

Public Abstract

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Title:The Relationship Between Learning Leadership Tasks of Principals and the Ability of Instructional Coaches to Serve as Change Agents for Teachers

This research study was completed to determine if there was a relationship between learning leadership tasks of principals and the ability of instructional coaches to serve as change agents for teachers according to perceptions of instructional coaches, principals who had not been an instructional coach, and principals who had been an instructional coach. A principal as a strong learning leader promotes learning within his or her own building by being a lead learner, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) acknowledged this through a study showing intellectual stimulation by a building leader, including keeping up-to-date on best practices and ensuring teachers know, have discussed, and are using these practices, has a large correlation with high student achievement ($r=.32$).

The problem in practice arises when a principal is not first and foremost a learning leader and because of this the understanding of the importance of learning for the entire educational community is not transparent. Principals may inadvertently not support this type of learning by remaining focused on the many managerial roles of a principal instead of on the instructional leadership role. Instructional coaching becomes difficult because the goal of this type of program is to ultimately lead teachers to change their practices through continual learning.

Preskill and Brookfield's (2009) approach to learning as a way of leading as the focus for the research questions, survey questions, and data analysis protocol. Data was collected using a survey with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The participant sampling group was comprised of 38 principals who had not been instructional coaches, 27 instructional coaches, and 6 principals who had been instructional coaches found within five different midwestern school districts housing an instructional coaching program.

The first research question addressed the prevalence of the learning leadership behaviors in principals in most successful and least successful instructional coaching scenarios. The quantitative data showed all nine learning leadership tasks of principals were significantly different between most successful and least successful instructional coaching programs. The second and third research questions addressed the leadership behavior of principals in successful and unsuccessful instructional coaching scenarios respectively. The qualitative data showed developing collective leadership, being open to the contributions of others, supporting the growth of others, and creating community were the most discussed and showed to be the most important for successful instructional coaching programs.

School leaders can use the results of this research study to assist in determining if implementation of an instructional coaching program is worth the time, effort, and financial requirements, as well as determine where strengths and weaknesses in learning leadership tasks of principals lie in working with current instructional coaching programs. An evaluation by the district administration of the principal's learning leadership behaviors such as vision creation, teamwork, listening skills, life-long learning skills, ability to provide resources and time, ability to remove obstacles to learning, foster open communication, and promote collaboration should take place.

The research also imposed implications for practice of instructional coaches. When reflecting on their work and observing strengths and weaknesses, instructional coaches can then look at possibilities of effects from the principal's learning leadership abilities. In a safe environment, instructional coaches can help principals grow in their leadership skills.