Chapter 11

Leadership for Improving Student Success through Higher Cognitive Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter distinguishes between a shared hierarchical leadership, where a leader formulates goals, identifies training materials, authorizes funds and then all participate in a shared culture, vs. a fully shared co-leadership, where all educational stakeholders co-lead by initiating innovation and sharing development. This chapter advocates fully shared co-leadership. The key contribution of this chapter is the identification of four key attributes of higher cognitive pedagogy: executive function, attribution theory, goal-setting, and self-efficacy. These four attributes can easily be mastered by all educational stakeholders: mentors, principals, instructors, tutors, and students. Consequently, this chapter advocates the initiation of educational innovation in pedagogic delivery by instructors. The chapter illustrates its approach with a diverse set of subjects ranging from mathematics to essay writing. A typical application presented in this chapter illustrates spontaneous leadership at the university level followed by a more structured collaboration with K-12 institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership

Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (2009) distinguish four categories of transformational educational leadership:

- Setting directions, collaborative practices and high expectations.
- Developing the knowledge, skills and values of people by stimulating, supporting and modeling professional practices and values.

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- Redesigning and strengthening the school culture organization.
- Managing instructional programs.

This chapter focuses on the last category, instructional leadership. Instructional leadership seeks to facilitate growth in student learning. An instructional leader reforms approaches to teaching by orienting staff to ambitious instruction methods (Cobb, 2008). To effectively lead instructionally, the leader must be a master of a range of pedagogical practices that promote learning, and focus on educational methods rather than on educational content (Hopkins & Harris, 2000; Hopkins, Harris, & Jackson, 1997).

Instructional leadership is best achieved by distributed leadership in a shared culture. A sharing instructional leader shares and distributes his or her responsibilities by advocating open communication and collaboration (Parsley, 2009). Sharing educational leaders create conditions that enable teachers and students to take a high degree of responsibility for their own teaching and learning (Duignan, 2006). The sharing takes place at several levels including decision-making, teamwork and work assignment (Cordeiro & Cunningham, 2013). Harris (2008) points out that shared leadership can be recognized by seeing leadership in many more people in the organization than just those with titles.

Using the leadership concepts just introduced, two forms of shared instructional leadership can be formulated which this chapter calls hierarchical shared leadership and fully shared co-leadership.

- The hierarchical instructional leader leads his or her group by providing new and ambitious forms of pedagogical instruction, sharing both the vision and details with his or her group which then forms a team for implementing the idea. Thus, the leader’s leadership is expressed by selecting the pedagogical innovations, methods and training to focus on. The leader is possibly also responsible for funding.
- Contrastively, the fully shared instructional leader has a less dominant role. New ideas of pedagogy may be initiated by any member of the group working with the leader. The group as a whole still works as a team to develop the idea. Thus, the leader’s leadership is not expressed through idea selection or idea implementation; rather, leadership is at most expressed by presenting the idea, facilitating development of the idea, or by researching and providing resources for the idea’s implementation. An alternative formulation is that all team members are equal co-leaders with perhaps one of them initiating the idea.

The transition from a hierarchical instructional leadership in the direction of a fully shared co-leadership is illustrated by the GOGYA project of the AMIT network of schools in Israel (Chabin, 2015). Prior to GOGYA, AMIT, a network of roughly 110 high-schools in Israel with a centralized leadership, had used a hierarchical shared instructional leadership. Each of the principals in the 110 schools had mentors who would help coach and disseminate ideas and methods of pedagogy. The mentors in turn took direction from the centralized leadership.

The GOGYA project has facilitated transformation in the direction of a shared instructional co-leadership. As Deutsch, coordinator of research and development (R&D) for AMIT, states, “We are building leadership. We do not want to send mentors to schools forever. Eventually, we want the teachers to lead themselves” (Chabin, 2015, p. 13).

The basic GOGYA idea is that the R&D team from each school, a group of seven teachers, travels to the GOGYA site once a month. There they listen to lectures on pedagogy, methods and resources, but more importantly, they share with each other. Upon returning home, they share with other instructors in
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