

The Cultivation of Instructional Leaders through the Development of the Novice School Administrator's Instructional Toolkit

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Abstract: In considering the role of the school administrator and the varied knowledge and skills needed to fulfill this critical role, what is often agreed upon is the prioritized status of instructional leadership in the overarching effectiveness of the school leader. As Schools of Educational Leadership and School Administration consider the most important experiences and activities needed to best prepare the leaders of tomorrow, this article presents five essential tools critical to the novice administrator's toolkit. This paper provides analysis and application of invaluable feedback, instructional vision, ingrained data analysis, incomparable expectations and instructional confidence and courage as important tools for any new administrator. Based on current research as well as the practitioner's perspective, this examination may add to the continuous review of administrative programs and internship experiences.

Key words: educational, leadership, school, administration, instructional

1. Background

In considering the role of the school administrator and the talents, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to carry out this unique educational responsibility, experts and apprentices alike may be hard-pressed to pinpoint the most important actions or tasks, or the most critical competencies required in order to positively impact students and schools. What is often agreed upon; however, is the critical and prioritized status of instructional leadership in assessing the true effectiveness of the school administrator (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013; Jenkins, 2009; Lochmiller, 2015). This article serves as an examination of the instructional leader — specifically, the most important things that instructional leaders should know how to do — and the impact these “tools” might have on the leader, the teachers and the school. This paper highlights relevant research associated with this examination, but also relies on the practitioner's perspective, formed from years of school administration supervision and mentoring. While no program or experience can canvass the broad spectrum of complexities inherent in instructional leadership at the school level, there are five prioritized areas that may be addressed in building towards the development of strong and confident instructionally-prepared school administrative program graduates.

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2. Blending Theory and Practice: Building the Essential Instructional Toolkit for the Novice School Administrator

While there is much expected of any school administrator, perhaps the most significant expectations are those involving instructional leadership. At its core, the work of the instructional leader is to ensure that each student in the school is receiving the highest quality of instruction, each and every day of the school year (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013; Lochmiller, 2015; University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, 2015). Traditionally, teachers, students, parents, and the school community as a whole expect the principal of the school to be equipped and prepared to act as the leader in all things instructional. This expectation exists not only because of the accountability which rightfully falls upon the shoulders of the school administrator in terms of student achievement and success, but also because of the assumption that school administrators are well-read experts on their discipline. Who else but a school administrator is in the position to appraise the efforts of a student, evaluate the performance of a teacher, and assess the learning climate of the whole school, then engage in adjustment of all three for the betterment of the student, school and community?

Equipping school administrative students and interns with key instructional tools will enable them to establish the right foundation, early on in their administrative careers, for strong instructional leadership of their school and their school community. Determining these prioritized tools is an exercise in contrasts and commonalities. For example, according to Concordia University's *Educational Leadership*, these tools would include communication skills and effective use of resources, visibility, and instructional know-how (2013). Administrator practitioners may also view the most critical tools as those involving knowledge of curriculum, providing of resources, instructional observation skills, and the ability to research (Jenkins, 2009). While this paper will identify five distinct tools that are deemed as essential, Schools of Educational Leadership and School Administration will continue to explore activities and experiences through which to facilitate the acquisition of these and other critical instructional leadership tools in the ongoing development of instructionally-focused school leaders.

2.1 Tool I: Invaluable Feedback

In any given day and in any given instructional situation, the school administrator's most accessible and powerful tool is invaluable feedback (Bekker, 2012; Education First, 2015; Loveless, 2016; Maine Schools for Excellence, 2013; Oliva, Mathers, & Laine, 2009). Invaluable feedback guides practice and understanding, facilitates reflection, and, overall, keeps the faculty and staff moving on a continuous path of growth (Bekker, 2012; Lochmiller, 2015). Note that there exists a significant chasm between "feedback" and "invaluable feedback". Anyone can give feedback, and anyone can give feedback to teachers. Whether or not this feedback makes any difference depends in large part on the source, on the recipient, and on the context within which it is given. Invaluable feedback is something entirely different. First, it is provided and given in the spirit of support and assistance, and its source is one who is in the position to be regarded as an expert in the field (Lochmiller, 2015). While this descriptor can include teacher colleagues or district-level visitors, in most cases the teacher will look to the school administrator for this invaluable feedback (Park, Takahashi & White, 2014; Oliva, Mathers & Laine, 2009). This type of feedback is "invaluable" because it is based upon an in-depth and current knowledge of the classroom, the teacher, the students, the school, and how all those factors interact against the backdrop of best practices, effective pedagogy, and data. This type of feedback is "invaluable" because it is specific, it is targeted, it

is positive, and it provides a clear vision of today’s reality and tomorrow’s possibility, including an implied pledge of administrative support in the teacher’s growth journey (Aguilar, 2013). Just as feedback can positively and significantly impact the rate of learning and growth for students (Hattie, 2012), so may the improvement of teachers be facilitated through feedback. Teacher growth is important — especially for the majority of principals who a) inherit the faculty that await them at the school to which they are assigned, and b) find recruitment of new teachers even more difficult with every passing year. Instructional leadership theories which base the primary role of the instructional leader as that of recruiter and retainer of great teachers (Horng & Loeb, 2010) may be neglecting to recognize that there is often a deep chasm between the faculty a principal inherits and the faculty a principal needs. Due to this reality, as stated in the Maine Department of Education feedback protocol, “effective instructional feedback is a critical practice for principals to master” (2013, p. 1).

2.1.1 Defining Invaluable Feedback

It is important at this juncture to define invaluable feedback — what it is and what it is not. It is disheartening for any teacher to receive a charge from their school administrator to “include more opportunities for students to work together” — while knowing that the leader has no idea how to do exactly that. It is embarrassing for any teacher to have to ask for suggestions regarding their thoughtfully-written lesson plans, only to discover that the school administrator has never read them. School administrators who make it a priority to engage in invaluable feedback throughout the course of their days find that teachers are eager for their visit and conversation and, as a result, instruction is in a constant state of improvement throughout the school (Glickman et al., 2014). Further, these leaders, in turn, provide feedback in a manner that is recognized to be most effective with teachers — feedback that affirms the effective actions already in place and includes suggestions for how the instruction could be even more effective (Tavernetti, 2015). As described by Gaines (2014) and DeWitt (2013), many administrators, and more frequently novice administrators, develop the habit of providing praise and compliments and assuming these are feedback. It has been generally concluded that while platitudes can act effectively as terms of encouragement, they do little in terms of teacher instructional growth (Bekker, 2012; DeWitt, 2014; Gaines, 2014).

2.1.2 The Three Layers of Invaluable Feedback

In adapting to this habit of providing invaluable feedback, the school administrator must capture as many opportunities as possible to engage in instructional conversations. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of what these opportunities can be and is followed by an explanation of the impact of each when utilized.

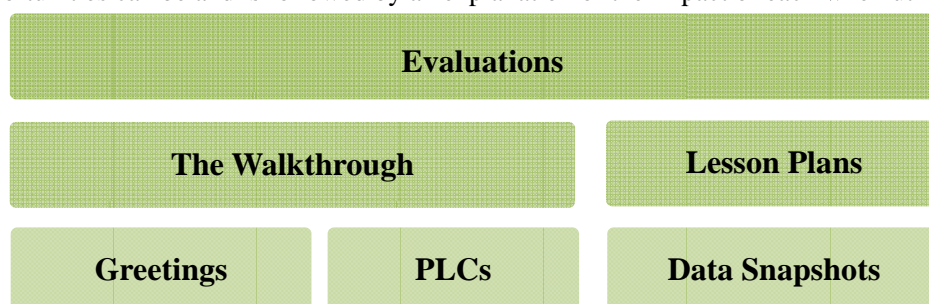


Figure 1 The Three Layers of Invaluable Feedback (Abernathy, 2017)

The three layers of invaluable feedback begin with the most formal at the top and then gradually blend into the more informal at the bottom. The top layer represents a legally required method of feedback, followed by the second layer, which represents the opportunities a school administrator has, every day, to impact the individual

growth of the individual teacher. The third layer includes components designed for visibility, data discussion, and invaluable feedback given as part of a collaborative process of improvement.

2.1.3 Formal Evaluations

The top layer of invaluable feedback represents the most formal of instructional conversations: the principal's formal observations and evaluations of the teacher's teaching, the students' learning and the employee's performance as a whole. This is a required part of any school administrator's role, and therefore, will very rarely go unaddressed (Oliva, Mathers & Laine, 2009). Because they are mandated, teacher evaluations are also often seen as the most important instructional role of the school administrator and, as such, the sole instructional goal of the administrative team. Teacher evaluation is needed, no doubt. It serves as a formal and legal method by which to evaluate the performance of the individual, provide helpful suggestions or affirmation of effectiveness, and secures a formal record of conversations, areas in which to improve, and justification for continued work in the profession. When carried out correctly and with enthusiasm on the part of all participants, formal observations as part of the evaluation process may lead to an improved quality of instruction (Reform Support Network, 2015). The unfortunate reality associated with formal evaluations, however, is that in many cases, the formal observations and the culminating evaluation based on these formal observations is the beginning and the end to the administrator-teacher instructional conversation. As described by Feldman, "for the vast majority of teachers meaningful feedback is limited at best, consisting largely of ritualized annual personnel evaluations that do not reliably lead to improved teaching and learning" (2016, p. 1). In preparing the leaders of tomorrow, it is imperative that we provide a template by which school administrators understand that the formal observation and evaluation process is one piece to the puzzle — and one small tool in a very broad toolkit of instructional administrative practices.

2.1.4 The Walkthrough

The second layer of opportunities for invaluable feedback includes The Walkthrough and the reading and responding to lesson plans. The Walkthrough is capitalized for a reason...this school administrator tool should act as a priority in any instructional arsenal of strategies. Just as any action or behavior is guided through ongoing, informal feedback, so, too, is the craft of teaching (Feldman, 2016). As referenced here, The Walkthrough does not refer to a drop-in visit during which the leader walks around the room, shares a few friendly greetings, then leaves. This Walkthrough consists of a 4–5 minute classroom visit, made for the specific purpose of reflecting upon the teacher's actions, the students' learning, and the classroom climate as a whole — and then reacting to this "real-time" snapshot observation with specific and constructive feedback, which is written in either print or digital form and shared with the teacher, either immediately or within the day (Glickman et al., 2014). The critical element is not the format, but rather the specificity and existence of the feedback. Research has indicated that walkthroughs conducted simply for the task of completion and lacking any specific feedback for teachers are less effective, may have a potentially negative impact on instruction (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013) When utilized frequently and consistently, research suggests that this brief, informal walkthrough can positively impact the instructional classroom culture as well as demonstrate the leader's priority on effective instruction (Glickman et al., 2014; Protheroe, 2009). The Walkthrough should include mechanisms for qualitative as well as quantitative feedback and, above all else, The Walkthrough must include feedback that is so invaluable the teacher will be led to deep contemplation, careful reflection, and highly-motivated reaction and change because of it.

2.1.5 Lesson Plans

Sharing the second layer with The Walkthrough is an equally important part of the school administrator's

skill set — understanding and monitoring lesson plans. While The Walkthrough and even formal observations can provide a platform for powerful and invaluable feedback, realistically speaking, leaders, faculty, students and parents must all accept that administrators are, by nature of their jobs, not able to physically be present in all classrooms for the entirety of the school day. Yet all of these internal and external stakeholders can and should hold the school administrator accountable for the instruction in each classroom 100% of the time. This is the point at which lesson plans become very important for principals as well as teachers. It is imperative that the school administrator possess the instructional knowledge to clearly articulate the research-based expectations for the planning of lessons and to be ready to justify these as needed. While not able to physically monitor every lesson in their building, school administrators are able to monitor instructional activities and decisions that are planned, provide invaluable feedback regarding these plans, and facilitate the ongoing growth of teachers through this monitoring and feedback process. While there have been and will always continue to be plenty of debate regarding the merit or the need for lesson plans, the reality exists that not only do lesson plans provide the best platform by which a teacher might instruct in a highly effective manner for all students, but they also provide a needed opportunity for the school administrator to monitor planned classroom instruction during the many times that visiting the classroom to watch the teacher in action is not a viable option. As the school administrator provides frequent invaluable feedback through both The Walkthrough and in regards to lesson plans, teachers are led to reflect deeply on instructional decisions and, consequently, to grow in their craft (Oliva, Mathers & Laine, 2009).

2.1.6 Greetings

As stated previously, the third layer includes components designed for visibility, data discussion, and invaluable feedback given as part of a collaborative process. School administrators of the past often highlighted their daily visits to classrooms (noted here as “Greetings!” visits) as evidence of instructional monitoring. In reality, the morning drop-by to say “Good Morning” (as well as to see and to be seen) is a minimal management expectation of any leader. The good news for novice school administrators; however, is that it can also serve an instructional purpose as it provides a quick and efficient opportunity to monitor instruction proactively. These visits provide an administrator the ability to give quick invaluable feedback or to make note of specific areas of concern in need of more focused monitoring. In a 2013 study, researchers concluded that the impact of The Walkthrough can actually be enhanced by additional efforts at informal coaching, such as these drop-by visits (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013).

2.1.7 Professional Learning Communities

Also included in the third layer of opportunities for invaluable feedback are the team-centered, research and data-based, teacher-led conversations known as Professional Learning Communities. The Professional Learning Community gathering provides for any school leader a more collaborative opportunity to provide invaluable feedback (Matthews & Crow, 2010). As highlighted through the work of DuFour et al., PLCs provide the collegial setting by which principals may become “eaders of leaders” and by which their feedback may encourage the growth of other instructional leaders within the school environment (2005, p. 23). The ability of the school administrator to engage in a discussion of strategies to address data deficiencies, while sitting with a team of teachers, adds significantly to the discussion and deliberation. In contrast to the first two layers of the feedback model, in this PLC setting the administrative feedback facilitates the growth and learning of the team and may contribute to “building and cultivating the learning capacity of the school” (Matthews & Crow, 2010, p. 81).

2.1.8 Data Snapshots

In addition, the third layer provides for invaluable feedback through a different collaborative approach, one which provides for the “systematic gathering of quantitative or qualitative observation data” from many classrooms in order to “identify schoolwide instructional needs” (Glickman et al., 2014, p. 181). Using this data snapshot approach, the school administrator may visit classrooms, again, for 4–5 minutes, for the sole purpose of gathering data. This data acquisition should be for the purpose of sharing, in an aggregate manner, a realistic representation of the fidelity of instructional practices in the classrooms. For example, perhaps a high school principal is leading the faculty in a re-commitment to Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy and an increased use of higher order thinking and activities in each classroom. After reminding the faculty of this focus, the principal may engage in a month-long series of data snapshot visits, during which time the principal is noting the levels of questions being asked and the level of activities being used in the classroom. As opposed to The Walkthrough, the data snapshot results are not shared with the individual teacher — in fact there are no individual names attached to any particular snapshot record. In contrast, the data gathered is later shared with the grade level or the faculty as a whole in an effort to lend a data element to the discussion regarding the school’s prioritized instructional focus (Glickman et al., 2014). With this tool, the leader’s feedback is invaluable, it is just not individual. Growth and improvement will come from the team’s approach and reaction to the data implications.

2.1.9 Invisible Visibility

Invaluable feedback is an essential instructional tool for the school administrator toolkit, but it is a tool that is only effective to the degree that the leader has the expertise to use it appropriately. Part of this appropriate use is recognizing the need to be present — at all times and in many places — in order to know which feedback is appropriate (Bekker, 2012). Lesson plan monitoring, classroom visits, PLC meetings, data discussions; the strong instructional leader views these as naturally ingrained segments of the day, not as tasks to be checked off the daily “to-do” list. This instructional presence is also dependent on the ability of the school leader to be instructionally stealth. In terms of instruction, the principal should be neither the star attraction nor the flamboyant coach. The principal in this role engages in *invisible visibility*, a knowing and supportive presence that facilitates ongoing instructional growth, reflection, and vitality throughout every facet of the school’s instructional life. In addressing the many opportunities to provide invaluable feedback, it is incumbent upon the school leader to preserve the natural state of affairs to every degree possible. The ability to practice *invisible visibility* means the administrator is seen, but not necessarily formally acknowledged. The administrator’s presence is appreciated, but without any disruption to the teaching, learning, discussions, or analyses taking place.

Invaluable feedback is, quite simply, an invaluable tool for any school administrator and acts, quite frankly, as one of the most effective means by which the leader may impact and positively affect the growth and improvement of teachers and the increased achievement and success of students (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). In recognition of this prioritized status, states such as Louisiana and Ohio are making administrator feedback key components of their teacher evaluation programs (Reform Support Network, 2015). In order to provide this invaluable feedback, one must be an expert in best practices, an expert in lesson planning, an expert in student needs, and an expert in student behavior management. These qualifications are all part of the second critical tool of any instructionally-minded school administrator’s toolkit: ***An Instructional Vision***.

2.2 Tool II: Instructional Vision

If the previous tool represents actions (feedback) which are based on values, beliefs, knowledge and

know-how, this second tool represents the “guide” that provides the very direction to do so. In research produced through the University of Washington, Fink (2012) concluded that in most of the more than 2,000 schools involved in the study, there existed no shared vision and no understanding of what effective instruction was, or should be, or could be. Without a focused instructional vision and deeply-held beliefs and values regarding teaching and learning, effective instructional strategies, classroom climate and teacher-student relationships, to name a few, a school administrator will lack the core by which to ever provide any helpful feedback to any teacher (Reform Support Network, 2015; University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, 2015). As noted in other recent research, teachers thrive professionally and are motivated to improve instructionally when led by an engaged and knowledgeable instructional leader (Louis, 2015). Louis also noted as part of this study that “principals who were regarded by their teachers as effective instructional leaders were able to describe, comprehensively, the instructional issues facing their schools” (2015, p. 10). In a related study, it was concluded “in school after school, that principals were the critical link in stimulating the conversations that led to the classroom practices that are associated with improved student learning” (Louis & Walshtrom, 2011, p. 54).

Before proceeding in the examination of this critical tool, it is appropriate to differentiate between the instructional vision of the school administrator and the overall vision of the school itself. While any effective strategic process will allow for the creation and frequent review of the formal Vision and Mission of the school, the leader's instructional vision is an articulation of how instructional goals may best be accomplished. Often, the leader's instructional vision is a blending of school-adopted strategies, district initiatives, and current research. The most important factor in the acquisition of this instructional tool is not the pathway chosen in its development, but in its clear and concise existence.

In interesting research led by Chad Lochmiller of Indiana University (2015), high school administrators were studied through qualitative analysis to determine effectiveness of feedback to math and science teachers. It was concluded that all administrators involved relied on their own experiences, in other content areas, to provide feedback that focused on basic pedagogical strategies while neglecting any reference to the unique aspects of math and science content — rendering their feedback partially effective at best. As shared in the report of this study: “school administrators who strive to be effective instructional leaders must expand their understanding of various content areas” (Lochmiller, 2015, p. 85). As the instructional leaders of schools, administrators must be prepared, even as early as their exit from their school administration programs, to provide this clear instructional vision for all under their supervision. Without this foundation, no teacher will understand the feedback being given nor consider the feedback to be invaluable. Without this foundation, no teacher will understand the design of The Walkthrough, the comments on the formal evaluation, or the tidbits of praise or affirmation shared during an informal visit filled with greetings. School administrators who bring the expanded content knowledge, the awareness of research, and the understanding of best practices can promptly and with enthusiasm discuss what is being done and what could be done better in any instructional situation.

Sequentially, this tool must be in the toolkit prior to the previous highlighted tool of *Invaluable Feedback*, as the completion of the first tool in meaningful terms can only be executed when grounded upon completion of the second. Both of these tools have the potential to be acquired through school administrator preparation programs, professional experiences at the school and classroom level, and individual research and practice. It must be noted; however, that to rely solely on one's own knowledge, skills, and values in providing feedback and direction as instructional leader would be engaging in this critical role with a limited toolkit. Strong instructional leaders will add an additional element, one that enables them to be aware of the ever-evolving results and impact of

instructional decisions, and the ever-present ability to make instructional adjustments based on quantitative measures. Thus, the instructionally-minded school administrator possesses an *ingrained data analysis* mindset.

2.3 Tool III: Ingrained Data Analysis

The word “data-driven” has become as synonymous with education as “desk” and “pencil”, and with our evolution towards this data-driven model comes a need for school leaders to be data-mindful in their role as instructional leaders. In adding this tool of “data analyzer” to their toolkit, novice school administrators will find the need to be cognizant of not only the numbers, but also the nuances and limitations. To be ingrained, one must engage in the practice habitually, without forced thought, and as part of the everyday function of their role.

To have an ingrained appreciation for the analysis and use of data, the school leader who possesses this tool is prepared to desegregate, discuss, and draw conclusions from data, with individuals or groups, formally or informally, with the end result being the improvement of instruction and the achievement of students. In designing their *Four Dimensions of Instructional Leadership*, University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership researchers framed a key guiding question as: “How do school leaders use data to instill urgency around student learning and the role of the learning-focused culture in improving student achievement?” (University of Washington, 2015, p. 2). The knowledge behind this process is important, but it cannot stand alone. Analysis of this type takes a skill set grounded in computation, understanding of percentages, scale scores, growth, and proficiency, as well as ability to articulate information of this type in a way that is understandable to a varied audience with varied skill sets of their own. The instructional leader, with an ingrained data analysis skill set, will provide careful guidance towards certain data and will be able to clearly articulate the use and benefit of and appropriate conclusion from this data for the betterment of teaching and learning (Lochmiller, 2015).

Leading and guiding teachers in the appropriate analysis of data is the first step. Other steps for the school administrator may include the use of formative data to provide invaluable feedback regarding instruction, the use of available data to lead discussions on current research, and the use of student data to monitor the progress resulting from interventions. All of these and more may be visible in a school in which an instructionally-minded school administrator is leading. What is more important about this instructional tool and why it should exist in any administrator's toolkit is that sound instructional decisions simply cannot be made without it (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010).

A school administrator who lacks this particular tool may make decisions, but without the data upon which to base them, or without the understanding of the available data at hand, the decision will be incorrect. A pertinent and common example of this is the school administrator who plans an exciting professional development opportunity for the entire faculty — without the understanding or analysis of data which clearly indicates an entirely different PD is warranted. In addition, a school administrator who lacks this particular tool may gather all the data available, analyze it incorrectly or access the wrong data for the wrong topic, and make a decision based on an incorrect analysis. In this scenario, the decision is still wrong. Or a third scenario, again, without this particular tool, is one in which the leader analyzes no data and makes no decision — at least none that makes any sense to anyone within the school. In contrast, the school administrator who possesses this important ingrained data analysis tool will always seek the data necessary to determine instructional effectiveness of teaching, potential improvements in instruction, and overall trends for learning within the school. This very leader will know the data that will serve as most helpful, will know and be able to articulate the importance and use of this data to any and all stakeholders, and will keep an ever-watchful eye on the fluctuations of the data moving forward.

2.4 Tool IV: Incomparable Expectations

Much has been written in regards to school leaders' expectations and the impact on the learning and culture of any school. It is one thing to say "high expectations"; it is an entirely different circumstance by which one delivers on true, incomparable expectations. According to Miriam-Webster (2016), expectation is actually a state of being, one in which a person is looking forward to something or waiting for something. A pertinent question that could be asked of any teacher in any school on any given day is, "Do you know exactly what it is that your school administration is looking forward to you doing?" It might be an interesting exercise, indeed, to hear the responses to this simple question. This instructional tool, when part of the toolkit of a school administrator, enables the leader to not only have expectations, but to ensure that these are incomparable expectations.

In utilizing this tool, the instructionally-minded school leader is keenly aware of every instructional action or process that is needed in order to meet the goals and objectives of the school and in order to align to the instructional vision of the leader. In this regard, the leader has determined expectations for each of these actions and processes, and has a clearly articulated communication for each of these determined expectations. The leader has established incomparable expectations for the meetings, discussions, and work on the PLCs of the school. The leader has established incomparable expectations for the lesson planning and delivery of all teachers in the school. The leader has established incomparable expectations for the academic growth of children, for the classroom learning environments, for the use of common formative assessment data, and for the structure of the instructional day and the utilization of best practices. These incomparable expectations are high, no doubt, but also clear and purposeful, as each is aligned in support of the previous three tools discussed.

In setting these incomparable expectations and in assuring compliance to such, the instructionally-minded school leader provides the platform by which the ultimate goal may be reached — the guarantee of an equally engaging and effective learning experience for every student in the school. Without expectations that are incomparable but also consistent, the first day of school, student assignment day, becomes each student's "lottery" day, a day in which some students are winners and some are not. The ability to set and affirm on a daily basis incomparable expectations for all instructional stakeholders in the building enables the school leader to move ever-closer to the assurance of quality instruction for all. This fourth tool can be a difficult one to wield, even for the most veteran of administrators; therefore, it is helpful for the instructionally-minded school administrator to have a fifth tool as support: *Confidence and Courage*.

2.5 Tool V: Instructional Confidence and Courage

The fifth essential instructional tool for the novice school administrator involves the ability to complete instructional tasks, establish an instructional vision, provide invaluable instructional feedback, and lead instructional discussions — all with an evident sense of confidence and courage. While these qualities are often inherent in the personalities of both school administrative candidates as well as school administrators, it is also accepted that confidence and courage may be encouraged, fostered, and grown over time through certain activities, experiences, and support. The leader's confidence and courage act as the conduit that bridges the gap between theory and successful practice within the school. There can be no doubt that many schools have been led by school administrators who possessed an abundance of confidence with no knowledge or skills to actually act in a way to make a positive impact on instruction and student learning. In contrast, consider the school administrator who is instructionally competent and perhaps even instructionally-brilliant, with a thorough understanding of methods, pedagogy, assessment, best practices, and delivery...but lacks confidence and courage. This school

administrator possesses several of the tools highlighted previously, but lacks the courage to lead needed instructional change and lacks the confidence to inspire others to improve in their craft.

3. Additional Tools for the School Administrator's Instructional Toolkit

It is noted that while this abbreviated toolkit list highlights five prioritized instructional tools for the novice (or any) school administrator, there are others that have been suggested through studies and writings, all of which are credible and some of which are notable for this topic. For example, the ability to secure and distribute instructional resources for use in the teaching and learning process is important (University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, 2015). It is also, however, an extension of the critical tools highlighted here, for there is no leader who is able to secure the most effective resources without first analyzing the data, observing the teaching, possessing a clear vision of what the instruction should include, and articulating a distinct set of expectations for teaching and learning in the school. These are the driving forces behind resource acquisition and allocation.

Professional development is another area that would certainly make any list of critical responsibilities of the instructional leader. As an example, Bambrick-Santoyo's Seven Levers for Quality Instruction (2012) feature several of the top five tools highlighted here (data-driven instruction, observation and feedback, instructional planning), as well as additional "levers", including professional development, student culture, staff culture, and management of leadership teams. This article would propose that as school administrators engage in establishing a strong instructional vision, providing invaluable feedback, possessing an ingrained appreciation for and use of data, articulating incomparable expectations, and embodying instructional confidence and courage, additional critical leadership characteristics will naturally follow in an aligned pattern. Professional Development will be planned which is based on evidence and data-driven needs, and not on what happens to be easily available or within the budget. Student and staff culture will become a priority, because a clear instructional vision and incomparable expectations will prompt an environment in which anything less than a stellar instructional culture is unacceptable. School leadership teams will thrive as the school administrator is visible and instructionally-engaged and all within the school are aligned under a steady and confident instructional leader. In a report supported through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Education First describes this phenomenon as such:

The theory of action is simple. Use multiple measures to evaluate performance. Analyze the data. Use the information to provide relevant, actionable feedback and support. Use the feedback and support to improve teaching practice. Improved instruction, in turn, will lead to improved student outcomes (2015, p. 3).

It is also relevant to acknowledge that no instructional tools, strategies, or approaches exist in a vacuum. There are a variety of other conditions and factors that impact the instructional toolkit of any leader, including many that are seemingly unrelated to instruction. The length of time of the principal's tenure at the school, the level of involvement of parents in the school, the funding and resources available to the school, and the degree of turnaround efforts or transformative change that is needed at the school all impact how and when the principal may utilize available instructional leadership strategies (Loveless, 2016).

4. The Role of Higher Education in the Development of Critical Instructional Leadership Tools

The first four tools highlighted in prior sections are critical but may also be difficult, for the novice school administrator, to execute at a highly effective level. As an example, in their massive study of 125 school leaders in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Grissom, Loeb and Master concluded that the typical principal spends only 0.5 percent of their school day providing informal instructional feedback to teachers (2013). In separate work, DeWitt (2013) found that the plethora demands of the daily principal role gives novice administrators the impression that they are not able to find the time for instructional leadership activities. The University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership, utilizing a comprehensive instructional framework designed to quantify the actual instructional capacities of schools leaders, concluded that from among over 2,000 principals and other education leaders, very few have actually developed the expertise necessary to identify truly effective instruction and to articulate what makes it so (Fink, 2012). Additionally, in a study report for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, researchers concluded that the development of school administrators too often "results in the lack of skills necessary to engage new teachers in trusting, instructive, and productive feedback conversations" (Park, Takahashi & White, 2014, p. 2). It is evident that preparation to meet the demands of the school leader's job is a significant challenge, as is the need to prepare future administrators to employ effective instructional leadership tools to impact teaching and learning.

The tools featured in this paper are only effective in the hands of those who are equipped to wield them in the most determined and proactive manner. Novice school administrators are often at a disadvantage in the development of these tools, for any new role or situation will bring with it the discomfort and learning curve associated with change. For example, research has shown that while school administrators are given the responsibility for teacher evaluations, many districts do not require that administrators be trained for this purpose (Oliva, Mathers & Laine, 2009). It is possible for school administration programs to facilitate the development of these tools, such as how to effectively evaluate teachers or how to appropriately provide feedback and to address the facilitation of confidence and courage needed to execute them effectively through specific actions built into the program of study and specifically into the administrative internship experience. This will not be a new enterprise for many programs, as a renewed emphasis on instructional leadership development swept across many campuses with the effective schools movement of several decades past (Hornig & Loeb, 2010). What has changed, perhaps for the better or perhaps for the worse, is the increased emphasis on accountability and the increased pressures on the school leader as instructional and achievement guru and the noted lack of preparedness in addressing these increased instructional expectations (Concordia University, 2013).

While the internship may often serve as a flexible time during which an experienced mentor designs a broad spectrum of administrative experiences in which the candidate may engage, it also provides the perfect platform by which critical instructional leadership tools may be practiced. Specific required activities could include:

- a) the design of an original walkthrough instrument (paper, digital, web-based, or some other format);
- b) the application of this walkthrough instrument in at least ten different classrooms for the purpose of providing specific, informal feedback to teachers;
- c) the utilization of the formal evaluation system, including the opportunity to conduct at least two formal observations and follow-up conferences with teachers;
- d) the opportunity to select and analyze one key set of data for the school, one key set of data for a team of

teachers, and one key set of data for an individual teacher — and the opportunity to share this analysis, via faculty presentation, team presentation, or teacher meeting, with the following questions addressed:

- I) Why is this data important?
 - II) What conclusions can be made from the analysis of this data?
 - III) Are there reasonable adjustments that should be made to our instruction or our instructional schedule based on this data?
 - IV) What are potential celebrations based on this data?
- e) attendance at two separate Professional Learning Community meetings (or teacher team meetings if PLCs are not in place), with feedback provided during and following the meetings;
 - f) the creation of the candidate's Instructional Vision, aligned to the school strategic vision and goals and representative of the candidate's beliefs and values regarding instruction and learning;
 - g) the creation of the candidate's Instructional Expectations, which is a narrative, a philosophical statement, or a checklist of specific instructional expectations for the classrooms, aligned to the instructional vision of the candidate;
 - h) the completion of at least ten drop-in, greetings-based classroom visits, with informal and brief feedback included;
 - i) the reading of at least five lesson plans (either through a collection process or to be done while in a classroom) with specific and invaluable feedback provided to the teacher.

The research conducted at the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington adds additional information to the challenges faced by new administrators. Studies conducted between 2007 and 2012 suggest that novice instructional leaders often share incorrect misconceptions about teaching and are less equipped to pose reflective questions to teachers about their instruction (Fink, 2012). In light of this, school administration coursework might be adjusted to include:

- a) A thorough discussion of best teaching practices and the most effective, research-based instructional strategies, including the appropriate use of and potential results of each.

In addition, school administrator programs may be in the best position to encourage the “can-do” approach required of school administrators while they are still learning what it means to carry out this challenging and ever-evolving role. In considering the tools highlighted here, for example, it may be too convenient for a candidate (or a veteran administrator) to relegate these types of direct and involved instructional tools as impossible to execute, due to barriers involving time or workload. In the words of Stanford University's Hornig and Loeb:

Out of this literature has arisen a prototype of ideal instructional leaders....Although this is an appealing portrait of the ideal, this model is actually poorly suited to the reality of many of today's schools. That reality includes large high schools serving some 3,000 students with courses ranging from Advanced Placement Calculus to service learning. No matter how extensive the teaching background of a school leader, could anyone have the content knowledge and relevant experience to coach one beginning teacher in how to engage students in British poetry of World War I and another on how to differentiate instruction in general chemistry? Even if school leaders have the requisite expertise, imagine them finding the time to regularly observe 250 teachers or provide extensive hands-on mentoring on curriculum and instruction (2010, p. 66).

While this viewpoint may at times be shared by practicing administrators, the ideal time to introduce a different perception of this challenge of time allocation, volume of work, and cumulative potential of impact is

while a candidate is learning how to be an instructionally-minded school leader.

It is significant at this juncture to note the 2015 *Making Time for Instructional Leadership* study conducted by a team of Vanderbilt University and University of Pennsylvania researchers. To briefly summarize, this report was designed to review the data and findings resulting from a new SAM process, funded by the Wallace Foundation and carried out through a research grant to Vanderbilt University. The SAM (School Administration Manager process) was designed to provide a school staff member (the SAM) to a school for the purpose of working with the principal to assist him or her in spending appropriate time on instructional leadership. While the report highlights positive impact and encouraging data from the case study schools involved, the most significant information shared, for the purposes of this article, pertains to the principalship moving forward. As shared in the report:

Principals are expected to be instructional leaders, but multiple studies conclude that principals actually spend little time on instruction. Many challenges exist around principals increasing their time on instruction: organizational norms push principals away from instructional leadership; the many demands on principals' time make it hard to focus on instruction; and they may lack skills and knowledge about instruction; and aside from the SAM process, no large-scale interventions have attempted to focus on specifically changing principal time allocation (Goldring et al., 2015, p. 55).

While this work is admirable, the application of this concept in the majority of schools or districts may never come to fruition. The true reality is that principals every day, and in every size school, employ the five instructional tools highlighted in this article, and more, in their work as instructional leader. High schools with 250 teachers do exist, but not with only one school administrator in the office. A school of 250 teachers will, in most public school districts in the United States, employ 8–10 school administrators. In contrast, a school of 20 teachers serving 400 students will, in most public school districts in the United States, employ one school administrator. Related to this topic of time is a 2013 study of the school leaders of Miami-Dade Public Schools, in which researchers concluded that simply spending time on instruction is not, in and of itself, sufficient — but that the effects of instructional leadership really depend on spending the right time on the right time investments (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013). The point to be made is that all school administrators, if equipped with the essential instructional tools, can and will act in the capacity of instructional leaders. There will be the time to provide invaluable feedback, to lead analysis of data, and to drop-in to classrooms on a frequent basis because the ratio of teachers to administrator will be reasonable. There will be opportunities to encourage and improve the beginning teacher, the veteran teacher, the English teacher, and the Chemistry teacher, because effective instructional strategies and best teaching practices permeate all content and all classrooms. Instead of acting as barriers to instructional leadership, this scenario actually demonstrates the very definition of it.

5. Conclusion

The 21st Century school leader is expected to wear many hats and to be strong in many capacities — including manager of processes, builder of a positive culture, partner in effective external development efforts, and strategic thinker. Juggling these many responsibilities effectively and all at once may appear an impossible task, yet studies have shown the potential positive impact when a leader is able to successfully do so (Hornig & Loeb, 2010). In a powerful study conducted in the state of Texas involving thousands of principals and tens of thousands of principal observations, researchers concluded that highly effective principals are able to raise the

achievement of typical students in their schools by up to seven months of learning per year (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013). Within this influence is the impact every principal and school administrator may have in what is often regarded as the most important role of a school leader — that of instructional leader. Yet, in a 2012 study conducted with nearly 3,000 education leaders and focused on the expertise of these leaders in observing instruction, the vast majority scored at the novice or emerging categories (Fink, 2012). Other research suggests that many school leaders fail to provide adequate instructional leadership because they simply don't know how (Gaines, 2014). Instructional leadership challenges may be execution issues — but they are also, at least to some extent, preparation issues.

With so much going on throughout each and every busy day, it is often challenging for leaders to focus their time and efforts in such a way as to reach their full potential as instructional leaders (DeWitt, 2013). Achieving this balance effectively grows even more challenging in light of the realization that organizational management, strategic leadership, and community outreach (to name a few) remain important components of the daily responsibilities of any principal (Hornig & Loeb, 2010). This article, however, remains focused and committed to one critical piece of the principal's role and effectiveness. Including the five tools explored here in every new school administrator's toolkit provides the opportunity for emerging leaders to incorporate an instructional focus and instructionally-minded action into each and every school day. Besides the safety of school inhabitants, there is no role more critical to the future of our schools and the success of our students. Embedding content, activities and opportunities in order to build these tools and even practice their use is a topic and a challenge that any School of Education and school administrator program should be compelled to revisit and potentially address.

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