

Foreword

During a break at a conference for educational leaders I attended a few years ago, I was chatting with a colleague who taught a course on instructional leadership. One of her former graduate students, now a school principal, stopped to say hello. Within a few moments the conversation turned to the coursework the former student had taken during his graduate program: “I really enjoyed your course on instructional leadership,” he said to my colleague, a professor with a reputation as an outstanding teacher. “I don’t get much of a chance to use instructional leadership in the real world,” he continued with a smile, “because I’m too busy with all of the day-to-day responsibilities of being a principal.” My colleague’s only response was nonverbal, somewhere between a smile and a grimace. As I listened to this conversation, I reflected on the fact that many school administrators had expressed the same notion to me; for these principals, instructional leadership, like solar energy, is an interesting concept but a low priority. They *wish* that they had more time to devote to it. But the “real world” of the principalship that they describe—a world of discipline referrals, parental complaints, and bureaucratic paperwork—leaves little room, they believe, for any instructional leadership beyond the traditional teacher evaluation process that they carry out once or twice a year. I have heard so many administrators state this belief that I refer to it as part of the “conventional wisdom” of traditional school principals.

In this second edition of the *Handbook of Instructional Leadership*, Blase and Blase prove that conventional wisdom concerning the principal and instructional leadership is utterly wrong. Put positively, the research reported on the following pages proves convincingly that successful principals are, first and foremost, successful

instructional leaders. Based on the comprehensive description of how instructional supervision is actually practiced and how it affects teachers, the Blases provide strong support for the general premise that “facilitative, supportive actions by principals as instructional leaders have powerful effects on classroom instruction,” as well as the specific premise that “spoken language has a powerful impact on teachers’ instructional behavior.”

The Blases’ research shows successful instructional supervision to have such positive impacts on teaching and learning (and ineffective or nonexistent instructional supervision to have such negative impacts) that no one who reads this book will be able to justify the relegation of instructional leadership to the margins of educational administration. I have always believed that one reason many principals attend poorly or not at all to their instructional leadership responsibilities is that they lack information concerning exactly *how* one provides effective instructional supervision. The Blases’ detailed descriptions of the behaviors of good instructional leaders, contrasted with equally detailed descriptions of ineffective behaviors, provide the data-based knowledge that principals need to develop or enhance their own instructional supervision.

Whether describing the successful principal’s role in instructional conferences, staff development, and teacher reflection or the principal’s use of visibility, praise, and autonomy, the authors provide data-based descriptions of the goals that principals have when they use particular instructional leadership strategies, specific examples of those strategies, and specific impacts the strategies have on teachers. For each area of instructional leadership addressed in the book, summaries of research results serve as the skeleton, and extensive quotes from teachers who participated in the study flesh out the research findings. This second edition updates the knowledge based on successful instructional leadership (five instructional conference strategies, six ways principals support the study of teaching, six principal behaviors that foster teacher reflection, and so on), and adds a comprehensive new chapter on developing professional learning communities. The Blases’ rich descriptions of principals’ motives, behaviors, and impacts, combined with revealing quotes from teachers, bring to life for the reader such concepts as *inquiry*, *reflection*, *collaboration*, *empowerment*, and *professional learning community*. They enable the reader to encounter the spirit of schools

where these ideas have become a reality. In the same vein, the authors' findings, including the results of a new study on abusive principals, provide a distressing view of the negative impact on teachers from principals' failure to effectively facilitate instructional conferences, staff development, and teacher reflection; in such cases, interruption, abandonment, criticism, and authoritarian control abound. Indeed, the contrast of successful and ineffective behaviors is so stark, so compelling that the reader is left with a sense of urgency, with a conviction that the findings reported here need to be disseminated as soon as possible to inservice and preservice principals, central office administrators, policymakers, and professors of educational administration!

Another feature of this book that I appreciate is the way that Blase and Blase integrate their research findings with existing literature from a variety of related areas of study including models of teaching, adult development, critical theory, organizational theory, the change process, and leadership theory. By emphasizing the *interaction and interdependence* of all of these areas with instructional leadership and professional learning communities, the Blases are laying the foundations for a *comprehensive approach* to school reform, with instructional leadership as the integrative sine qua non of school improvement.

At the beginning of this foreword I told the story of the principal who didn't have much time for instructional leadership because he was too busy with "the day-to-day responsibilities of being a principal." If I see that principal again, I plan to recommend that he read this book. At the very least it will offer him a "real world" radically different from the real world in which he currently operates, a world in which instructional leadership is the principal's most important function, and in which *successful* instructional leadership has an enormously positive impact on teachers and teaching. The research presented in this book just might change that principal's view of what the principalship is all about.

In closing, I believe it is important to point out to readers not yet familiar with the authors that this second edition of the *Handbook of Instructional Leadership* represents the latest publication in an impressive, thematic *body of work* developed by the authors, sometimes writing together, sometimes as individual authors, and other times with other coauthors. The Blases' work has focused on the related

topics of the work-lives of teachers, supervision, instructional leadership, micropolitics in schools, teacher empowerment, and shared school governance and schools as professional learning communities. This work, then, can be viewed as an important piece of a larger whole the authors have been developing for some time now. They are to be commended for both this exceptional book and their overall contribution to the field of educational leadership.

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