Unpacking Instructional Leadership: Four Leadership Practices that Impact Leaders, Teachers, and Students

Participant Guide

On The Cover

The inuksuk historically was used for navigation, as a point of reference, a marker for travel routes, fishing places, camps, hunting grounds, places of veneration, drift fences used in hunting, or to mark a food cache. Varying in shape and size, the Inuksuk have ancient roots in Inuit culture.

The hands of many and the efforts of an entire group were required to build these massive stone sculptures. They are the result of a consensus of purpose, of focused action by a group united in its goal and labour. The inuksuit are the product of cooperation, teaching us that as good as our individual efforts may be, together we can do even greater things.

Many Inuit retain strong attachments to inuksuit believed to have been built by their ancestors. Some of the old inuksuit are mentioned in Aya-yait, the traveling songs passed from one generation to the next to help travelers remember a series of directions for long trips. The inuksuit celebrate community and working together and are a symbol of the human spirit. They recognize our ability to succeed with others, where we would fail alone. They remind us of our need to belong to something greater than ourselves. They reinforce our ability to commit to common goals and as a beacon for guiding our journey.

Individual Reflection: Instructional Leadership

Reflect on a specific moment in time when you experienced strong instructional leadership as a teacher or when you created this experience for others.

Briefly describe the moment:	
What were the characteristics/features that made this stand out from other experiences?	
What did the leader/you do to orchestrate this experience?	
What was the impact of this leadership experience on students? How do you know? What evidence could you point to?	

4 Pillars of Instructional Leadership

Background
Based on the Alberta Education Leadership Quality Standard (LQS), "A leader ensures that every student has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences" (2018). Administrators as instructional leaders play an instrumental role in facilitating, supporting, monitoring and developing teacher capacity to achieve optimum learning in the classroom.

An instructional leadership mindset includes an intense moral purpose focused on promoting deep student learning, professional inquiry, trusting relationships and seeking evidence in action (Timperley, 2011).

Crucial to Instructional Leadership are goals that have an academic focus. Instructional leaders also set high expectations for student learning then equip teachers with the beliefs, knowledge, and skills to achieve them. (Robinson, 2011)

Four Pillars of Instructional Leadership:

1. Setting Direction
When administrators serve effectively as instructional leaders, student achievement is likely to improve (Leithwood, 2012 p. 84). It is not enough to create a vision for instructional improvement, rather administrators need to engage in targeted actions to improve student learning (Leithwood, 2012). These actions need to be linked to the instructional goals of teachers through a collaborative process.

2. Leading Learning
When leaders and teachers undertake an evidence-informed inquiry and use it to work collaboratively towards change and improvement for learners, it establishes a professional community and makes inquiry the everyday work of schools. This creates a culture of sustained improvement. The most powerful way that school leaders can make a difference to the learning of their students is by promoting and participating in the learning and development of their teachers (Robinson, 2011, p. 104). Robinson (2011) found that the principal who makes the biggest impact on learning is the one who "participates as a learner" with teachers in helping to move the school forward. Michael Fullan (2014) describes a learning leader as someone who not only models learning but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis.

3. Instructional Walkthroughs
Administrators build the capacity of teachers to respond to the learning needs of all students (Leadership Quality Standard, Competency 6a). This is accomplished by explicitly engaging teachers about well defined instructional pedagogy, professional goals and the Program of Studies. Administrators need to be intentional about each classroom visit and conversation with the explicit purpose of engaging with teachers about these key areas.

4. Collective Leadership
A leader fosters the development of shared values, a common focus, and collective responsibility for student learning. This is accomplished by distributing formalized leadership roles within the schools' context. Collective leadership is positively associated with teacher motivation, teachers' working conditions, and increased student achievement (Leithwood, 2012).

Leadership Capabilities

Vivian Robinson (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 30 studies which examined the impact of educational leadership on student learning. Her analyses of the studies identified five different leadership practices that made a significant difference to student learning. These five leadership practices or dimensions (Which were outlined last night) "tell leaders what to focus on to have an impact on student learning; however, they say very little about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to make the practices or dimensions work" (Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2011, Robinson, 2011). Robinson contends that there are three capabilities that are needed to engage in these five practices:

- The capability to apply relevant knowledge within a leader's practice
- The capability to solve complex problems.
- The capability to the type of trust needed for doing the hard work of improving and strengthening teaching and teacher learning.

Helen Timperley contends that if principals are going to lead teacher learning and development they must know their class of teachers. They need to know what teachers already know and do well and when teachers need to learn. They also need to learn and do what makes a difference to teacher learning and student learning (2011).

A Caveat:
Most widely known models of instructional leadership give considerable weight to non instructional elements of the school. Hallinger and Heck (1999), for example, conceptualize instructional leadership to include attention to "purposes," "people," and "structures and social systems." This conceptualization underscores the point that classroom practices occur within larger organizational systems that can vary enormously in the extent to which they support, reward, and nurture good instruction. School leaders who ignore or neglect the state of this larger context can easily find their direct efforts to improve instruction substantially frustrated. Successful principal leadership includes careful attention to classroom instructional practices, but it also includes careful attention to many other issues that are critical to the ongoing health and welfare of school organizations.

Activity: Read Something and Say Something

- Everyone please read the each of the pillars with your group.
- When you are finished reading, each person will state an observation about the pillar (please repeat this process for all The Pillars, The How, Leadership Capabilities, and The Caveat).
- Do not discuss or debate.
- Each person just says something or makes a summary statement.

Setting Direction Statement:

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Leading the Learning Statement:

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Instructional Walkthroughs Statement:

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Collective Leadership Statement:

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Leadership Capabilities Statement:

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Caveat Statement:

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Pillar 1: Setting the Direction

"School Leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning."

<div align="right">Leithwood, 2012</div>

According to Kennth Leithwood's research one of the essential components of an effective school leader's repertoire is an ability to set direction. He outlines this in his book " Linking Leadership to Student Learning". He describes *setting the direction* as follows:

> This category of leadership practices comprises four specific practices: building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations, and communicating the direction. Overall, it is a category of practices intended to establish what Fullan (2003) and others call "moral purpose," a basic stimulant for the work in question. All of these practices are aimed at bringing a focus to the individual and collective work of staff members in the school or district.

It becomes clear that Setting the Direction means more than creating a mission and vision for a school (this is merely one element). It involves detailed planning utilizing data to narrow the focus of the school's improvement focus. Even more important is the communication of this focus. Academic rigor and high expectations are integral in establishing clear targets for professional growth. As will be explored on Friday, this process should be a collective one.

Reflect on the current direction of your school, do you feel you could describe it to a stranger in a few sentences? What would you describe this direction as?

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If everything else stayed the same, what change would have the most impact on our school/division?

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Research Excerpt: Individual Reflection

In his article Embracing the Power of Less, Mike Schmoker describes the need for instructional leaders to focus on a few key improvement goals.

"When leaders narrow their focus to one or two powerful initiatives, they can get amazing results—and love their jobs."

<div align="right">Mike Schmoker</div>

Countless leadership studies point to the power of devoting our precious time and energy to a tiny set of priorities. Morton Hansen's book, Great at Work (2018), is based on a five-year study of 5,000 leaders. Of the seven top factors that Hansen found influence leaders' performance, "focus"—a commitment to a severely reduced number of initiatives—was number one, the single most pivotal factor. Hansen's operative expression is, "Do less, then obsess." That is, apply the (always-limited!) time and energy that now get diffused across several initiatives intensely and obsessively to one or two major initiatives at a time. Those who obsess over a "tiny set" of goals will be "less stressed out, more balanced, and more satisfied with their job." For such people, life improves dramatically both inside and outside of work (2018, p. 193).

The skinny is about finding the smallest number of high-leverage actions that unleash stunningly powerful consequences. —Michael Fullan (2009)

Building-level leaders must be allowed to select initiatives that are guaranteed to have a large and immediate impact on student performance.

In his book Essentialism, Greg McKeown (2013) urges leaders to focus, whenever possible, on only one major initiative at a time—until that initiative is fully and successfully executed and produces results. Success, McKeown writes, is a function of "the disciplined pursuit of less."

Mike Smoker (2019) outlines 3 key areas of focus for any leader looking to set direction and focus on key priorities. He states:

> "For the majority of schools, choosing such initiatives will be easier than it
> appears. If we honestly apply the most extreme criteria to select the most
> powerful, urgently needed focus for a school, the evidence will likely point to one
> or more of the following priorities: creating a clear, coherent curriculum;
> promoting authentic literacy; or ensuring that instruction includes certain key
> elements (clarity on what will be learned and how the learning will be assessed,
> and frequent checks for understanding throughout the lesson). Many studies
> confirm the primacy of these three aspects of schooling (and, sadly, their absence,
> even in schools with respectable test scores). So focusing on any one of these will
> have an outsize impact on all students, from high-achieving to struggling."

Schmoker's 3 key areas of focus are:

Creating a Coherent Curriculum
Any team of teachers can build a coherent, provisional curriculum (subject to administrative review) in about two hours. The process begins with a review of state standards, followed by thoughtful selection of the most essential content and skills. Then the team should decide which content and skills to teach each grading period, and in what order. And we must never forget that any curriculum worthy of the name must include generous amounts of substantive reading, discussion, and writing.

Promoting Authentic Literacy
The ability to read, write, and speak effectively may be more critical to academic and career success than any other factor (Hirsch, 2016; Hurley, 2015).

Delivering Soundly Structured Instruction
The presence of certain elements of instruction ensures that much higher proportions of students will succeed on daily lessons, projects, and standardized assessments. Such lessons start with a clear statement of what will be learned, why it's worth learning, and how it will be assessed. Then, for each small, manageable chunk of the
lesson, the teacher quickly and efficiently checks to ensure that every student can successfully do the work (for instance, by circulating while students work, checking their progress). If some students are struggling, the teacher must adjust her instruction—by reteaching key concepts or addressing common patterns of error—to ensure the highest possible success rate. Top researchers and practitioners now attest to the game changing impact such instruction will have on student achievement—on virtually any kind of lesson or task (Schmoker, 2018, pp. 63–71).

How might it change your job if you focused on just one or two instructional goals? How might your day-to-day schedule and tasks be different? Would you feel differently about your job?

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Consider the three focus areas Schmoker says are likely to have the most impact within any school. Which of these needs most attention at your school? Could you narrow your focus to that priority for the coming school year?

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Pillar 2 - Leading Learning

"Numerous research studies have shown that school leaders have a positive impact on student learning"

Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood & Seashore Louis 2012, Robinson, 2011

Leading Learning - Connecting the Dots

Viviane Robinson and her colleagues conducted a large-scale "best evidence synthesis" of research on the impact of school principals on student achievement. Robinson summarizes their conclusions in a book titled Student Centered Leadership (2011). She found five leadership domains that had significant effect sizes (shown in parentheses) on student achievement:

1. Establishing goals and expectations (0.42)
2. Resourcing strategically (0.31)
3. Ensuring quality teaching (0.42)
4. Leading teacher learning and development (0.84)
5. Ensuring an orderly and safe environment (0.27)

In this book Robinson outlines:

There are specific dos and don'ts within each category, but the message they carry as a set is quite clear. The most significant factor—*twice as powerful as any other*—is "leading teacher learning and development," which is essentially what I mean by the role of learning leader. Within item 4, Robinson found that the principal who makes the biggest impact on learning is the one who attends to other matters as well, but, most important, "participates as a learner" with teachers in helping move the school forward. Leading teacher learning means being proactively involved with teachers such that principal and teachers alike are learning. Think of it this way: the principal who covers only such areas as establishing a vision, acquiring resources for teachers, working to help individual teachers, and other similar activities does not necessarily learn what is specifically needed to stimulate ongoing organizational improvement. For the latter to happen, the principal must make both teacher learning and his or her own learning a priority. Within this domain of teacher learning and development, Robinson found two critical factors: the ability of the principal to make progress a collective endeavor (a core theme of this book), and skills for leading professional learning. To extrapolate from Robinson, both of these factors require the principal to be present as a learner. Principals who do not take the learner stance for themselves do not learn much from day to day, no matter how many years of "experience" they may accumulate, as little of that prior experience was really aimed at their own learning. Thus principals need to chart their own learning and be aware of its curve from day one if they are going to get better at leading. And they do this best through helping teachers learn.

Guiding Questions:

Given that "leading teacher learning and development" has the most significant impact on student achievement (0.84 effect size), how can school leaders most effectively participate as learners alongside teachers to foster a collective professional learning environment and drive continuous organizational improvement?

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What practices and dispositions are essential for principals to adopt a "learner stance" and engage in ongoing professional development, particularly in facilitating teacher learning and fostering collective progress?

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Pillar 3 - Instructional Walkthroughs

"Quality leadership occurs when the leader's ongoing analysis of the content, and decisions about what leadership knowledge to apply results in quality teaching and optimum learning for all students."

<div align="right">The Leadership Quality Standard</div>

Activity - 3 - Instructional Walkthrough Plan

Driving Question: *As instructional leaders, how can we enhance our in-depth conversations with teachers about high-quality teaching and learning on a regular basis (daily)?*

Criteria:

- Schedule (10% of total teachers per day; 5-15 minutes; 2 times per month; 18 times per year per teacher)
- Daily follow up with evidence based conversations.
- Anchored on a shared *Instructional Framework:* Program of Studies, School Improvement Plan strategies, Foundational Pedagogical Expectations

Structure:
Who sees who?

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What is the personalized focus for each teacher as the school is your classroom? Know your learner/teacher.

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What barriers do you anticipate? Are you anticipating challenges and how are you responding to these challenges?

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Communication to Staff:

What do you anticipate the reaction of teachers to your increased walkthroughs?

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What is your next communication with staff?

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Evidence of the Work:

What evidence have you seen or what evidence do you anticipate as the result of this focus? With you? With teachers?

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How did the walkthrough schedule affect your instructional leadership practice? What do you need to put in place to ensure fidelity to instructional walkthroughs? How are you using your whole team to support this focus area?

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Walkthroughs can become purposeful work which always connect to student learning. How will you know that the instructional and assessment practices of teachers are positively impacting students?

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What are some barriers that will keep you from having evidence based conversations? How are you going to make sure these conversations will happen?

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Challenges of Instructional Leadership

Activity - Analyzing Capacity: 80% Problems/20% Conditions

Principals often express concerns about the complexity of their work, the increased needs of students and parents in their schools, the amplified expectations for accountability and the resulting increased paperwork, and the lack of sufficient support to allow them to be instructional leaders whose primary focus is leading learning. What "problems," as defined by Lipton and Wellman, are raised by insight and reflection on the Leading Learning competency and indicators? What "conditions" affect your work?

80% Problems
These are issues...
- within our sphere of influence or control.
- that we want to spend time and resources on.
- that can be resolved.

20% Conditions
These are issues . . .
- over which we have no influence or control.
- that we do not have enough resources to change.
- that we do not want to change at this time.

Barth, R., Darnell, B., Lipton, LO. and Wellman, B. (2003) Guide for Instructional Leaders, Guide 1: An ASCD Action Tool

Problems	**Conditions**

What might be some possible solutions to identified problems?

Pillar 4 - Collective Leadership

"When we dream alone, we only dream. When we dream together, reality begins"

Brazilian Proverb

Kenneth Leithwood examines the role of collective leadership in schools in his book titled "Linking Leadership to Student Learning". The concept of collective leadership used by Leithwood in his study overlaps with Rowan's conception of "organic" management, defined as follows:

> a shift away from conventional, hierarchical patterns of bureaucratic control toward what has been referred to as a network pattern of control, that is, a pattern of control in which line employees are actively involved in [making] organizational decision[s,] [and] staff cooperation and collegiality supplant the hierarchy as a means of coordinating work flows and resolving technical difficulties.
>
> Miller & Rowan, 2006, p. 219–220

Evidence described by Leithwood highlights three claims:

First, collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than does individual leadership. This suggests that the current emphasis on distributing and sharing leadership might have the potential for real payoffs. At the very least it confirms the assumption that increasing the influence of many actors in a school system will not undermine effectiveness and accountability, but potentially enhance them.

Second, in higher-performing schools, principals and district leaders retain the highest levels of influence, but almost all people are granted greater influence than is the case in low-performing schools. The big "winners" in the influence "lottery" in higher-performing schools are parents and teachers acting together. But with these two exceptions, the overall hierarchical control structure of schools remains largely unchanged.

Third, collective leadership is linked to student achievement indirectly, through its effects on teacher motivation and teachers' workplace settings. As in several of our previous studies, we found significant but much weaker relationships between leadership and teacher capacity. The way in which we measured teacher capacity may help to explain these results. It was primarily a measure of professional development opportunities—that is, opportunities to learn from colleagues in a variety of ways—rather than a direct measure of the knowledge and skills teachers need to foster student achievement. In effect, although principals and their co leaders exert a significant influence on teacher

access to professional learning opportunities, their power to influence the quality and impact of those activities on teacher knowledge and skills may be more limited. This qualification, however, does not diminish our finding that motivation and work settings—factors subject to leadership influence—have significant effects on student achievement. In light of this, a narrow focus on leadership efforts aimed at building teacher capacities would be misguided.

Collective leadership may have its greatest impact by reducing teacher isolation and increasing commitment to the common good. Experiencing informal influence and feedback through professional discussions encourages a focus on shared practices and goals, and it may foster organizational innovation.

Key Understandings:

- Collective Leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership.
- Almost all people associated with higher-performing schools have greater influence on school decisions than is the cse with people in low-performing schools.
- Higher-performing schools award greater influence than low -performing schools to teacher teams, parents, and students in particular.
- Principals and district leaders have the most influence on decisions in all schools, and they do not lose influence as others gain influence.
- School leaders have an impact on student achievement primarily through their influence on teachers' motivation and working conditions. Their influence on teachers' knowledge and skills produces much less impact on student achievement.
- When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher.
- Leadership effects on student achievement occur largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community—a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning. Professional community, in turn, is a strong predictor of instructional practices that are strongly associated with student achievement.
- The link between professional community and student achievement may be explained by reference to a school climate that encourages levels of student effort above and beyond the levels encouraged in individual classrooms.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Three implications for policy and practice are suggested by the evidence described in Leithwood's book:

1. In their efforts to improve student achievement, school- and district-level leaders should, as a matter of policy and practice, extend significant decisional influence to others in the school community.
2. District leaders and principals working to extend influence to others should not be unduly concerned about losing their own influence.
3. In responding to demands that they focus sharply on improving their teachers' instructional capacities, school and district leaders should not overlook the influence they can have on classroom practice through their efforts to motivate their teachers and to align their teachers' work settings with what is known about effective instructional practice.

Who has influence in your school, who do you want to have influence?

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How do the working conditions in your school contribute to the instructional practices of teachers?

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Which ones seem to aid teachers in doing their best work and which ones seem to impede them?

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What could a school leader do to significantly influence the motivation of teachers?

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Who else should be involved with identifying high quality evidence of teacher practice? How do you ensure that teachers are involved in this process?

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Do the processes we have in place unintentionally promote a traditional leadership approach?

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Trust

Supportive principal behavior and faculty trust are significantly correlated in both elementary and secondary schools. In schools with higher levels of engaged teachers, moreover, teachers express higher levels of trust in their colleagues, more collective decision making, and a greater likelihood that reform initiatives are fully implemented and affect student achievement. Key leadership behaviors and specific actions are known to engender trust. For example, "competence" is demonstrated by "engaging in problem solving, setting standards, buffering teachers, pressing for results" (Tschannen Moran, 2004, p. 34). More recently, trust has been shown to predict how educators interpret their superiors' ability to carry out more technical and transformational leadership functions. Embedded in the notion of trust is the key distinction between the trustee and the truster; that is, those having more or less power (or dependence) in a particular situation.

Shared leadership and instructional leadership are important variables, but they are indirectly related to student achievement. Both seem to gain their influence because of their strong relationships to other variables: the way in which teachers organize themselves into professional communities, reflective discussions about instruction, and a sense of collective responsibility for student learning. This finding is hardly surprising when we consider the arguments for shared leadership, which generally emphasize expanding the sphere of responsibility and creativity to meet pressing school needs.

To realize their potential as instructional leaders, principals working in middle schools and high schools need particular modes of support. They face a distinct challenge—shaped by the large, complex settings in which they work— and they need a level of support commensurate with their distinct needs. Simply increasing pressure on principals is unlikely to bring about real improvements in principal-teacher collaboration and achievement levels in secondary schools.

Consider the school environment in which you work (or, if you are in a district or another organization, think about one school you work with). How would you describe instructional leadership in that setting? How about collective leadership?

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Notes from The Article "How Principals Cultivate Collective Leadership"

Terry Wilham writes this article from his perspective and experiences as a system level leader. Having worked with many schools in many different roles, he has observed collective leadership is more

effective than traditional leadership models because it engages teachers in the real work of school improvement. Traditional leadership in schools often is defended as collective leadership because the principal has instituted a "leadership committee" and designated "department head" roles. Wilhelm's argues that this is not true collective leadership because these committee and roles are designed to facilitate school organizational decisions and activities rather than focusing on the business of improving teaching and learning.

In a collective leadership school, all adults continually learn together to achieve formulated specific goals where every student achieves at the highest levels. He cautions that simply assigning teachers to new teacher teams and asking them to collaborate will not be sufficient. These teacher leaders then need to be supported in their new roles with training on how to lead colleagues in examining student work, to facilitate collaborative discussion, access research-based methods and strategies, and compare student learning results for various strategies. The role of the principal or leader becomes one of trainer, facilitator and coach. Common missteps in the transition to collective leadership are:

- Assigning tasks to teacher teams without providing the symbolic authority from the principal or system leader to take on and accomplish the task. Teacher teams without authority will view this change as another fad that will fade over time.
- Delegating authority to an unprepared team. Principals and system leaders need to change their role as team leaders to the trainer of team leaders. Teacher leaders need support to be successful in their new role.
- Overestimating team's readiness to take on difficult issues. Teacher teams need to develop their skills and trust within the team to tackle challenging conversations about difficult issues. It takes two to three years for a teacher team to become a high preforming team and over the process they will encounter challenges that require the principal or system leader support.

Collective Leadership is a development process and requires a delicate balance between providing direction and supporting the teams creativity and initiative. From his experience he advises that school-based teacher leaders need to meet regularly at the system level with other teacher leaders to develop skills to lead their peers and engage in ongoing professional development.

Wilhelm, T. "How Principals Cultivate Shared Leadership." Educational Leadership 71, no 2 (October 2013): 62–6.

Based on the notes from the article, complete the following chart:

Positive	Interesting	Challenging

Indicators of Instructional and Collective Leadership:

Activity: Using Key Ideas to "Move to the Right"

Assess where you are in relation to these key ideas related to Instructional and Collective Leadership from the research. Add additional key ideas relevant to your context.

1. How can you move your practice at least one row to the right?

Key Ideas from Research	Not happening yet	Some instances of this happening in a few places	Many instances of this happening in various contexts throughout the school	Embedded in every context throughout the school
Team learning is vital to promote continuous learning within and across organizational Levels in the school.				
Most teachers in our school share a similar set of values, beliefs, and attitudes related to teaching and learning.				
In our school we have well-defined learning expectations for all students.				
Most teachers in this school take responsibility for improving the school outside their own class.				
Meaningful feedback on performance from colleagues occurs.				

Teachers visit other teachers' classrooms to observe instruction.				
Conversations between colleagues about what helps students learn best.				
Teachers in this school help maintain discipline in the entire school, not just their classroom.				
The department chairs/grade-level team leaders influence how money is spent in this school.				
Teachers have an effective role in school-wide decision making.				
Teachers have significant input into plans for professional development and growth.				

School's principal(s) ensures wide participation in decisions about school improvement.				
My school administrator clearly defines standards for instructional practices.				
School administrator routinely discusses instructional issues with staff.				
School administrator routinely provides specific ideas for how to improve instruction.				
When teachers are struggling, our principal provides support for them.				
Our principal ensures that all students get high quality teachers.				

If my principal promised to do something, s/he would follow through.				
I feel free to discuss work problems with my principal without fear of having it used against me later.				

If you were to provide your school staff with this same activity how do you feel they would respond? Would your responses align?

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School Planning

Narrowing the Focus:

Our three BIG ticket items are ...	because...