

Introduction

There is little doubt that the principal's role in a school is pivotal to all that a school represents to teachers, students, and parents (Allington & Cunningham, 2002; Booth & Rowsell, 2002; Fullan, 2003; Whittaker, 2003). An effective principal understands the dynamics of the school and facilitates the development of a successful learning community where teachers interact with each other and all of the students have an opportunity for academic and social success. The books in this series complement each other and serve as guidance to school principals, both new and experienced, to achieve this goal.

It is important to note that the principal's role is diverse, requiring skills and knowledge in many areas. The principal needs to be knowledgeable of education legislation and how it plays out in local school district policy and procedure. The principal is charged with ensuring that not only is legislation on curricula satisfied but that legislation dealing in many other areas such as inclusion, safety, family, and children's issues; criminal acts; and information meet with compliance. In short, the principal is accountable for all that transpires in the school. On a managerial level, the required tasks can surely be accomplished; however, a school is about more than rules, regulations, and compliance. It is also about people; so, effective interpersonal skills are crucial for a principal to work successfully with staff, parents, and community. Encouraging and helping everyone strive to meet their potential as contributors to learning and the school can be a daunting task. Balancing managerial and interpersonal aspects of a school while maintaining a positive, productive learning environment is challenging.

An understanding of curriculum and teaching strategies needs to be within the principal's knowledge/skill set. For literacy, a working knowledge of the language curriculum, learning/teaching strategies, and literacy developmental stages is essential. The principal must also have the skills and tools to monitor the school in order to determine if curricula are being adhered to, that effective instruction is occurring, and that student achievement is optimal. Finally, the principal must have the skills to effectively initiate change in literacy instruction where it is needed. It is to this end that this book is dedicated.

The book was written as a practical guide for principals to use as they work toward improving literacy instruction in the school and, as a result, student achievement in literacy.

Although titled *The Principal as Instructional Leader in Literacy*, the contents can be successfully used by other leaders in the school working to improve literacy instruction. Literacy lead teachers, coaches, and study groups, to name a few, will all find the suggestions a practical way to implement change. Many staff development activities, observation guides, and organizational tools are presented in the figures, ready for use at staff meetings, staff development events, and professional learning community meetings.

To begin, the definition for literacy on which the content of the book is based will be established. Because there are many varied definitions, it is important to ensure that consistency of terms is determined. As a clear definition brings meaning to the book, it is also required within a school community to maintain uniformity. One of the first tasks to be accomplished as schools move toward more effective instruction in literacy is to discuss and establish common understandings and definitions of literacy.

The historic background of the current approach to literacy instruction follows. This synopsis would be useful when working with staff to help them understand and appreciate why they may be directed to alter their current practices from those they are most familiar with and comfortable applying. In essence, they may see that what they are currently doing, although effective, can be improved on in the spirit of ongoing professional growth that leads to increased student achievement.

The foundations of literacy are explained within the commonly used balanced literacy framework. Since the model bridges a number of delivery models, staff will see that they are not being

asked to completely alter the program and many of their resources and strategies will still be valid. The importance of honoring the professionalism of teachers and their ability to adapt present materials while applying a variety of teaching strategies is paramount to the success of school growth.

Another important consideration currently at the forefront of instructional improvement, differentiated instruction, is examined. Again, establishing a common understanding and methods of differentiation within a school will be valuable to future growth.

The text then leads into instructional leadership, the role of the principal. This role comes quite naturally to some principals and can be quite challenging for others. The need for excellence in instructional leadership, however, is of utmost importance to the advances made in instruction and, subsequently, student success.

Having a good understanding of balanced literacy, differentiated instruction, and instructional leadership will give you the background knowledge to help you determine how you may want to use the strategies suggested throughout the book as you work with your staff from the planning stage of a school literacy plan to implementation, employing effective strategies of shared leadership. Please note that you will want to adjust some of the terminology of the content to match your school district's vernacular and initiatives in order to make your efforts with your school community comprehensible and meaningful.

Additionally, to help you deepen your understanding of contents of the topics covered, a list of suggested reading is found in the "Must Read" section at the end of the book.