

Principal Priorities for School Improvement

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Abstract

The importance of teacher effectiveness on student achievement has been well-documented. School leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors influencing student achievement. However, the job of a principal is arguably one of the most interrupted jobs anywhere. Principals are continually bombarded by students, parents, staff, and the mini-crises that occur each day. Although many researchers and educators have written about school leadership, few have offered a concrete path of how to put all the pieces together on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Early in the 2015-16 school year, I was asked to support the Principal of Oak Park Charter School, a K-5 charter school in Sacramento. Like most of her peers, this Principal was overwhelmed by the multiple demands of her job. After reviewing school-based data, interviews with stakeholders, and a thorough review of relevant literature, I designed an intervention focused on coaching the OPC K-5 Principal on how to prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job. My analysis of intervention data yielded several key findings. When principal on-the-job support is delivered in a structure that creates psychological safety, even in less than ideal conditions, identification and narrowing of the principal “knowing-doing gap” is possible. Furthermore, coaching principals on building shared understanding and relational trust is crucial to starting and sustaining distributed leadership efforts aimed at helping principals prioritize the multiple demands of the job.

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Introduction and Context

Oak Park Charter School is an independent, public charter school located in Sacramento's inner city community of Oak Park. OPC is a member of Oak Park Public Schools (OPPS), a PreK-12 system of charter schools serving approximately 1,700 students. OPC serves approximately 600 K-8 students on two campuses. The student population, admitted through open lottery, is approximately 67% African American, 19% Latino, 6% two or more races, 2% Asian, and 2% White. Nearly 82% of the students come from families who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 10% of students have a diagnosed learning disability, and 5% are English Learners. During its first decade of operation, OPC was recognized by the state and US Department of Education for the achievement of its African American and low-income students, who far exceeded their counterparts in comparable schools throughout Sacramento County and the state, including an overall 913 score on the Academic Performance Index (API) in 2010. Since 2011, the API and state test scores have been in steady decline. In 2015, CAASPP scores for grades 3-5 were among the lowest in Sacramento County. Additionally, Teacher turnover at the end of the 2014-15 school year was at nearly 50%.

Problem of Practice

As the founding principal of OPC and in my role of training and supporting instructional leaders with OPPS, in the Fall of 2015, the OPC Superintendent asked me to support the OPC K-5 Principal to identify the core issue(s) and develop a solution(s) to reverse the trend of declining student achievement and teacher turnover. Multiple data points collected from OPC indicate an immediate and urgent need for stronger alignment between instructional support and the professional development needs of teachers. My initial step to define this problem of practice was to triangulate data from the following sources to capture multiple perspectives of OPC teachers and the Principal on instructional support (coaching, professional

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development, instructional planning) and the professional development needs of OPC teachers and the Principal:

1. **Instructional Staff Performance Evaluations:** Reviewed data on 2014-15 Teachers, Education Specialists, and Teaching Fellow self-assessments, year-long professional development goals, and the final evaluation of each Teacher completed by the Principal.
2. **Principal and Instructional Coach Performance Evaluations:** Reviewed data on 2014-15 self-assessment, year-long professional development goals/progress, and the final evaluation of the Principal completed by the Chief Academic Officer, and Instructional Coach (completed by Principal).
3. **Teacher Surveys:** Analyzed feedback from Teacher responses to anonymous survey questions directly connected to instructional support and professional development from the end of the 2014-15 school year.
4. **Interviews:** Conducted 1-to-1 interviews with the Principal, new Superintendent, and the previous Superintendent who hired the Principal. The OPC Principal revealed to me that she is overwhelmed by the multiple demands of her job, and she needs support that will allow her to maintain a consistent focus on the instructional leadership aspects of her role. The new OPCS Superintendent believes that the Principal is not “an instructional leader.” The previous Superintendent stated that the Principal does not know how to “say no,” nor does she know how to prioritize her time and activity to maximize her focus on instructional leadership.

These data sets also reveal that in 2014-15, nearly 80% of the OPC instructional staff were evaluated by the Principal to be at Advanced or Proficient performance levels. The Principal was evaluated to be at the Basic performance level, and the Instructional Coach received a rating at the Advanced level. Teacher survey data highlighted a recurring belief that instructional support did not meet the varied professional development needs of Teachers, especially related to CCSS Math. While teachers need more adequate instructional support, the performance evaluations indicate the Principal needs more support to build her instructional leadership

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knowledge and skills. However, the interviews revealed an even more urgent and pressing need for Principal support.

The Principal of OPC is overwhelmed by the multiple demands of her job. Hence, she is not able to maintain a consistent instructional program focus to support teachers' professional development needs. Therefore, based on the review of the aforementioned school-based data that helped initially frame this problem of practice, a thorough and on-going Literature Review, I designed an intervention focused on coaching the OPC K-5 Principal on how to prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job. In February, just as we were about to conduct the pre-intervention interview, the entire Action Research Project was thrown for a loop when the Superintendent publicly announced his decision that the Principal would not be returning for the 2016-17 school year. For several weeks thereafter, the Action Research project was forced into a holding pattern as the Principal, staff, and parents absorbed this news. In late March, just prior to the school's Intersession break, the Superintendent confirmed that the Action Research project could move forward. In April, a request was made by the Principal and Superintendent that the school's Assistant Principal be allowed to participate in the coaching sessions during the intervention phase. It was the assumption of the Principal and Superintendent that the Assistant Principal would remain at the school. Despite this turn of events, my goal remained that the intervention focusing on a foundational step (prioritizing the multiple demands of the principal's job) would help clear a path for the Principal to re-establish an instructional program focus and more consistently use her time to meet the professional development needs of her teachers.

Literature Review

After reviewing school-based data, conducting interviews with stakeholders, and a thorough review of relevant literature, I designed a theory of action and an intervention focused on coaching the OPC Principal on how to prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job. The following literature review will provide evidence that supports my belief and theory of action: Through on-the-job coaching support on distributed leadership, the OPC Principal can prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job. Thus, the Principal can begin to establish an instructional program focus to meet OPC teachers' professional development needs.

I begin the literature review by sharing the research evidence on the daily challenges that get in the way of principals' instructional leadership efforts. I then discuss the impact of these challenges on principals, including isolation and attrition, to underscore the urgency for a different approach to carrying out the responsibilities of school leadership. The literature review then describes the model of distributed leadership, which debunks the myth of the omnipotent principal and highlights the vast, untapped potential of human capital in schools as a source to support principals' instructional leadership efforts. Finally, the literature review brings to focus the dearth of research on effective coaching models for and the importance of on-the-job support for principals. The literature review concludes with a description of blended coaching and its suitability as a guide for building the OPC principals' capacity for prioritizing and meeting the multiple demands of her job.

Principals Daily Face the Challenge of a Knowing-Doing Gap

The importance of teacher effectiveness on student achievement has been well-documented [Darling-Hammond, 2000; Marzano, 2001; Hanushek, 2010]. School leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors influencing student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Common themes consistent with the broader research body on the actions that

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effective school leaders take include: holding and communicating vision (Bryk et al., 2010; Schein, 2004), building capacity through professional community (Bryk et al., 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), and leading learning-centered conversations grounded in data (Wellman & Lipton, 2004).

On the surface, it seems like a pretty straight-forward game plan to be a school leader. The reality is that there is always some distraction or seemingly urgent matter that beckons principals and other school leaders away from the meaningful work of instructional leadership and school improvement. Veteran principal Kim Marshall wrote (2003) an eloquent and accurate critique of the lives of most principals. “The dirty little secret of American schools is that principals rarely get into classrooms. Powerful, almost inexorable forces conspire to keep school administrators from a meaningful instructional role. The result is Hyperactive Superficial Principal Syndrome (HSPS).”

The job of a principal is arguably one of the most interrupted jobs anywhere (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Principals are continually bombarded by students, parents, staff, and the mini-crises that occur each day (Lovely, 2006). Because of this, a principal can invest a tremendous number of hours –and heart and soul - into the work of the school without even stepping foot into a classroom. Although many researchers and educators have written about school leadership, few have offered a concrete path of how to put all the pieces together on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis (Lochmiller, 2013). Leaving this information out of the equation is a serious mistake. Ultimately, even the best solutions are meaningless if principals cannot feasibly put them into place (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

Each decision a principal makes has a direct impact on the teaching and learning that takes place within the school building. Key decisions are clouded by chaos and uncertainty. For novice principals, the challenges of being a school leader are compounded by additional barriers. A qualitative study (O’Doherty & Ovando, 2013) examining the instructional leadership perceptions of 4 first-year principals

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shed light on the instructional leadership challenges encountered by first-year principals. These challenges called into question their leadership capacity and threatened to prevent them from fully engaging in instructional leadership. Four pressing challenges encountered by these first-year principals appeared to influence their initial leadership actions: succession of the previous principal, implementation of previous year's plans, motivating people to change, and balancing the complexity of the principal job." Of these challenges, the following two are of most relevance to the problem of practice that I am addressing:

- *Succession.* This potential barrier is especially relevant to my work with the OPC Principal, as I am the founding principal of the school. All four participants in O'Doherty & Ovando's study cited succession of the previous principal as a pressing challenge that seemed to work against their best intentions, knowledge, and understanding about instructional leadership. According to these novice principals, following someone else's leadership style, which might reflect different values, was tremendously difficult. Establishing their own credibility with the faculty and community based on their individual philosophy became an overwhelming task.
- *Role complexity.* These first-year principals were balancing the complexity of the principal job while advocating for significant changes. This required the novice principals to push forward in advocating and enacting substantial change on the campus while grappling with learning a new and challenging role. This challenge highlights that the job of being a principal, especially a novice principal, consumes a great deal of energy and requires the flexibility to simultaneously balance a myriad of responsibilities that are essential to a well-functioning school. Unraveling the complexity of the OPC Principal's role is paramount to prioritizing the multiple demands of her job. Buried under an avalanche of information, input, and initiatives from the Superintendent, Home Office (human resources, fiscal, and legal), parents, staff and even students, the Principal is faced daily with too much to do and too little time. The OPC Principal has an understanding of her role as the

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instructional leader. Like many of her peers, however, there is a rift between what the OPC Principal recognizes as important and how she actually behaves. In *Assessing Educational Leaders* (Reeves, 2004), the author reveals that school leaders have an intellectual understanding of the right things to do, yet they lack the fundamental ability to act on this knowledge. For example, in a survey of school leaders, 71% of school leaders strongly agreed it was important to manage time to be an instructional leader, but only 45% said they did so. Similar “knowing-doing gaps” were found in responses to using data to improve teaching and learning, and establishing and communicating the vision of the school. In fact, the only instance where the “knowing-doing gap” did not exist was in operations and discipline – areas that consume the majority of a leader’s time and attention, including the Principal who is the focus of this research! In order to close this knowing-doing gap, the OPC Principal must learn to better organize herself and her work environment in ways to meet the multiple demands of her work with greater efficiency.

Impact of Principal Challenges include Isolation and Attrition

Although principals are pivotal to change and improvement in schools, they often have difficulty taking charge of their own destiny. Leaders who are prone to constant reaction, rather than action, suffer a loss of identity, see themselves as victims, and experience higher levels of stress than their more optimistic counterparts (Lovely and Smith, 2004). These professional challenges often seep into principals’ personal lives, jeopardizing health and even the closest relationships (Lovely, 2006). Gary Bloom and his colleagues (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005) concluded that principals often feel vulnerable and insecure.

“Our research tells us that their outlook and attitudes about their profession run through cycles ranging from desperation to optimism.” Unfortunately, principals seldom are afforded the support of a skilled coach. Therefore, it is very common for principals to feel isolated in their daily work. In charter schools with limited

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resources for administrative support staff, principals are often saddled with even more responsibilities and accountability.

“I went from being a confident, successful classroom teacher, to feeling like a complete failure,” said the OPC Principal, during our pre-intervention interview, reflecting on the impact of isolation and inadequate coaching support during her two years as the school leader. “Who do I talk to when I need support and encouragement, without feeling like I’m being judged?”

It is easy to see why some educators view the principal’s role as “impossible” or “unrealistic” in its current condition. The data on principal attrition seem to support this view. Attrition can consist of a principal moving to another school, leaving the profession all together, returning to teaching or moving to a position in a district office. The figures for principal attrition in 2011-12 (US Department of Education, 2014) show that 27.4% of principals in high poverty schools leave annually. Even in schools serving affluent populations and communities, 20% of principals leave this critical role. The K-5 charter that is the focus of the research project has had 4 principals from 2011-16. During interviews with teachers and current and former principals at the school, this constant change in leadership was noted as having a pejorative effect on the consistency in the instructional program and school culture. Compounding this issue, teacher attrition at OPC at the end of the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years was nearly 50%. These facts reinforce the focus and urgency of this action research project on improving the OPC K-5 Principal’s knowledge and skills to prioritize the multiple demands of her job. This intervention can be the first step to reverse the isolation and attrition for whomever is in the Principal role at this charter school.

Distributed Leadership: Debunking the Myth of the Omnipotent Principal

During the effective schools movement of the 1970s (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Lezotte, 2001), researchers found that effective schools typically had principals who functioned as instructional leaders. These studies viewed the principal as the sole instructional leader, reinforcing a

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romantic idea of the heroic school leader (Hallinger, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Rather than searching the galaxy for this illusory ideal of the omnipotent school leader, it's much more practical to teach principals how to identify, communicate and remain focused on their school's purpose, priorities and people (Lovely and Smith, 2004).

More recent studies have broadened our understanding of instructional leaders to include others beside the principal, such as teachers and department chairs (Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). Highly-effective leaders work vicariously through others to move their organizations forward (Lovely, 2006) by thoughtfully distributing their leadership responsibilities among staff members. Distributed Leadership is "the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles across the school organization" (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 470). Delegation of tasks or dividing responsibilities according to role is not distributed leadership (Timperly, 2005; Watson & Scribner, 2007). School principals who cannot engage others in leading will be unable to spread and mobilize the expertise necessary for school improvement in their schools; they are thus unlikely to be very effective (Spillane & Louis, 2002, p. 98).

Lost among the distractions and daily work demands that require principals' attention, is a vast, untapped pool of human and intellectual capital (e.g., teachers, student services personnel, other administrators, and coaches). A review of the OPC Principal's weekly calendar revealed that she was carrying out several operational (monitoring recess and lunch) and school culture (managing student behavior) tasks, instead of sharing these responsibilities with the Dean of Culture, who was hired for this purpose. This decision greatly reduced the OPC Principal's time devoted to meeting the professional development needs of her teachers, as well as carrying out other instructional leadership roles.

Understanding how to utilize distributed leadership will be an essential component of the intervention to help the OPC Principal prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job. Critical to distributed leadership is the ability of a school leader

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to co-construct shared understanding with and among those whom the principal is sharing the leadership work. As stated earlier, simple delegation of tasks or dividing responsibilities according to role is not distributed leadership. Each member of the leadership team should have an opportunity to contribute to the development of a shared understanding with the Principal of their respective role. This premise is supported by Schein's (2004) general principle that real internalization of new learning is best achieved when the learner is actively involved in the design of the learning process. A final key factor for the intervention will be developing the Principal's ability to create psychological safety to allow staff members (e.g., the Dean of Culture) to overcome any fears (loss of identity, learning anxiety), possible defensive responses, and embrace principles of change that will truly lead to growth. Repeating this process with all individuals with whom the Principal decides to share leadership will be the critical first steps in establishing a leadership structure that lays the foundation for the Principal to prioritize the multiple demands of her job.

Professional Development & Coaching are Key in Closing the Principal Knowing-Doing Gap

The importance of professional development for principals cannot be overstated. Principals' professional development needs have never been greater than they are today (MetLife Survey, 2013). Yet research indicates that not even 4 percent of Title II "allowable use" federal funding is spent on principal professional development (Reed, 2014). Given the myriad district, state, and federal initiatives principals are expected to implement, there is a widening chasm between the professional development needs of principals and the instructional tools and skills required to do the job well (Lovely & Smith, 2003). The cycle of making decisions, analyzing results, refining decisions, and collecting data is critical to the professional learning of all principals. Principals can develop and apply these decision-making skills when they are provided opportunities for professional development and coaching.

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After analyzing school leaders' opportunities to learn (OTL), Spillane and his colleagues (2009), make a distinction between formal OTL and on-the-job learning. Formal OTL may take many forms: from pre-service training (e.g., preliminary administrative services credential programs), to workshops for school principals offered by local school districts or state governments, even workshops offered by some non-governmental agency. Spillane states that while the literature focuses on these formal OTL, in part because these are more accessible to researchers, scholars are increasingly paying attention to on-the-job learning, which is learning in and from daily work practice (Bryk, Camburn, and Louis 1999; Horn 2005; Scribner et al. 1999; Seibert 1999).

At the heart of this action research project is on-the-job support and capacity building of the OPC Principal to meet the multiple demands of her job. The Principal is currently unable to carry out her role as the instructional leader of the school because she does not have the necessary skills to prioritize her myriad of responsibilities. Nor has she received focused, ongoing coaching support on how to build her knowledge and skills to effectively prioritize the multiple demands of her job. An intriguing model for supporting and professionally developing the OPC Principal on-the-job is blended coaching (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005). Effective blended coaching for school leaders incorporates a number of key elements:

- The coach constructs a relationship based upon trust and permission. Building relational trust (Bryk et al., 2010) during our intervention will provide the OPC Principal a safe space and allow true insight into her beliefs, understandings, and struggles in her role. Thus, opening the door for deeper learning.
- The coach and coachee recognize that problems and needs are valued learning opportunities. This concept is at the heart of most coaching interactions.

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- The coach must be prepared to apply a variety of coaching skills as appropriate to the context and needs of the coachee.
- The coach is fully present for and committed to the coachee.
- The coach provides emotional support to the coachee. As we have previously shared, many leadership positions-including those of school leaders-are isolated and emotionally challenging.
- The coach maintains a fundamental commitment to organizational goals as agreed to by the coachee, and appropriately pushes the coachee to attain them. During the coaching cycles, the Principal will co-construct a vision of her leadership role built on coherence guided the school's mission, goals, priorities, and use of time.
- The coach practices in an ethical manner.

As noted earlier, those in school leadership positions often struggle, especially during their first years, in this role and cite a lack of adequate support to clarify and navigate their new roles (Gross, 2009). Direct, job-embedded coaching on a one-to-one basis responds to each of the characteristics of adult learners, including school leaders. The use of blended coaching for training on distributed leadership appears to be an appropriate approach to help the OPC Principal close her knowing-doing gap.

Conclusion

This literature review has provided evidence that supports my belief and theory of action: Through on-the-job coaching on distributed leadership, the OPC Principal can prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job. Thus, the Principal can also begin to establish an instructional program focus to meet OPC teachers' professional development needs (see Theory of Action in Table 1). This literature review has shed light on the challenges (knowing-doing gap) to the instructional leadership efforts of principals and novice principals, thus pushing principals down a path to isolation and attrition. Distributed leadership was also shown in the literature review as an alternative approach to sharing and carrying

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out the responsibilities of school leadership. This literature review also demonstrates that, although there is a dearth of research on effective coaching models for on-the-job support for principals, blended coaching appears to be an ideal vehicle for supporting the OPC Principal's efforts to prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job.

Table 1: Theory of Action

Problem of Practice	Literature Review	Literature Review	Intervention	Literature Review
What is the context? What is the problem in that context?	What do you know about the problem?	What has been tried in the past to address the problem? What was successful and why?	What are you going to try? Why do you think it will impact the problem? What is your rationale/case?	What do we know about quality interventions of this kind?
<p>Principal (<i>based on 2014-15 evaluation</i>) is not able to consistently carry out duties of an instructional leader</p> <p>Teachers want and need more effective instructional support (PD)</p> <p>Novice Principal is overwhelmed by the multiple demands of her job.</p> <p>Principal cannot establish focus on instructional program.</p> <p>Principal does not have knowledge, skills to prioritize the multiple demands of her job.</p>	<p>-Principals' time is consumed by competing demands and initiatives – instructional leadership usually takes a back seat to management of school.</p> <p>-Principals do not know how to prioritize instructional leadership over managerial aspects of job.</p> <p>-Principal attrition and mobility is higher in high poverty schools (like OPC Elementary).</p> <p>-Dearth of educational research on how to become an instructional leader.</p>	<p>Past Attempts</p> <p>-primarily PASC-based or not at all (charter schools)</p> <p>-conferences, one-time workshops</p> <p>-isolated</p> <p>-lack of trust</p> <p>-</p> <p>Successful PD</p> <p>+Job-embedded</p> <p>+Provided in a small-group setting, or individualized</p> <p>+Relational trust</p> <p>+Goals, data-driven</p> <p>+Collaborative with peers</p> <p>+Shadowing other principals</p> <p>+Ongoing</p> <p>+Priority for school, district</p> <p>+Action research</p> <p>+Conducting literature reviews</p> <p>+Time and resources allocated</p> <p>+Distributed</p>	<p>Intervention: I will coach the OPC Principal on how to prioritize the multiple demands of her job in order to establish an instructional program focus to help meet teachers' PD needs.</p> <p>Rationale: Through 3 cycles of on-the-job coaching, the OPC Principal will begin to develop understanding and ability to distribute leadership.</p>	<p>Direct, job-embedded coaching on a 1-to-1 basis responds to each of the characteristics of adult learners, whether they lead schools or private enterprises. (Bloom et al, 2005;)</p> <p>(PD) should primarily be school based and connected to authentic and immediate school goals (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Little, 2006).</p> <p>Attempts to build on the strengths, interests, and needs of learners</p>

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		leadership +Building shared understanding	(Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000) Differentiation for learners: Each learner will learn in different ways and opportunities to individualize optimal combination of training, practice, and method of learning are valuable (Schein, 2004).
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Intervention & Data Collection Plan

The OPC Principal is completing the second year in this leadership role. During the previous 6 years, she was a teacher at the school. Her students scored consistently among the top students in Sacramento in both Reading and Math. The biggest challenge for her as a Principal has been prioritizing the multiple demands of her job. Without adequate coaching support, this Principal has gone from being a highly-effective teacher “to feeling like a complete failure.” Based on the pre-intervention data I collected and the literature review above, I created an intervention focused on:

- Surfacing and examining beliefs about school/instructional leadership
- Identifying what gets in the way of carrying out instructional leadership duties. What is the impact of this knowing-doing gap?
- Identifying the Principal’s Priorities (by school year, month, week)
- Aligning the Principal’s Priorities to the school’s Mission (purpose) and Goals
- Communicating to stakeholders alignment of Mission (purpose), Goals and Priorities
- Equipping Operations Team members to share leadership responsibilities through distributed leadership.

My goal for the intervention was focused on taking a foundational step with this school leader: Prioritizing the multiple demands of the principal’s job. This intervention was designed to

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help clear a path for the Principal to establish an instructional program focus and more consistently utilize her time to meet the PD needs of her teachers. The need for distributed leadership came out organically during the pre-intervention interview and first coaching cycle. During the literature review, I also encountered another key idea that informed my intervention design: Schein's principles of helping people embrace and maintain change. This concept was a driving force to ensure that the Principal will not simply follow the steps in the intervention plan for the duration of the coaching cycles. Schein (2004) writes, "We sometimes can learn things through imitation that do not really fit into our personality or our ongoing relationships. Once we are on our own and the role models are no longer available, we often revert to our old behavior. If we want to learn things that really fit into our personality, then we must learn to scan our environment and develop our own solutions." Therefore, each coaching session was planned with questions to surface and examine the Principal's own thinking to ensure deeper learning. Finally, this intervention plan was predicated on creating relational trust (Bryk et al, 2010) and psychological safety, which allowed the participants to overcome fears (loss of identity, learning anxiety), possible defensive responses, and embrace principles of change that will truly lead to growth.

Intervention Coaching Cycles

The focal point of the intervention design was three coaching cycles, followed by a half-day spent shadowing the Principal and Assistant Principal. After a pre-intervention interview with the Principal (see Appendix A for questions), I met with the Principal and Assistant Principal on a weekly basis for 1 hour. The time of our meetings was usually based on the availability of the Principal, and we met each time in her office. I developed an agenda (see Appendix B) for each coaching session with input from the Principal. Prior to each coaching session, the participants and I read an article that focused our conversation. For Session 1, we read two articles from Kim Marshall: *Hyperactive Superficial Principal Syndrome* (2003) and *Priority Management for Principals* (2008). After establishing meeting norms and responsibilities, we had a 10-minute discussion on the reading, with guiding questions on the agenda. Then, in the *Moving Practice* portion of Session 1, we focused on the following objectives:

- Identifying the Principal's Priorities (by school year, month, week)

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- Aligning the Principal's Priorities and related activities to the school's Mission (purpose) and Goals

Session 2 of the coaching cycles built upon the work of the first session with a reading from *Leverage Leadership* (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). This reading focused on intentionally planning the use of time during each school day to focus and protect priorities the Principal identified during Session 1. The Moving Practice section of Session 2 really focused on two key questions: How do you (Principal) defend/protect your priorities and time? How are administrative team members empowered to support your priorities in pursuit of the school's Mission and Goals? One of the outcomes of this discussion was that the Principal came to the realization that she needed to share leadership responsibilities with administrative team members. The other key outcome was that the Principal identified that her initial step into distributed leadership would be to retrain the Dean of Culture on his duties for student behavior support.

Session 3 was our final session together. This was an opportunity for the Principal and Assistant Principal to plan the retraining for the Dean of Culture. During this discussion on retraining on the Dean of Culture, I continued to pose questions that would intentionally move them toward shared understanding between the Principal and Dean of Culture through this process. We concluded Session 3 with the Principal eager to implement her plan for distributed leadership with the Dean of Culture. We met the following objectives during Session 3:

- Communicating to stakeholders alignment of Mission (purpose), Goals and Priorities
- Equipping administrative team members to share leadership responsibilities through distributed leadership.

I asked the Principal to video record her training with the Dean of Culture. Although she did not record her coaching session, I did ask the Principal during the post-intervention interview what she learned through her first formal attempt at distributed leadership.

Data Collection Plan: Overview

My goal for the data collection component of this intervention was to capture data that would provide both process data (to inform next steps in the intervention) and impact data, to measure expected change in the Principal's ability to prioritize the multiple demands of her

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job. The following structures and instruments were used to collect data throughout the intervention process. A more detailed summary of the Intervention and Data Collection Plan is seen in Table 2.

1. Coaching Conversations
2. Reflective Journals for participants and researcher
3. Pre-, Post-Intervention Interviews
4. Weekly Schedules for Principal & Assistant Principal
5. Principal-designed Materials for Retraining of Dean of Culture
6. Shadowing the Principal & Assistant Principal

Table 2: Intervention & Data Collection Plan

Date	Component	Activities	Purpose/Question to be answered	Data to be Collected	Type of Data (process v. impact)
March 25 @ 11 am	Pre-Intervention -Interview of Principal re: managing priorities & time	Video interview of Principal - Surfacing core values, beliefs, current practices re: managing priorities & time and instructional leadership	Establish baseline of Principal understanding: -What is the Principal's current understanding of principles of managing instructional priorities & time? -What was effective/ineffective about any past training on managing instructional priorities & time? -What obstacles are stopping the Principal from managing her instructional priorities & time?	-Video/Transcript of Principal interview -Researcher Reflective Journal -Principal Reflective Journal	Process (interview question responses inform steps forward)
May 3 @ 11 am	Coaching Session 1	Pre-reading: <i>Hyperactive Superficial Principal</i>	-Can building knowledge and skills for managing	-Plus/Delta survey at end of coaching session.	Process (responses inform steps forward)

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		<p><i>Syndrome (Kim Marshall);</i></p> <p><i>Priority Management for Principals (Kim Marshall)</i></p> <p>Coaching on: Coherence in Leadership: identify top 2-3 priorities aligned to Mission/Vision, Goals; develop monthly priorities list for May & weekly schedules of activities focused on priorities.</p>	<p>instructional priorities & time improve</p> <p>Principal's focus on the instructional program?</p> <p>-Will 3 coaching cycles be enough for the Principal to learn to manage instructional priorities & time?</p> <p>-What is the impact of having another person (Asst. Principal) join the Intervention?</p> <p>-What is the impact of feedback from AP & Dean of Culture on Principal's learning?</p>	<p>-Transcription/coded notes from video of coaching session</p> <p>-Researcher Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal's monthly priorities (task list) focused on instructional program priorities</p> <p>-Principal & AP weekly schedules/calendars of activities focused on instructional program</p>	<p>-Impact (evidence for comparison between baseline and post-intervention)</p>
<p>May 10 @ 11 am</p>	<p>Coaching Session 2</p>	<p>Pre-reading: <i>Leverage Leadership Chapter 8</i></p> <p>Coaching on: Protecting your Priorities; Defending your time</p>	<p>-Can building knowledge and skills for managing priorities & time improve Principal's focus on the instructional program?</p> <p>-Will 3 coaching cycles be enough for the Principal to learn to manage instructional priorities & time?</p> <p>-What is the impact of having another person (Asst. Principal) join the Intervention?</p> <p>-What is the impact of feedback from AP & Dean of Culture on Principal's learning?</p>	<p>-Plus/Delta survey at end of coaching session.</p> <p>-Transcription/coded notes from video of coaching session</p> <p>-Researcher Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal & AP's daily and weekly action plans (with separate buckets)</p> <p>-Principal's weekly schedule/calendar of activities focused on instructional program</p>	<p>Process (responses inform steps forward)</p> <p>-Impact (evidence for comparison between baseline and post-intervention)</p>

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<p>May 17 @ 11 am</p>	<p>Coaching Session 3</p>	<p>Coaching on: Empowering Staff Members to Protect Time/Priorities through Distributed Leadership & Shared Understanding</p>	<p>-Can building knowledge and skills for managing priorities & time improve Principal's focus on the instructional program?</p> <p>-Will 3 coaching cycles be enough for the Principal to learn to manage instructional priorities & time?</p> <p>-What is the impact of having another person (Asst. Principal) join the Intervention?</p> <p>-What is the impact of feedback from AP & Dean of Culture on Principal's learning?</p>	<p>-Plus/Delta survey at end of coaching session.</p> <p>-Transcription/coded notes from video of coaching session</p> <p>-Researcher Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal & AP-designed agenda for training dean of culture to support/protect principal's priorities & time: (<i>evidence of building shared understanding of priorities and actions to support priorities from agenda and video of training</i>)</p> <p>-Co-constructed (with Principal) weekly schedules for dean of culture and assistant principal to support/protect priorities & time</p> <p>-Principal's weekly schedule/calendar of activities focused on instructional program</p>	<p>Process (responses inform steps forward)</p> <p>-Impact (evidence for comparison between baseline and post-intervention)</p>
<p>May 25 @ 4:15 pm</p>	<p>Training of Dean of Culture</p>	<p>Researcher & Principal will analyze video of training of Dean of Culture</p>	<p>-Is there evidence of Empowering Staff Members to Protect Priorities/time through Distributed Leadership & Shared Understanding?</p> <p>-What is the impact of feedback from AP & Dean of Culture on</p>	<p>Video/Transcript/Coding of Principal interview</p> <p>-Researcher Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal Reflective Journal</p>	<p>Process (responses inform steps forward)</p> <p>-Impact (evidence for comparison between baseline and post-intervention)</p>

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<p>May 24 (AP), 25 (Principal)</p>	<p>Shadow Days</p>	<p>Researcher will Shadow Principal, AP & Dean of Culture each for 1 day (4-6 hours of shadowing for each participant; log use of time at 5-minute intervals with necessary questions by researcher to understand participant's decision making/rationale).</p>	<p>Principal's learning?</p> <p>-Is there evidence of Empowering Staff Members to Protect Priorities/time through Distributed Leadership & Shared Understanding?</p>	<p>-Shadowing Logs of Principal, AP & Dean's use of time on</p> <p>-Share results/feedback from shadowing with Principal</p>	<p>-Impact (evidence for distributed leadership and shared understanding of priorities)</p>
<p>May 31 @ 11 am</p>	<p>Post-Intervention -Interview of Principal re: managing priorities & time</p>	<p>Video interview of Principal</p> <p>- Identifying growth/change in beliefs, new practices re: managing priorities & time</p>	<p>- Compare with baseline for Principal understanding:</p> <p>-What is the Principal's new understanding of principles of managing priorities & time?</p> <p>-What was effective/ineffective about this training on managing priorities & time?</p> <p>-What was the impact of having another person (Asst. Principal) join the Intervention?</p> <p>-What was the impact of feedback from AP & Dean of Culture on Principal's learning?</p>	<p>- Video/Transcript/Coding of Principal interview</p> <p>-Researcher Reflective Journal</p> <p>-Principal Reflective Journal</p>	<p>Impact (compare with baseline from pre-intervention interview)</p> <p>Process</p>

Research Methods

The ultimate goal of this action research project was to help the OPC Principal build the knowledge and skills to prioritize the multiple demands of her job. This foundational step took precedence over the initial focus of the research, which was to support the Principal to meet the professional development needs of her teachers. This initial, teacher-centered outlook was based on a review of the school's 2015 CAASPP scores, teacher survey data, and 2014-15 performance evaluation results for teachers, the Instructional Coach and Principal, as well as an interview with the current Superintendent. However, initial interviews with the Principal and her previous Superintendent (who hired and supervised the Principal in her first year) strongly indicated that the Principal was overwhelmed by the multiple demands of her job. Throughout his action research project, one research question above all continued to guide my work: *"Can building knowledge and skills for prioritizing the multiple demands of her job re-establish the Principal's focus on meeting teachers' professional development needs?"* Addressing this research question was critically important as the St. HOPE organization, and other schools, have devoted countless hours and resources in the recruitment, hiring, and supervision of principals. These efforts have not yielded expected outcomes, as OPC has had 4 different principals over the last 5 years.

I collected several different types of data to address this critical research question: coaching sessions, reflective journal, pre- and post-intervention interviews, weekly schedules for the Principal and Assistant Principal, Principal-designed training for Dean of Culture, and Shadowing of the Principal. I video recorded each of the three coaching sessions. Then, I transcribed the dialog and Plus/Delta participant feedback from the recording of each session. Finally, I coded the transcribed notes from each coaching session and analyzed them for expected outcomes and any other relevant findings. I asked both the Principal and Assistant Principal to complete a reflective journal after each coaching session. Neither was able to complete this step. I was able to make notes in my own reflective journal. I conducted a pre-intervention interview with the Principal to inform the literature review and

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diagnose the Problem of Practice. I conducted a Post-Intervention Interview with both the Principal and Assistant Principal within two weeks of the final coaching session. I collected the weekly schedules for the Principal and Assistant Principal to compare number of hours spent (weekly) on self-identified Priorities and potential impact of distributed leadership. These schedules were collected pre- and post-intervention. I collected the meeting agenda and materials that the Principal used to retrain the Dean of Culture. This was the Principal's first formal attempt at distributed leadership. I coded these documents for evidence of elements of distributed leadership: alignment of the Dean's role/activities to the school's mission and goals for school culture, and building shared understanding to ensure role clarification. Finally, at the conclusion of the intervention coaching cycles, I spent a half-day shadowing the Principal. I noted which activity the Principal was engaged in every 5 minutes. The data collection form I used was adapted from a Stanford University study (Horng, Klasik, and Loeb, 2009) on principals' time use (see Appendix C). Then, I coded this time-use data to compare with the Principal's pre-intervention use of time to address the multiple demands of her job. The data points that were most indicative of the impact of this action research project were: transcribed meeting notes, plus/delta participant feedback at the end of each session, pre- and post-intervention interviews, and the Principal-designed retraining for the Dean of Culture.

Therefore, my first step in analyzing this data was actually to start with these qualitative sources. I analyzed the transcribed meeting notes from all 3 coaching sessions, plus/delta participant feedback at the end of each session, and pre- and post-intervention interviews. Additionally, I analyzed the Principal-designed agenda and materials for retraining the Dean of Culture. I started by creating basic categories of codes based on the collaborative practices detailed in my Theory of Action – Expected Outcomes (see Table 3). I then broke those categories down further in to more specific codes. Eventually, using more than 20 different codes, I reviewed and coded the transcribed meeting notes from all 3 coaching sessions, plus/delta participant feedback at the end of each session, and pre- and post-

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intervention interviews. Additionally, I coded the Principal-designed agenda and materials for retraining the Dean of Culture.

Table 3: Theory of Action - Expected Outcomes

Expected Change	Data Source	What Will This Data Tell Me?
<p>Principal will have an improved ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Communicate the alignment between school's Mission (purpose) and Goals to the weekly activities assigned to the OPC Operations Team members. +Prioritize each of the non-instructional demands of her job into categories based on intended role of Operations Team members. +Distribute leadership responsibilities for student behavior support to Dean of Culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Plus/Delta feedback from 3 coaching sessions +Pre- and Post-Intervention interviews with participants +Transcribed record of interviews and coaching sessions. +Researcher Reflective Journal +Principal-designed agenda and materials for retraining Dean of Culture +Principal & Assistant Principal weekly calendars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Process (responses inform steps forward) +Impact (evidence for comparison between baseline and post-intervention)
<p><i>Improved Understanding</i> of how to prioritize the multiple demands of Principal's job</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Plus/Delta feedback from 3 coaching sessions +Pre- and Post-Intervention interviews with participants +Transcribed record of interviews and coaching sessions. +Researcher Reflective Journal +Principal-designed agenda and materials for retraining Dean of Culture +Principal & Assistant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Impact (evidence for distributed leadership and shared understanding of priorities)

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	Principal weekly calendars	
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Once coded, I attempted to boil down the data from each instrument with a quantitative measure. I counted up the frequency and quantity of various codes found throughout the data set. I was able to compare the frequency of these codes appearing in the pre- and post-intervention interviews, coaching sessions, plus/delta feedback responses, and Principal-designed retraining materials. I compared pre- and post-intervention responses. I looked specifically for changes in the Principal's responses that would indicate an improved ability to utilize the elements of prioritizing the multiple demands of her job. Additionally, I decided to review the coded data for changes in the Principal's *understanding* of how to prioritize the multiple demands of her job.

Finally, I completed the process with a quantitative source. I counted the number of hours allocated in the Principal and Assistant Principal's weekly schedules that were spent on instructional program activities. I counted these weekly scheduled hours both pre-intervention and post-intervention to see if I could find any changes in hours devoted to instructional program activities, which would indicate an ability to prioritize the multiple demands of the Principal's job.

Analysis & Findings

This action research project examined the impact of an intervention designed to build a Principal's capacity to prioritize the multiple demands of her job. I analyzed the data sources described above in search of change in the Principal's ability and awareness in utilizing three agreed upon elements in prioritizing the multiple demands of her job: communicating the alignment between the school's Mission (purpose) and Goals to the weekly activities assigned to the OPC Operations Team members; prioritize each of the non-instructional demands of her job into categories based on intended role of Operations Team members; distribute leadership

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responsibilities for student behavior support to the Dean of Culture.

Following trends in the data, I also looked at the following related issue: whether the Principal demonstrated improved understanding of distributed leadership and building shared understanding. From this analysis, I derived the following findings:

1. The structure of the intervention provided the Principal a setting that supported her learning.
2. Participant input is necessary to the content and delivery of on-the-job Principal support.
3. Identification and narrowing of the Principal knowing-doing gap is possible through distributed leadership.
4. Coaching Principals on building shared understanding is a key factor in starting distributed leadership efforts.

In this section, I will briefly summarize each of my findings and share data to support these conclusions.

Structure of the intervention

My goal for the intervention was focused on taking a foundational step with this school leader: Prioritizing the multiple demands of the principal's job. This intervention was designed to help clear a path for the Principal to establish an instructional program focus and more consistently utilize her time to meet the PD needs of her teachers. Three elements of the intervention appeared to provide a structure to support the learning for the Principal:

1. The small-group structure of the intervention seemed to build collegiality and focus the collaboration in a short amount of time. This was also important due to the short-term nature of the intervention. The Principal spoke directly to the impact of the small-group structure during the post-intervention interview. "Most of my time in trainings has been with several other (administrators) from different school sites. Being able to work with two other people, and focused on my school, sped up my ability to trust this group and kept my interest. This gave me the courage to share much more than usual."

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2. The use of blended coaching strategies (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005) allowed the intervention to take into account the emotional and professional development needs of the Principal. The flexible use of coaching stances (instructional, collaborative and facilitative) seemed to engage and focus the Principal during the coaching sessions. The effectiveness of this coaching strategy was highlighted by the Principal during our post-intervention interview. “In particular, I really liked how (researcher) would paraphrase what I shared in response to one of the focus questions on the agenda. That made me feel that you were really listening to my ideas. I think this (coaching strategy) has been any eye-opener for me. Usually, I am so caught up in my day-to-day, I’ve been delegating duties to my Operations Team, but not really starting off with a focus on shared understanding. I haven’t taken the time to really listen and understand what my Operations Team members have to say so I can build on their skills.”
3. The development of agreed-upon norms for how the participants and I would interact with one another during our coaching sessions was another key structural feature. In particular, the norm of confidentiality was noted by the Principal as being most important to her participation in the intervention. “I think a big change for me from other trainings or PD was that we agreed to norms, especially confidentiality. That put me at ease to really share openly. I hadn’t paid much attention to creating norms like confidentiality. That’s going to be key for my Operations Team meetings and retraining (the Dean of Culture). Otherwise, I am just guessing about what they need to do their job, instead of sharing what they are thinking, feeling?”

The data from the transcribed notes of the pre- and post-intervention interviews and coaching sessions confirm that the structure of the intervention provided the Principal a setting for support and learning. These conditions helped the Principal to gradually embrace the interaction and share more openly about her challenges with prioritizing the multiple demands of her job. During the pre-intervention interview, the Principal appeared guarded and was brief in her responses, as in the following exchange:

Researcher: “Describe any challenges that get in the way of your instructional leadership duties?”

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Principal: “There aren’t really any challenges. I used to get frustrated last year when I couldn’t keep my schedule. This year is much better.”

During the second coaching session, I asked the Principal to share how she not only schedules her time based on priorities, but how she defends her time against distractions. This time, her response shows a willingness to share openly about her struggles.

Principal: “I’ve gone through the whole process of blocking out time for culture, group meetings, teacher leader meetings, observations, check-in meetings, and big projects. These are things I blocked off at the very beginning of the school year and built my schedule. So, I’ve been doing all these things. Then, little things get in the way, and we don’t have those meetings as (pauses to respond to radio call from Dean of Culture about a student out of class)...as regularly. See, I can’t even finish a sentence (laughs out loud)! So, these things get in the way. Some days or weeks, I’m really good (at sticking to a schedule). Other weeks, I catch myself like, ‘Oh, my gosh! It’s been three weeks, and I haven’t met with my Operations Team!’”

This evidence of change in the Principal’s willingness to gradually engage more deeply in the conversations and activities supports my finding that the structure of the intervention (small-group, blended coaching strategies, and establishing norms for confidentiality) provided the Principal a setting that supported her learning. Equally important was the evidence that the Principal gained an understanding of how important these structures will be to her own efforts in coaching her Operations Team members.

Participant input is necessary for on-the-job Principal support.

During the literature review, I encountered a key idea that informed my intervention design: Schein’s principles of helping people embrace and maintain change. This concept was a driving force to ensure that the Principal will not simply follow the steps in the intervention plan for the duration of the coaching cycles. Schein (2004) writes, “We sometimes can learn things through imitation that do not really fit into our personality or our ongoing relationships. Once we are on our own and the role models are no longer available, we often revert to our old behavior. If we want to learn things that really fit into our personality, then we must learn to scan our environment and develop our own solutions.” Therefore, the content for each coaching session was planned with input from the Principal. This feature of the intervention

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helped me to develop focus questions for each session to surface and examine the Principal's own thinking to encourage deeper learning. These focus questions were written on the actual agenda and shared with the Principal at least 24 hours in advance of each coaching session. I also engaged the Principal and Assistant Principal during the Closure section of each coaching session through plus/delta feedback responses.

In the second coaching session, the Principal prioritized each of the non-instructional demands of her job into categories based on the intended role of Operations Team members. The Principal then engaged deeply in a discussion on how to distribute leadership responsibilities for student behavior support to the Dean of Culture.

Researcher: "How are your team members empowered to support your priorities in pursuit of your mission and goals? Your person who sits at the front desk? The Dean of Culture? Anyone else that you have that you think can really be a key player in helping you have that balance so it becomes less happenstance and more intentional?"

Principal: "Let's start with (the Dean of Culture)."

Researcher: "What is his role? Does he have the same understanding of his role that you have?"

This intentional and continuous input from the Principal helped shape the focus of the intervention to meet her needs, and simultaneously formed the Principal's own understanding and application of distributed leadership. This was evident at the end of the second session from the Principal's plus/delta feedback: "So, what worked well for me was having a visual of what our priorities look like, charting and mapping them out on paper so we could visually continue to see them, although they still tie into the overall school goals. *Then, the distribution of tasks to the Ops Team.* That conversation was powerful."

This evidence shows the change in the Principal's understanding of the importance and process of distributed leadership in prioritizing the non-instructional demands of her job. This evidence also supports my finding that participant input is necessary to on-the-job Principal support that fits the personality and needs of participants, and not simply learning through imitation.

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Recognition and narrowing of the Principal knowing-doing gap is possible.

Data from the intervention reveal that the Principal was able to improve both her ability and understanding of how to prioritize the multiple demands of her job. A pre- and post-intervention comparison of the Principal's weekly schedule is a strong indicator of the impact this brief intervention had on narrowing the knowing-doing gap.

In the pre-intervention phase, the Principal's calendar showed that she spent, on average, approximately 7.5 hours per week on her instructional leadership duties (observation and feedback sessions, group meetings with teachers, and planning for professional development events). The post-intervention review of the Principal's calendar revealed that she was scheduled to spend approximately 15 hours per week (about 33% of her time on campus) engaged in instructional leadership duties. To triangulate this data, at the conclusion of the intervention coaching cycles, I spent a half-day shadowing the Principal. I noted which activity the Principal was engaged in every 5 minutes. The data collection form I used was adapted from a Stanford University study (Horng, Klasik, and Loeb, 2009) on principals' time use (see Appendix C). The shadowing activity yielded the following results in the Principal's time use during my half-day (4.5 hours total) of shadowing:

- (1.5 hours) Administration: Special Ed meeting
- (1 hour) Organization Management: school budget meeting
- (1.25 hours) Instructional Leadership: evaluating teachers, informal classroom visits
- (.75 hours) Relationships: interacting socially with staff, students; communicating with parents during lunch supervision.

The data from the shadowing activity also supports that there is an increased amount of time that the Principal has spent on instructional leadership (22%) in comparison to pre-intervention data (15%). Thus, this time-use data provides evidence of closing the Principal's knowing-doing gap. It is noteworthy that the Principal spent no time while I shadowed her on student behavior management. This was a major focus area during the intervention for the Principal to empower the Dean of Culture to carry out the duties related to student behavior through distributed leadership. The Principal spoke to this change in her schedule during our post-intervention interview.

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“Since the retraining of the Dean of Culture, I’ve been able to focus on doing more with my teachers, like classroom visits and evaluations. I didn’t know how to get here, but I know now I need to empower my team, especially with non-instructional priorities. Otherwise, this job is overwhelming and pretty much impossible!”

A key factor that served as a catalyst for the Principal’s change in use of her time was helping her come to the realization of the misalignment between her actual daily activities and the school’s mission, goals, and her priorities. Equally important, and related, was the Principal’s recognition that she was overwhelming herself with responsibilities by underutilizing her Operations Team members. I used Schein’s process for motivating change (“unfreezing”) to help the Principal see this disconnect. Schein (2004) describes the concept of unfreezing as composed of three processes: 1. enough disconfirming data to cause serious discomfort and disequilibrium; 2. the connection of the disconfirming data to important goals and ideals, causing anxiety and/or guilt; and 3. enough psychological safety to solve the problem and learning something new without loss of identity or integrity.

During the first coaching session, I set the stage for introducing disconfirming data through focus questions for the Principal and Assistant Principal to share their top priorities, school-wide goals, and the mission of the school. Then, I posed the following question to surface a potential misalignment: “So, let’s look at your calendars. If those are your mission, goals and priorities... what in your schedule reflects the activities that are helping you achieve these goals and adhere to these priorities?”

As she recognized this misalignment, the Principal began to articulate that she was holding onto non-instructional duties that should be held by her Operations Team members. This conversation also helped the Principal recognize her need for training on how to distribute leadership with her Operations Team members. Thus, training on distributed leadership became the focus for coaching session 2.

This evidence shows how disconfirming data played a key role in the Principal’s recognition that she needed training on how to distribute leadership to meet the multiple demands of her job. This evidence also supports my finding that narrowing of the Principal knowing-doing gap is possible through training on distributed leadership.

Coaching Principals on building shared understanding is a key factor in distributed leadership efforts.

Understanding how to utilize distributed leadership was an essential component of the intervention to help the Principal prioritize and meet the multiple demands of her job. Critical to distributed leadership is the ability of a school leader to co-construct shared understanding with and among those whom the principal is sharing the leadership work. As stated earlier in the Literature Review, simple delegation of tasks or dividing responsibilities according to role is not distributed leadership. Each member of the leadership team should have an opportunity to contribute to the development of a shared understanding with the Principal of their respective role.

The need for training for the Principal on distributed leadership and shared understanding came out organically during the pre-intervention interview and first coaching cycle. The Principal shared, “Well, one thing that I have been working on personally is delegating. There is no way one person can do it all. So, I’ll be honest. I struggle with delegation, simply because I’m used to doing things, gettin’ it done, and get it done right, not having to go back and do it over because it wasn’t right the first time.”

Therefore, as we focused on defending the Principal’s priorities in coaching session 2, a key factor was taking the conversation beyond distributed leadership to building shared understanding:

Researcher: “How are your team members empowered to support your priorities in pursuit of your mission and goals? Your person who sits at the front desk? The Dean of Culture? Anyone else that you have that you think can really be a key player in helping you have that balance so it becomes less happenstance and more intentional?”

Principal: “We don’t have a lot of people?”

Researcher: “Tell me who you do have? Whom do you want to start with?”

Principal: “Let’s start with (the Dean of Culture).”

Researcher: “What is his role? Does he have the same understanding of his role that you have?”

Principal: “Yes, he’s the Dean of Culture.”

Researcher: “Tell me more.”

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After the Principal described the various aspects of the Dean's role, especially his role in providing student behavior support, I pushed the Principal's thinking by sharing disconfirming data from the previous week.

Researcher: "So, last week, I came to shadow you. You were in the midst of preparing for an expulsion hearing, and weren't able to get into any classrooms during the time I was shadowing. Was the Dean able to be a part of giving you information for that process?"

Principal: "He was supposed to, he just didn't. We had multiple conversations."

Researcher: "What do you think would help the Dean to be more consistent or be able to carry out those duties you described? We know the research on adult learning tells us, we don't want to make assumptions. We have to be sure that whatever your vision is for the role, you have the same shared understanding with the Dean. His activities, like yours, have to align to the school mission, goals and your priorities. Then, you have to do this repeatedly. Listening to him. Give him a safe space to share questions or needs. What might that look like if you actually "re-train" the Dean?"

Principal: "I see it as (Assistant Principal) and I figuring out our understanding (of the Dean's role) and making sure that we're on the same page. Then, we bring in the Dean, making sure he's on the same page."

Through coaching session 2, I continued to intentionally move the Principal toward building shared understanding with the Dean of Culture. We then used coaching session 3 to help her plan the initial agenda for retraining the Dean of Culture. I asked the Principal during the post-intervention interview about her gains in understanding and ability to build shared understanding:

"I wish I had learned when I first got into this job how to build shared understanding. I've been pretty much simply assigning a role or duty to staff members. I think (building shared understanding) is a lot like teaching a lesson to students in the classroom. You don't just tell kids to go solve a math problem: you set goals for the year, write objectives, model, guided practice, independent practice, and checking for understanding all throughout. I need to guide my staff member all through the steps of training, implementation, monitoring or assessing,

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and making adjustments. Whatever I'm asking them to do, I've got to make sure we both know how it relates to our school goals, too. If I'm that intentional and supportive, that's going to take away their uncertainty and fear of making mistakes, because they know they can come back to me to ask questions or get help. It's also building my trust in them to be able to share duties that I've been holding on to, like student behavior management. It's like a whole new outlook on leadership!"

I also collected the meeting agenda and materials that the Principal used to retrain the Dean of Culture. Notable on the agenda was the Principal's plan to build shared understanding with the Dean of Culture on school goals for a safe and respectful environment, as well as specific student behavior management processes. The Principal also built in time on the agenda and established norms for the Dean to share any questions or concerns for how his duties with student behavior management support school-wide goals. The evidence from coaching session transcripts, the retraining of the Dean of Culture, and the post-intervention interviews demonstrate the Principal's increasing understanding of the importance of shared understanding to distributed leadership efforts. This evidence also supports my finding that coaching principals on building shared understanding is a key factor in distributed leadership efforts. Again, a key factor in this outcome was the use of disconfirming data (use of time, misalignment with the Dean's role) help the Principal realize that she needed to be trained on building shared understanding in her first attempt at distributed leadership.

Implications for Broader Educational Community

The overarching goal of this action research project was to build the capacity of a Principal to prioritize the multiple demands of her job. I derived the following implications from the findings of this action research project:

Human Resources Leaders, Supervisors & Evaluators of Principals

Those who hire, supervise and evaluate principals must look deeply at how we can train and support principals on distributed leadership practices. This approach of sharing leadership shows great potential for potential for reducing the isolation and attrition that is surrounds the principal position in schools across the nation. It is also clear that principals need professional development and coaching. This action research project has found evidence that on-the-job coaching tailored to the needs of the principal offers great hope in narrowing the principal knowing-doing gap. Furthermore, this action research project has underscored the critical nature of shared understanding between a principal and staff members in the context of distributed leadership. This same approach to building shared understanding must be at the core of the relationship between principals and their supervisors and evaluators.

Final Conclusions

This action research project has demonstrated that on-the-job coaching for training on distributed leadership and shared understanding helped close the knowing-doing gap for a K-5 Principal. One catalyst in the change in the Principal's actions was coaching on the strategic re-alignment of the school's mission and goals to the Principal's priorities and day-to-day actions. Another catalyst was the use of disconfirming data (use of time) from the Principal's weekly schedule and focus questions that guided the Principal's learning about distributed leadership and building shared understanding.

Limitations of the Intervention

One major limitation of this project was that the intervention began near the end of the school year. Even though the intervention data shows that the Principal

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demonstrated growth in understanding and ability in distributed leadership, I am left wondering how much greater the impact could have been on the problem of practice had the intervention started earlier, perhaps near the mid-point of the school year.

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Appendices