e.g., Sergiovanni, 2005; Goddard, 2002; Joyce, Calhoun, & Hopkins, 2002) describe the principal’s role in a school as having changed from that of a manager to that of a leader of teaching and learning. If leading teaching and learning is the same as instructional leadership, there is still a need to bring greater clarity to what that is and how it is experienced. Studies of how teachers use their time during instruction (Newmann et al., 2001; Hargreaves, 1992; Smith, 1998) have not focused on the actions of the principal in monitoring or setting expectations for the delivery of high quality instruction. The search for an operationalized understanding of instructional leadership is what leads us to the investigation presented here.

Much has been written in the literature about the importance of the principal serving as an instructional leader (e.g., Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Creemers & Reezigt, 1996). However, the literature on instructional leadership is often otherwise theoretical in nature and does not reflect the messiness of what principals do on a day-to-day basis. Research into leaders’ behaviors which relate to instruction has primarily had a focus on

either distributed leadership (Spillane, 2004) or on the leader's content knowledge (Stein & Nelson, 2003).

The “how” and “when” of the principal engaging with the teacher to specifically address competencies known to be used by effective teachers has been relatively under-researched in most classroom-centered research. A recent, good example, however, of research into the link between the principal and teacher professional development is the study of implementation of IFL in three urban school districts (MDRC, 2007). That study found teachers reported differing amounts of instructional support being provided by their principals. Principals whose teachers rated them higher on the instructional leadership scale had received more professional development to be instructional leaders than did the lower-rated principals. However, self-report for teachers' instructional behaviors and the related instructional leadership actions by principals were not consistent with what was otherwise observed by the researchers.

Research Questions

Despite the existing and emerging evidence for educational effectiveness being linked to instructional leadership and its impact on teaching and learning, there continues to be a lack of clarity for what defines and constitutes instructional leadership. It has been said that a lack of definition is a main impediment to progress in the field (Gronn, 2003). Our research seeks to further unpack the concept of instructional leadership by addressing the following questions:

1. What does instructional leadership look like?
2. Are teachers' reports of instructional leadership similar to what principals have to say about it?

3. Does instructional leadership look different at the elementary and secondary levels?

In our study, thousands of teachers' and hundreds of principals' and district leaders' perceptions and experiences were captured on surveys and in individual interviews. Taken together, they provide us with an enhanced look into the concept of instructional leadership.

Methods and Analysis

A 131-item teacher survey (including eight demographic questions) was developed for data collection in a stratified random sample of K-12 schools across the United States. The survey was mailed to 172 schools in 43 districts with a total teacher population of 7075. There were 3,983 surveys returned from 127 schools for a response rate of 74% for schools and a 56% response rate for teachers. The teachers completed the surveys anonymously, with each survey being placed by each respondent into an envelope that could be sealed before returning it for analysis. The surveys were collected and returned by the school.

A subset of 18 districts was randomly selected from the larger pool of 43 districts to become participants in site visits by a four-member data collection team. During the site visit, individual interviews of district leaders, school principals and classroom teachers took place using role-specific interview protocols. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In order to address the research questions posed for this study, 17 items from the teacher survey were identified as principal leadership behaviors that have been noted in the literature as likely having an impact on teachers' instructional behavior. (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of the items.) Ten of the items, as measured on a six-point scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, ask about teachers' perceptions, and include, for example,

- When teachers are struggling, our principal provides support for them.
- My school administrator clearly defines standards for instructional practices.
- My school administrator ensures wide participation in decisions about school improvement.

The other seven items, as measured on a five-point scale (Never, 1-2 times, 3-5 times, 6-9 times, 10 or more times) ask about frequency-specific actions. Examples include:

- How often in this school year has your school administrator discussed instructional issues with you?
- How often in this school year has your school administrator observed your classroom instruction?
- How often in this school year has your school administrator given you specific ideas to improve your instruction?

The 17 items were factor-analyzed, and they clearly separated into two distinct components. All 17 questions related statistically to either Factor 1 or Factor 2, and no question loaded on both factors. Ten survey items which asked about perceptions, loaded unambiguously on the first factor, with weights ranging from .707 to .867. The other seven items loaded unambiguously on the second factor, with weights ranging from .640 to .771.

The survey questions which comprise Factor 1 relate to a principal's actions to create a culture or ethos of continuous growth by emphasizing the importance of having a mission for school improvement and a vision of teaching to high standards. Factor 1 is about setting a tone of

continuous professional growth in the school, where the work culture embraces inclusive decision-making and the belief that we can always do better. We call this the “Instructional Ethos” factor.

The survey items which comprise Factor 2 relate to specific actions that a principal may have taken with individual teachers with a direct focus on instructional improvement. These questions measure the frequency with which the principal and the teacher are having regular, on-going dialogue about best practices. They ask about the principal being in the classroom, observing instruction and providing specific feedback to the teacher. Factor 2 is about operationalizing Factor 1, and we call this the “Instructional Actions” factor.

Using the two factors, we created a ranking of principals, as perceived by their teachers. The principals whose teachers rated them high on either or both of the two factors are called “high scoring principals” and the principals whose teachers rated them low on either or both of the factors are called “low scoring principals.”

Next, we used the student achievement data (math proficiency in 2005-06 on state tests) as an independent variable to stratify the population of principals to see whether or not high versus low scoring principals’ schools may cluster differently based on their students’ math proficiency scores. Finally, we stratified the data further by using level, elementary versus secondary, as the last independent variable.

This sorting process enabled us to identify the schools where we needed to begin for an exploratory analysis of the interview data. We wanted to better understand what might be happening at the schools whose principals were rated at the extremes of either high scoring or low scoring, with the interviews potentially providing us with that insight. Because instructional

ethos and instructional actions emerged as distinctly different concepts of instructional leadership from our factor analysis, we were curious to know more about what teachers and principals were saying about a culture of improvement versus the actions that were being taken to realize that vision.

From the interview protocol for the teachers, the three relevant questions and answers that we examined in our qualitative data were, “What role does your principal play in guiding and supporting your work in the classroom?”; “How often does the principal observe or visit in your classroom?” and “What kinds of feedback or suggestions does the principal give to help you improve your instruction?” From the interview protocol for the principals, the answers to the questions that we examined in our qualitative data were, “Tell me about the last time you visited a classroom. What was the purpose of the visit? Describe what you were looking for. What communication did you have with the teacher before, during, and after the visit? How do you know that changes are being made in instruction ? How often do you visit classroom?”

For purposes of our analyses, elementary schools are grades K-6, and secondary schools are grades 7-12. Middle schools with grades 6-8 are included in the group of secondary schools.

The schools which rated highest and lowest on Factors 1 and 2 were the ones where we analyzed the interview data. We did not know if there would be differences from what the teachers and principals had to say between the high and low scoring schools. Because our site visit schools where we conducted interviews were randomly distributed across all 127 schools, we ultimately had qualitative data from 57 teacher interviews from the high and low scoring schools and interview data from 14 principals.

Findings

Questions 1 and 2

The first research question being investigated is: “What does instructional leadership look like?” From our initial analysis of the teacher survey data, we found a clear distinction between a principal’s efforts to create a vision for learning and what he or she would do in order to enact that vision. Setting a tone or culture of high standards for quality instruction appears to be different from what the principal does in order to be certain that high quality instruction is actually happening. Given that these two characteristics of instructional leadership emerged as unrelated factors, we examined them separately in order to better understand possible reasons for why they were revealed as being different from one another. The second research question, “Are teachers’ reports of instructional leadership similar to what principals have to say about it?” is answered as the analysis of the teachers’ and principals’ interviews unfolds. The voices of the teachers will be telling a somewhat different story than what the principals are saying.

Discussion of Instructional Ethos –Factor 1. Instructional Ethos is about influencing the context in which instruction takes place. Clearly, what gets these principals out of bed each morning is what keeps them awake at night: they have a vision and believe all students can achieve at high levels. They are focused on providing quality programs. One characteristic that clearly differentiates high scoring principals from low scoring principals is that high scoring principals express the desire and the need to stay in their current school until the “mission is accomplished,” as one principal said.

How do high scoring principals establish a vision for the school that is centered on high student achievement? For one thing, they emphasize the value of research-based strategies. They speak about the amount of time that is invested into developing the school’s vision,

gathering research information and then applying it to their local setting. An elementary principal passionately stated, “I’ve researched and researched and done all I can to meet the needs [of my teachers] because they are very bright.” Analysis of the teacher interviews in that school reveals the research-based approach as being real and respected by the teaching staff. A teacher said of her high scoring principal, “My principal is very firm in what she believes.” In a separate interview, her principal expressed the vision as being non-negotiable: “My expectations are high and they know that.” The principal went on to emphasize the importance of having an open dialogue about the vision for the school. “I simply put it out there; we’ve got to kick it up a notch.”

The vision for high academic achievement for students among the principals who score high on Factor 1 is also about having a personal vision. As a principal states, “Our ultimate goal is that our economically disadvantaged children will break the cycle of generational poverty. [We seek] to challenge the status quo and create conditions in which our children have the opportunity to be more academically successful.” His focus is in contrast to a low scoring principal from a different school that focuses solely on “the standards,” without any effort to connect the standards to a school-level vision for his students. The emerging sense from the analysis of the principal interviews is that low scoring principals seem to care more about doing their job than impacting lives.

Discussion of Instructional Actions—Factor 2. In order to turn their visions of high student achievement into a measurable reality, high scoring principals are actively engaged in providing direct instructional support to teachers. Instructional Actions in Factor 2 is about how the principal engages in a ‘hands-on’ or formative approach to the task. The actions guide and

support the day-to-day intersection of teaching and learning with the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of every teacher's classroom practices. Responses from the Teacher Survey indicated that, in particular schools, the teachers saw the principal as frequently providing direct instructional support.

Table 1 below provides a list of the actions in Factor 2, with the corresponding means and statistics. As we would expect when comparing the top 20% with the bottom 20%, there is a statistically significant difference overall and on each of the survey items that were collapsed to make the Instructional Actions Factor 2. In every case the difference between top versus bottom 20% mean teacher ratings is the difference of at least one scale step.

Table 1. Top vs. Bottom 20% Mean Teacher Ratings per Building on Factor 2

	Instructional Actions Factor 2			
	Top 20% N = 29	Bottom 20% N = 30		
	Mean	Mean	t-value	p-value
Overall Mean on Factor 2	3.73	2.46	132.01	<.001
4-13 How often in this school year has your school administrator discussed instructional issues with you?	3.86	2.69	76.4	<.001
4-14 How often in this school year has your school administrator encouraged collaborative work among staff?	4.27	3.12	70.43	<.001
4-15 How often in this school year has your school administrator provided or located resources to help staff improve their teaching?	3.87	2.65	68.82	<.001
4-16 How often in this school year has your school administrator observed your classroom instruction?	3.44	2.27	63.04	<.001
4-17 How often in this school year has your school administrator encouraged data use in planning for individual student needs?	3.97	2.37	119.47	<.001
4-18 How often in this school year has your school administrator attended teacher planning meetings?	4.06	2.31	97.35	<.001
4-21 How often in this school year has your school administrator given you specific ideas for how to improve your instruction?	2.69	1.79	54.71	<.001

Scale: 1 = never; 2 = 1-2 times; 3 = 3-5 times; 4 = 6-9 times; 5 = 10 or more times

The largest difference above is on item 4-18, asking how often the principal attended teacher planning meetings. And the largest mean rating is on item 4-14, asking how often the principal encouraged collaborative work among staff. It is interesting to note that the smallest difference and the lowest rated item is 4-21, which asked how often the principal has given teachers specific ideas for how to improve instruction.

Analysis of principal interviews in the top and bottom 20% of the schools confirms what the teachers are reporting and what we found. As high scoring principals implement their

mission, their actions are very intentional and focused on high student achievement. In order for students to continually learn and grow, the principals spoke of the need of teachers to be learning and growing at the same time. Analysis of the teacher interviews revealed three kinds of on-going activities or behaviors of the principals that are prevalent that clearly distinguish high scoring principals from low scoring principals. Three distinct themes emerge from the interviews which describe the characteristics of high scoring principals:

1. They have an acute awareness of what is currently happening with teaching and learning in his or her school. One means of being aware was found among high scoring principals who collect lesson plans. As one principal noted, “I look at lesson plans and I attend team meetings.” A teacher in that building independently concurred: “She makes sure my lessons are in line with the standard course of study.” Another teacher explained, “If there are any questions on the lesson plans I turn in she asks me, ‘Why are you doing this? Is this relevant to what you are doing to meet this objective?’ ” Low scoring principals described their “hands-off” approach to instructional leadership, with one low scoring principal indicating that she delegates all instructional leadership to an instructional “coach.” However, this coach has no role in teacher evaluation and is discouraged from providing any negative feedback to teachers.
2. They have direct and frequent involvement with teachers, providing them with formative assessment of teaching and learning. Both high scoring principals and low scoring principals express that they frequently visit classrooms and are “very visible.” However differences between the two groups vary sharply as they describe the reasons that they have for making classroom visits. High scoring principals frequently observe classroom

instruction for short periods of time, making 20-60 observations a week, with most of the observations being spontaneous. Their visits become formative observations that are clearly about learning and growing as a professional, coupled with providing direct and immediate feedback. High scoring principals believe that every teacher—whether a first year teacher or veteran teacher—can learn and grow. High scoring principals described in their interviews how they “meet each teacher where they are at, by finding something good in what they are doing, and then providing feedback in an area that needs growth.”

In contrast, low scoring principals described a very different approach to observations of teaching. Their informal visits or observation in classrooms are usually not for instructional purposes. Even informal observations are often planned in advance so that teachers know when the principal will be stopping by. The most damaging finding was the collective voice of teachers in buildings with low scoring principals who described receiving little or no feedback from the principal after informal observations. One of these teachers stated, “I haven’t had any feedback or suggestions to date.” Another teacher considered the lack of feedback as a signal that “my principal has been in [my room] enough to know I am on top of things.” Often, the frequency of informal classroom observations by low scoring principals becomes much less as the year progresses. Low scoring principals focus more on formal, summative observations, providing limited, non threatening feedback, primarily to non-tenured teachers. Comments by teachers such as, “He is supportive of my teaching philosophy,” were the perceived reason why the principal did not engage with the teacher in any discussion around his or her instructional behavior or attempt any broader efforts to unite teachers around a clearly defined vision for the school. As low scoring principals do not seem to

regard the improvement of teaching and learning as an ongoing, life-long process, a culture for continuous learning is compromised.

3. High scoring principals have the ability and interpersonal skills to empower teachers to learn and grow into the vision set forth for the school. These principals seek out and provide differentiated opportunities for their teaching staff to learn and grow in their ability to accomplish high academic achievement for their students. For example, one high scoring principal led Saturday workshops for new teachers in order to catch them up to the rest of the staff. Another high scoring principal involved teaching assistants in a specific workshop designed to implement a new reading strategy. In contrast, in the interviews of teachers from schools with low scoring principals, the role of the principal in suggesting or supporting professional growth opportunities was seldom noted.

Findings – Question #3

The investigation into the third research question seeks to know if there are about any apparent differences between the elementary and secondary levels and the provision of instructional leadership actions on the part of the principal. What we found was a clear difference regarding the actions of the principal, based on the level of the school. Instructional leadership in the form of action that the principal takes with individual classroom teachers is not being implemented in the same way at the elementary and secondary levels.

Analysis of the quantitative data reveals that teacher perceptions of instructional leaders on the Instructional Ethos Factor 1 are somewhat similar between elementary and secondary teachers. All grade levels of teachers indicated a perceived either a high or low degree to which their principal was able to create a culture of professional growth and an emphasis on high

student and teacher performance. However, the teacher survey data reveals a markedly divergent report of the actions that elementary versus secondary principals took to support instruction. The Instructional Actions Factor 2 was very different at elementary and secondary levels as seen in the table below.

Table 2. Principals in the Top 20% vs. the Bottom 20% by Building Level

	<u>Elementary principals</u>	<u>Secondary Principals</u>
Factor 1		
Instructional Ethos	High scoring = 16 Low scoring = 7	High scoring = 9 Low scoring = 18
Factor 2		
Instructional Actions	High scoring = 19 Low scoring = 11	High scoring = 10 Low scoring = 19

Instructional Leadership Differs by School Level. The qualitative data from both teacher and principal interviews confirms what the quantitative data says. Based on interview data, elementary teachers and principals characterize high scoring principals that are effective instructional leaders as having a hands-on, direct role in instructional operations. They confirm

that Instructional Ethos Factor 1 is reinforced daily or continuously. Teachers in elementary schools whose principals score in the top 20% on Factor 1 say that “things [new initiatives] will be supported because they are related to a greater vision.” This is consistent with findings from many studies of leadership which have focused on the importance of setting a vision.

Elementary principals that scored high in both Instructional Ethos and Actions, the two related constructs within the concept of instructional leadership, also sorted with high student achievement. An elementary teacher vividly describes the way in which Factor 1 and Factor 2 interact:

“His [the principal’s] role and the benefit that I see for me is really two-fold. One is that he is a strong instructional leader. He knows his stuff. It would not surprise me if he were walking in one day and could take over my classroom without skipping a beat. I think that he knows what he’s talking about...when I sit down and talk with him about an observation that he has made, the questions that he asks, the suggestions that he gives, I know are from experience and I can trust them. They are the ones that are going to help move me along the path of instructional excellence. So he is not just a principal in name, but he knows what he is talking about. But then on the flip side, he also allows me to be the professional that I have been trained to be. He is not going to mandate that I teach a particular way. He is not going to tell me I have to be on this page on this particular day doing this particular grade level expectation or this has got to be my learning target. I don’t have to be in lock step. When you are as old as I am, you’ve been around a lot of different people and many times that is the expectation. That is one of the neat things I like about working at this school. [He gives the message that,] ‘I’m going to force you in a positive way to become better, but I’m going to allow you to bring your own personality into the classroom and make that happen.’ So he is two-pronged on that way [that we are supported].

The blend of instructional ethos and action is achieved through having a definition of instructional leadership that has both a vision of on-going professional learning and a hands-on, direct role in instructional operations. High scoring elementary principals do both effectively.

A different story emerges from the survey and interview data for secondary schools. In the interview data with secondary principals, they repeatedly express that there is not enough time in the day to complete all their responsibilities, and directly told us that instructional leadership “gets placed on the back burner.” Instructional leadership, or planning for it, takes place, instead, outside of the school day. Secondary principals assert that they provide instructional leadership through a structural framework of teacher leaders. By delegating to department heads, many secondary principals in our study think of themselves as the instructional leader because they are providing the structure, even though they are one step removed from the process.

Data from the teacher interviews reveals, however, that at the secondary level instructional leadership actions are generally not happening. “Administrators in general observe my classroom 1-2 times per year.” Another teacher stated, “I’ve never gotten any feedback that has affected my teaching or that has changed the way I teach besides broad initiatives that the school wants you to do, that everyone wants to see happen.” From the analysis of the teacher survey, we found that Factor 2, Instructional Actions, require a direct role in instructional operations. As one teacher noted, “The only time that I was observed was by an assistant principal. It was the second year I taught. She was here five minutes...five minutes! And one of the things that she observed about me was that I start on the left hand side of the room. Do you call that feedback?”

Principals pointed out in their interviews that they frequently delegated or distributed the instructional actions of instructional leadership to department chairs. Yet, the fact that content area department chairs in secondary schools exist is not viewed by teachers as a way that

instructional leadership is being provided. Most teachers describe their department chairs as being in charge of the departmental budget, and that the teacher leaders have responsibility to attend team leadership meetings called by the principal. We did not find any evidence in our interviews with secondary teachers that their department chair or content area colleagues are providing instructional leadership in the form of on-going classroom visits and dialogues about best instructional practices. This was true whether the principal scored either high or low on Instructional Ethos Factor 1. Even more surprising is the fact that secondary schools dominate the lowest achievement cell in our matrix of high and low scoring principals. Of the 31 schools in the bottom 20% in the ranking for all principals on Instructional Actions Factor 2, twenty of those schools were middle schools and high schools Said another way, out of a total of 127 schools who returned surveys, with 67 of those being secondary and 60 elementary, nearly 66% of all schools with principals scoring in the lowest 20% for taking direct action to support teachers' instructional practices are middle schools and high schools.

The link to student achievement is still a question needing further investigation. From the initial sorting of all principals whose teachers rated them as either high or low scoring, there were 5 elementary schools and 5 secondary schools in the top 20% of all schools whose principals were rated high on Factor 1 and who also had high math achievement. Low-rated principals on Factor 1 whose schools also had low math achievement numbered 3 at the elementary level and 8 at the secondary level.

For Factor 2, there were 4 elementary schools and zero secondary schools whose principals were rated high (i.e., in the top 20% of all schools) and who also had high math

achievement. Principals who rated low on Factor 2 and whose schools were lowest in math achievement numbered 2 at the elementary level and 7 at the secondary level. See Table 3 below.

Table 3. High vs. Low Scoring Principals by Building Level by Math Achievement

	<u>Elementary principals</u>	<u>Secondary Principals</u>
Factor 1		
Instructional Ethos	High scoring + high math achieve = 5 Low scoring + low math achieve = 3	High scoring + high math achieve = 5 Low scoring + low math achieve = 8
Factor 2	High scoring + high math achieve = 4 Low scoring + low math achieve = 2	High scoring + high math achieve = 0 Low scoring + low math achieve = 7
Instructional Actions		

As noted above, in our initial analysis, when math proficiency for school year 2005-06 is used as a final sorting mechanism for the high vs. low scoring principals, we see the greatest difference once again at the secondary level. Factor 1 emerges as a significant positive feature of

high performing secondary schools, and the absence of Factor 1, or Instructional Ethos, is significantly missing in secondary schools with low math performance.

The findings for Factor 2 which is the measure of Instructional Actions being taken by the principal are equally remarkable. There were no secondary principals who scored high on Factor 2 and whose schools also had high math achievement. At the other end of the ranking of principals, we found 7 secondary schools whose principals ranked the lowest on Instructional Actions and who also had low math achievement.

Discussion

We found a distinct bifurcation in the concept of instructional leadership from our data analysis. The view of instructional leadership as it is now portrayed in the literature may be missing the nuance that we seem to have uncovered. We found a distinction between principals providing support in the form of “popping in” to support the culture where the instructional leader is “visible” versus support in the principal being very intentional about each conversation and classroom visit, with the explicit purpose to engage with the teacher about targeted instructional ideas and issues.

We did find the establishment of a vision as a feature of K-12 schools led by high scoring principals. However, the principal’s engagement with individual teachers to see that the vision is enacted appears to not be occurring in many schools, the majority of which are middle schools and high schools. There are general assumptions that if the vision is instilled for high quality instruction then high quality instruction will, in fact, happen. However, we found that having the vision paired with follow-up supportive actions specific to instruction are often completely missing, and that is, in the majority of cases, at the secondary level.

Implications for District Leadership

If teachers do not look to principals as instructional leaders with regard to the teaching and learning happening in the classroom, where do teachers go to get feedback about their instruction? Our qualitative findings indicate that discussions about teaching and learning happen informally between colleagues and peers, and happen much less as a result of schools having structured team or content-area meetings or formal team leader-follower channels. The infrequency of instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by principals leaves little room for dialogue between the leader and followers about teaching and learning. Consistent with Supovitz's findings, our research indicates that under current secondary structures, authority relationships tend to discourage candor about problems that secondary teachers may be having (Supovitz, 2006). Nevertheless, the research indicates that when the principal effectively serves as an instructional leader, student achievement increases. District leadership must consider limitations of the current demands and the structure of the work of secondary principals which may not allow or support their engaging in instructional leadership actions.

If principals are to effectively serve as instructional leaders, instructional actions must complement the instructional vision. District administrators are normally fully aware of the managerial effectiveness of their principals in addressing the immediate tasks and problems of the school(s). District administrators may also be well aware of principals' efforts to create an instructional vision connected to student achievement. However, our findings point clearly to the lack of action that secondary principals take with regard to frequent and direct interaction with teachers around issues of instructional practices. Finding ways to bolster the skills of both secondary and elementary principals' direct work with teachers, and assisting them to structure

their day in order to find sufficient time to do this, is a task that most district leaders need to take on.

Principals are vital in providing a link between district initiatives and quality classroom instruction that leads to increased student achievement. Instructional visioning provides sense-making of district level/system demands, but it is only instructional leadership behaviors that can truly address aspects of quality instruction that turn the vision into reality and student success.

Appendix 1: Rotated Component Matrix

Survey Item	Component	
	1	2
4-1 My school administrator develops an atmosphere of caring and trust.	.857	.161
4-3 My school administrator creates consensus around purposes of our district mission.	.832	.243
4-6 My school administrator is effective in building community support for the school's improvement efforts.	.841	.224
4-7 My school administrator promotes leadership development among teachers.	.839	.279
4-8 My school administrator models a high level of professional practice.	.869	.213
4-9 My school administrator ensures wide participation in decisions about school improvement.	.818	.251
4-10 My school administrator clearly defines standards for instructional practices.	.768	.351
4-24 When teachers are struggling, our principal provides support for them.	.741	.259
4-25 Our principal ensures that all students get high quality teachers.	.705	.247
4-27 In general, I believe my principal's motives and intentions are good.	.756	.112
4-13 How often in this school year has your school administrator discussed instructional issues with you?	.253	.761
4-14 How often in this school year has your school administrator encouraged collaborative work among staff?	.288	.699
4-15 How often in this school year has your school administrator provided or located resources to help staff improve their teaching?	.352	.717
4-16 How often in this school year has your school administrator observed your classroom instruction?	.103	.671
4-17 How often in this school year has your school administrator encouraged data use in planning for individual student needs?	.155	.772
4-18 How often in this school year has your school administrator attended teacher planning meetings?	.183	.691
4-21 How often in this school year has your school administrator given you specific ideas for how to improve your instruction?	.159	.640

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