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PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS: MAGNIFYING AND SPREADING IMPACT

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This paper contributes to the emerging conceptualization of pedagogical leadership teaming as a foundation for our ongoing study of leadership, teaching, and learning in the Area III of the Calgary Board of Education. Pedagogical leadership teaming is rooted in five strands of research: (a) effective teaching, (b) shared instructional leadership, (c) professional learning, (d) evidence, relational trust and reflective discourse, and (e) learning focused district leadership. In our further inquiry based on this research informed image we seek to illustrate various ways that pedagogical leadership teams magnify and spread impact of teacher and leader learning on student success.

Keywords: teaching, instructional leadership, professional learning, district leadership

Over the last four years school leaders in the Calgary Board of Education's (CBE) 42 Area III schools have partnered with the Galileo Educational Network (GENA) to strengthen leadership and teaching practices towards improved student success – engagement, achievement, and well-being. Data collected from a variety sources in earlier phases of this research indicate that school leaders are (a) deepening their understanding of effective teaching and learning for knowledge-building inclusive environments, (b) mobilizing student-centred leadership practices and (c) developing processes for improving professional practice through evidence-informed

conversations. As one component of the larger study, this paper aims to contribute to an emerging conceptualization of *pedagogical leadership teaming* as a foundation for our ongoing examination of the ways that school leadership teams magnify and spread impact of teacher and leader learning. We briefly overview of the five strands of educational leadership literature, before outlining the collective case study research design that will be undertaken in the study's next phase. In the final section we discuss emergent aspects of *pedagogical leadership teaming*.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE LITERATURE

The five strands point toward an emerging portrait of pedagogical leadership teaming. This early image of synergistic practice is helping to address a fundamental challenge for educational leaders across schooling contexts: raising achievement and reducing disparity in ways that deepen impact and spread student success. Each individual research strand is now briefly addressed.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Learning environments emerging from contemporary research recognize learners as core participants, requiring active engagement, and developing in them an understanding of their own activity as learners. Such learning environments recognize that learning is not merely a solo activity, rather it is a distributed undertaking, social in nature, and involves the processes of interaction, negotiation, cooperation, collaboration, and participation. Such environments are further characterized by being highly attuned to the inextricably entwined nature of the emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning. Learning within these environments is organized to sponsor deep conceptual understanding rooted in disciplinary ways of knowing, doing, and being connected both vertically within the discipline and horizontally across disciplines. Such learning environments are learner-focused and acutely sensitive to the fact that students differ in many ways, including their prior knowledge. Learning within these environments is maximized when

each learner is sufficiently challenged and supported to reach just above their existing level and capacity. Assessment and instruction work together in these environments to ensure that learning goals are transparent and learners receive substantial, regular, timely, specific, meaningful feedback to improve learning (Friesen & Lock, 2010).

Based on a focused review of research literature, Friesen (2009) put forward a set of five core principles to help guide teaching and learning in view of these new realities. These principles, listed below and described in the *Teaching Effectiveness Framework* provide a research informed conception for teaching and learning within the contemporary context. (a) Effective teaching practice begins with the thoughtful and intentional design of learning that engages students intellectually and academically. (b) The work that students are asked to undertake is worthy of their time and attention is personally relevant, and deeply connected to the world in which they live. (c) Assessment practices are clearly focused on improving student learning and guiding teaching decisions and actions. (d) Teachers foster a variety of interdependent relationships in classrooms that promote learning and create a strong culture around learning. (5) Teachers improve their practice in the company of peers.

SHARED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) claimed “leadership practices targeted directly at improving instruction have significant effects on teachers’ working relationships and indirectly on student achievement” and that “when principals and teachers share leadership, teachers’ working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher” (p. 25). The effect occurs “largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community, a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning” (p. 25).

In their analysis of the literature on instructional leadership, Leithwood and Louis (2012) focused on a few well-developed models that posit a “set of responsibilities for principals that goes well beyond observing and intervening in classrooms – responsibilities touching on vision, organizational culture and the like” (p. 6). This conception is in keeping with an earlier view by Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) that *instructional leadership* has been mostly used as “a slogan to focus administrators on their students’ progress” (p. 6). They point to a more detailed three-category model described in Hallinger’s (2003) review: (a) *defining the school’s mission*, including framing and then communicating the school’s goals; (b) *managing the instructional program*, including supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress; and (c) *promoting a positive school learning climate* encompassing protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning.

Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe’s (2008) meta-analysis of the available evidence linking school leadership to student outcomes resulted in five categories of leadership practice that have been elaborated in Robinson (2011): (a) establishing goals and expectations, (b) resourcing strategically, (c) ensuring quality teaching, (d) leading teacher learning and development, and (e) ensuring an orderly safe and caring environment. These dimensions are inter-connected and work together with three leadership capacities to foster strong learning and teaching environments: (a) applying relevant knowledge, (b) solving complex problems, and (c) building relational trust.

Wahlstrom (2012) grouped instructional leadership practices into two categories: *Instructional Ethos* and *Instructional Actions*. Efforts in the *Instructional Ethos* category aim to build a culture that supports continual professional learning. “Principals whose teachers rate them high on *Instructional Ethos* emphasize the value of research-based strategies and are able to apply them in

the local setting” (p. 68). Wahlstrom found that setting a tone and developing a vision for student learning and teacher growth is present in high-performing schools of all grade levels. The second category – *Instructional Actions* – involves explicit engagement with individual teachers about their own professional growth and is more evident in elementary schools. *Instructional Actions* include direct observations and conversations with teachers in classrooms and in team meetings.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

An increasing body of evidence ties effective professional learning to positive changes in teaching practice. Timperley (2011) observed that when professional learning is not driven by identified student and teacher needs, teachers might find the experience interesting but in the absence of a need to solve a specific problem of practice or to improve a particular outcome for students, there is little urgency or motivation to change and improve (p. 47). Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, and Fung (2007) described professional learning as an intentional, ongoing, and systematic process and noted that “the term *professional development* has taken on connotations of delivering some kind of information to teachers in order to influence practice whereas *professional learning* implies an internal process through which individuals create professional knowledge” (p. 3).

EVIDENCE, RELATIONAL TRUST, AND REFLECTIVE DISCOURSE

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) found value in studying both elements (p. 30). In their analysis, leadership efforts to improve instruction positively impact student learning through improved working relationships with teachers. “When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers’ working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher” (p. 25). Another of their significant claims is that “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” (p. 39). 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. Increasing teachers’ involvement in the difficult task of making good decisions, and introducing improved practices must be at the heart of school leadership. There is no simple short cut. (p. 25)

LEARNING FOCUSED DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

An important final frame for pedagogical leadership teaming is the research literature on district leadership practices that strengthen the instructional leadership capabilities of school leaders. Several recent studies point district leadership practices in this direction (Brandon, Hanna, Morrow, Rhyason, & Schmold, 2013; Leithwood, 2012; Louis, et al., 2010a, 2012b; Marzano & Waters, 2006, 2009; Wahlstrom, et al. 2010). Anderson and Louis (2012) found that “district policies and practices around instruction are sufficiently powerful that they can be felt, indirectly, by teachers as stronger and more directed leadership behaviours by principals” (p. 181).

Though these systematic analyses of data collected from multiple sources in a variety of district contexts over an extended period of time address earlier critiques (Leithwood, 2008), there is much more to be learned about district leadership practices that impact educator and student learning. The collective case study research design to investigate pedagogical leadership teaming in action in the study’s next phase is now described

METHODOLOGY

Through collective case study, we will focus on four schools as instrumental cases (Creswell, 2012) to illustrate and illuminate ways through which school leaders magnify and spread impact.

Evidence from multiple-case studies is “often considered more compelling, and the study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (Yin, 2009, p. 53) and is a “common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings” Merriam (1998, p. 40). In collective case study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; 2005) multiple cases are described to provide insight into an issue. The issue under investigation within the bounded system of the Calgary Board of Education in 2016 is *participant perceptions of the impact of their work as members of pedagogical leadership teams on student, teacher, and leader learning*.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS – PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP TEAMING

The emerging image of pedagogical leadership is providing a foundation from which to launch further inquiry seeking to illustrate various ways that pedagogical leadership teams magnify and spread impact of teacher and leader learning to strengthen teaching and leadership practices towards improved student success – engagement, achievement, and well-being.

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