

*Paper presented at the Hong Kong Principals' Conference,  
Hong Kong, March 2010*

**Leadership for Learning:  
What We Have Learned from 30 Years of Empirical Research**

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a research-based model of leadership for learning. It offers the argument that the field has made substantial progress over the past 30 years in identifying ways in which leadership contributes to learning and school improvement. Six specific approaches that principals must attend to in leading for learning are presented: values and beliefs, vision and goals, leadership focus, capacity building, contexts for leadership, sharing leadership. Evidence is employed from several recent empirical studies to support this premise. While the author argues that progress has been made, limitations especially with respect to linking leadership practice to different contexts are noted.

Of the seven major task areas for which principals have responsibility, curriculum and instruction has generated the most sound and fury. On the one hand, the principal has been exhorted to exert instructional leadership, while on the other hand, he has been told flatly that such a role is beyond his or any other human being's capacity. The problem with these disputations is that the exponents of a given position have neither defined sharply what is signified by the concept of instructional leadership nor made their assumptions explicit. (Bridges, 1967)

Bridges' assertions about instructional leadership in 1967 continued to ring true 15 years later at the dawn of the effective schools era (Edmonds, 1979; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982). This research had identified 'strong instructional leadership from the principal' as a hallmark of effective urban elementary schools in the United States. While this finding found a ready reception among American policymakers, it was in fact, only a by-product of the effective schools research and there continued to be considerable ambiguity concerning both the nature of this role and its contribution to school improvement (Bossert et al., 1982; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Moreover, in a reprise of Bridges' earlier assertion, respected critics continued to question the extent to which instructional leadership represented a viable model that could be applied broadly to the principalship (Barth, 1986; Cuban, 1984).

During subsequent decades researchers took up the challenge of studying not only instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2008; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Heck, Larson & Marcoulides, 1990; Kleine-Kracht, 1993; Leitner, 1994; Wiley, 2001), but also competing models such as transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, 2000; Silins, 1994), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006), and shared leadership (Barth, 1990; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995). This body of research has sought not only to define these constructs, but also to

examine if and how leadership impacts students learning (Bell, Bolam, & Cubillo, 2003; Cheng, 1994; Day, Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkins, Harris, Gu, & Brown, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, In press; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Mulford & Silins, 2003, 2009; Robinson et al., 2008; Southworth, 2002; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). The fervor of debates over which model offers the greatest leverage for understanding how school leaders contribute to learning has reduced in recent years. Empirical results across a large number of studies have begun to show fairly consistent patterns of impact, and today, the term ‘leadership for learning’ has come to subsume features of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and shared leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; MacBeath & Cheng, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003; Mulford & Silins, 2009). This is the term that will be used for the leadership model employed in this paper.

Forty years after Bridges’ analysis, scholars have concluded that this body of empirical research, while still in need of further development, offers a sounder foundation for the practice of learning for learning. This paper will examine the progress that has been made in understanding how school leaders make a difference in school improvement and contribute to student learning. More specifically, the paper asks: “What have we learned over the past 30 to 40 years about ‘leadership for learning’ that can provide a guide for leadership practice in schools?” The paper draws eclectically upon a wide range of conceptual and empirical reports that have contributed to this field. We begin with a brief presentation of the perspective that we take towards leadership for learning. This is followed by the body of the paper which examines six key dimensions of leadership for learning.

### **Perspective on Leadership for Learning**

As suggested above, leadership for learning describes approaches used by school leaders to impact a range of important school outcomes with a particular focus on student learning (Day et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006, in press; MacBeath & Cheng, 2008; Mulford & Silins, 2003, 2009). The model of leadership for learning portrayed in Figure 1 is a synthesis of conceptualizations proposed by various researchers inside and outside of education over the past several decades (e.g., Bass, 1990; Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006, in press; Pitner, 1988). We provide a brief foreshadowing of this model here, and elaborate further in the body of the paper.

Insert Figure 1 about here

First, this model highlights the fact that leadership is enacted within an organizational and environmental context. The school is part of an ‘open system’ that consists not only of its community, but also the institutional system and social culture in which it operates (Mulford, 2009). Second, leadership is shaped by characteristics of the leaders themselves; personal values, beliefs, knowledge, and experience. These contextual features and personal attributes ‘moderate’ or shape the behavior of school leaders as they work to improve their schools. Third, the figure suggests that leadership does not directly impact student learning; rather its impact is mediated by school-level conditions and processes. The double-headed arrows in Figure 1 further suggest the possibility that school leadership both influences and is influenced by these school-level conditions. Finally, we note that in this conceptualization leadership is directed explicitly towards the improvement of student outcomes, and particularly learning.

This model provides a wide-angle lens for viewing the contribution of leadership to school improvement and student learning. In the following section, we will adjust this lens to focus in finer detail on features of leadership for learning that we assert are supported by empirical research. To aid in this task, we will draw broadly upon the leadership for learning literature that has accumulated over the past three to four decades. In addition, we will also focus more specifically on a small set of recent studies completed in the past several years that we believe have given this field a major boost forward (Day et al., 2010, Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2009, in press; Leithwood et al., 2010, in press; Robinson et al., 2008).

### **Leadership for Learning**

This section will discuss six dimensions subsumed within this model of leadership for learning. They include values and beliefs, vision and goals, leadership focus, building capacity for school improvement, context for leadership, sharing leadership.

#### **Values and Beliefs**

The leadership model portrayed in Figure 1 is a values-based leadership framework. In the words of McCrimmon (2004):

I refer to Kouzes and Posner's theory as values leadership, because asking people to undertake a risky journey with you depends on your credibility, as they rightly argue, which in turn depends on what you stand for as a person – your values. Moreover, the changes advocated by such leaders generally entail a shift in cultural or personal values.  
(p. 1)

Our proposed model of leadership for learning shares a similar normative assumption. Indeed, the model conceptualizes leadership as explicitly aimed at the improvement of student learning (i.e., the model presumes a specific thrust that *should* be the aim or goal) Moreover, it

also highlights the role of values in shaping leadership. Values define both the ends towards which leaders aspire as well as the desirable means by which they will work to achieve them.

A decade ago, Ronald Wolk (2000), the founder of *Education Week* stated, “What we need more than anything else today are principals who are asking hard questions about what it is we want from our schools, what it is we want from our students and how we get it.” When he said, ‘what we want from our schools and students, Wolk was referring the principal’s role in defining and prioritizing the school’s ‘terminal values’ (e.g., learning growth, academic achievement, social development, virtue, community service, equity in learning etc.). ‘How we get it’ refers to the ‘instrumental values’ that leaders manifest and nurture in working to achieve their goals (e.g., self-discipline, integrity, fairness, caring, mutual respect, risk taking, interdependence etc.). Every school has a mix of values that shape day-today behavior, though in many cases people may be largely unaware of what those values even are until they are violated (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Saphier & King, 1985).

This perspective is not meant to suggest that principals ‘dictate’ the values that guide the school. Indeed new principals must begin by taking the time to understand the values that already predominate in the school culture and the extent to which they are creating a healthy productive learning culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Saphier & King, 1985). Principals may choose to subtly or, at their own risk, dramatically introduce changes into the value mix of the school. Dramatic changes in core values are, however, generally reserved for crisis or turnaround situations.

Principals also act as ‘gatekeepers’ monitoring and managing the introduction of new values are introduced into the school. Despite the rhetoric of educational change, schools and their predominant value structures always lag behind the rate of change taking place outside the

schoolhouse doors. Tyack and Hansot (1982) referred to the schoolhouse as the “community’s museum of virtue.” This highlights the school’s role in cultural transmission, a function primarily concerned with maintaining continuity and stability in socio-cultural values and traditions. This casts the principal in the role of *curator* of the museum of virtue role that entails keeping societal values intact and in order. This explains why it takes so long to implement innovations such as student centered learning that involve a fundamental change in core values from those that described the upbringing of the school’s teachers and the children’s parents.

Saphier and King (1985) highlighted this role of the principal as values leader, stating that principals are responsible for ‘protecting what’s important.’ Implicitly, ‘what’s important’ refers to the school’s values. The principal acts in this role through decisions made on a day-to-day basis concerning resource allocation, staffing, problem finding and problem resolution. It can involve taking a stand on a program that the school will and will not adopt, or on what is defined as acceptable behavior of a student or teacher, or how instructional time will or will not be used.

Values play an instrumental role in the principal’s decision making in another way. Research conducted by Leithwood and colleagues (e.g., Leithwood & Stager, 1989) found that expert principals tend to have a high degree of clarity about their own personal values. They use their values as a ‘substitute for information’ when solving problems in ambiguous and information poor situations. In sum, values both shape the thinking and actions of leaders and represent a potentially useful tool for working with and strengthening the school’s learning culture.



Beliefs and expectations also shape the thinking and actions of leaders. The impact of beliefs on behavior was illustrated vividly in studies that demonstrated how teacher expectations influence teacher behavior and student learning (Jussim, & Harber, 2005; Rosenthal, & Jacobson, 1992). Similar findings surfaced in studies of instructionally effective schools where educators appeared to manifest a different set of beliefs about the potential of their students.

These findings highlighted the importance of maintaining high expectations for all children, and became codified in the normative statement that ‘all children can learn’ (Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Beliefs such as these implicitly shape the approach that principals take towards decision making, resource allocation, curriculum organization, teaching and learning in the school. Research finds that schools in which such beliefs are strongly supported tend to create an academic press consisting of structures and processes that challenge and support learning and growth for all students (Edmonds, 1979; Mortimore, 1993; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982; Oakes, 2005; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979).

### **Leading Through Vision and Goals**

In a synthesis of the school leadership effects research conducted during the 1990s, Hallinger and Heck (1996) identified vision and goals as the most significant avenue through which school leaders impact learning. More recently, using meta-analysis, Robinson and colleagues (2008) refined this conclusion, placing vision and goals as the second most significant means by which principals contribute to improved learning in classrooms (see Figure 5). Vision refers to a broad picture of the direction in which the school seeks to move (e.g., Educating the

whole child). In contrast, goals refer to the specific targets that need to be achieved on the journey towards that vision.

Vision and goals achieve their impact through two primary means (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). First they inspire people to contribute, even sacrifice, their effort towards the achievement of a collective goal. This motivational power of vision is highlighted in the theory of transformational leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Leithwood, 1994). Through joining a collective effort to reach a challenging but *meaningful* goal, people may come to realize new aspirations and achieve higher levels of performance. Goals also impact performance by limiting staff attention to a more narrow range of desired ends and scope of activities. Clearly defined goals provide a basis for making decisions on staffing, resource allocation, and program adoption. They help to clarify what we will do and what we will not do.

It should be noted that the early research on effective schools identified a ‘clear academic vision and mission’ as a hallmark of these schools (Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Subsequent research, however, found important differences across effective schools that appeared to be related to their social context. For example, Hallinger and Murphy (1986) found that effective schools in high SES contexts with a history of success appeared to operate with a clear academic vision and mission, but without clearly defined goals. In contrast, low SES effective schools that had more recently ‘turned around’ had both a clear academic vision and mission as well as clearly defined goals. The researchers proposed that in schools with a history of success, the vision was strongly embedded in the school’s culture and provided implicit guidance in maintaining the school’s direction. The low SES effective schools had used goals as a means of developing a shared vision and direction for improvement. This finding is supported in recent research conducted on school improvement in the UK (Day et al., 2010).

A notable finding that emerged over the years with respect to the use of vision and goals in school improvement concerns the conceptualization of these constructs by scholars studying instructional leadership and transformational leadership. The instructional leadership literature asserted that goal-related constructs (e.g., vision, mission, goals) must contain an academic focus. In contrast, the application of transformational leadership to education (e.g., Leithwood, 1994), left open the ‘value’ question as to the focus of the vision and goals. Research findings that compare these two different treatments of goals in research on leadership for learning favor the instructional leadership approach (e.g., Leithwood et al., 2006, in press; Robinson et al., 2008).

Thus, for the purposes of school improvement, the school vision and mission must be learning focused. This highlights the critical role that principals play in sustaining a focus on learning in the school. We note that this finding is supported by research on successful implementation of school-based management as well as school improvement, and applies even in contexts where there is strong collaborative leadership (Barth, 1990; Hallinger & Hausman, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998).

### **Leadership Focus**

We wish to address the issue of leadership focus in two ways. First we briefly discuss the issue of competing leadership models. Then we will revisit and refine our understanding of the means by which school leaders impact learning depicted in Figure 1. As noted earlier, scholars have debated the applicability of instructional and transformational leadership models to understanding how different leadership foci contribute to school improvement. A recent meta-analysis of leadership effects studies conducted by Robinson and colleagues (2008) provides useful guidance in this regard. They examined a substantial set of studies of school leadership

effects on learning conducted over the past four decades. Using meta-analysis, they were able to estimate the relative effects of different leadership models and foci on student learning (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

These results clearly show that instructional leadership better captures the impact of school leadership on learning. That is, transformational leadership as applied to education does not appear to measure all of the processes by which leaders impact teaching and learning. We note that this conclusion should be tempered for two reasons. First the studies included in the meta-analysis were all cross-sectional studies and did not assess the impact of leadership over time. Second, it is also true that selected dimensions of the two models do overlap (e.g., focus on vision, and goals, rewards). Nonetheless, Robinson's study highlights the fact that successful leadership in schools must incorporate an educational focus that is lacking from the transformational leadership model (Hallinger, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008).

A recently conducted series of studies by Hallinger and Heck (2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2009) offers further insight into the issue of leadership focus. They tested a variety of different means by which school leadership could potentially impact student learning (see Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, in press). Figure 3 shows a 'mediated-effects model' of leadership and learning. This model proposes, as in Figure 1, that the effects of leadership (i.e., of the principal and/or collective leadership) are not direct. Instead they are 'mediated' or achieved through school-level conditions that impact directly teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 2010). In Figure 3, taken from a study by Hallinger and Heck (2010), these school level conditions defined as the school's 'capacity for academic improvement'. This broad

condition of the school incorporates the three main vehicles of leadership that were depicted in Figure 1 (i.e., culture, process, people). Leadership was measured as an organizational property (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995) and defined as ‘collaborative leadership’ (Heck & Hallinger, 2009, Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Insert Figure 3 about here

Several features of this model are noteworthy. First, the model suggests that leadership is enacted in a context. In the case of this particular study, the context was comprised of various organizational conditions such as prior achievement and the socio-economic status of the students in the school. Second, this research examined change in the school and growth in student achievement over a four year period. Therefore the figure depicts both the initial state of leadership, capacity and student math and reading achievement in the school (i.e., the top half of the figure) as well as change in these conditions over time (i.e., the bottom half of the figure). This feature of the research was significant in that it enabled the researchers to measure the impact of leadership on school improvement and growth in learning.

Interpretation of this Figure suggests yields three specific conclusions.

- There was no direct effect of collaborative leadership on growth in student learning in these elementary schools (the dotted line indicates no significant relationship).
- Collaborative leadership impacted growth in student learning indirectly through building the school’s capacity for improvement (i.e., effect size of .31).
- The school’s capacity for improvement impacted growth in student learning (i.e., effect size of .24). (Hallinger & Heck, 2010)

This study also examined a variation of the mediated effects model which proposed that leadership both shapes and is shaped by the school’s academic capacity. Together, this process of mutual influence creates an impact on student learning. This conceptualization, termed a

reciprocal effects model, is shown in Figure 4 with the results from the same study. Based on a variety of criteria, the data provided stronger evidence in support of a reciprocal-effects perspective on leadership and school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, in press).

Insert Figure 4 about here

These findings are also highly relevant to our discussion of leadership focus. It should be noted Initial Achievement was positively related to subsequent changes in *both* Collaborative Leadership (.38) and School Improvement Capacity (.31). However, the converse was not true; neither initial levels of Collaborative Leadership nor initial levels of School Improvement Capacity were directly related to subsequent Growth in Achievement. These findings provide empirical support for the premise that schools can improve learning outcomes regardless of their initial achievement levels by changing key organizational processes such as leadership and improvement capacity (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, in press).

In addition, initial School Improvement Capacity positively affected subsequent changes in Collaborative Leadership, and initial Collaborative Leadership positively affected subsequent changes in School Improvement Capacity. This suggests that these constructs were part of a mutually-reinforcing relationship in which growth in one led to positive change in the other (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, in press).

It was further noted that improvement in the schools appeared to “gain momentum” over time through changes in leadership and school improvement capacity that were organic and mutually responsive. Moreover, the effect of School Improvement Capacity on Collaborative Leadership was *stronger* over time than the corresponding effect of Collaborative Leadership on

School Improvement Capacity. This suggests that leadership can be an important catalyst and supporting factor for school improvement, but that the school-levels conditions, whether referred to as school improvement capacity or school culture, always exercises an even stronger influence on leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, in press).

Having seen that leadership for learning is both mediated and shaped by the school's academic capacity is an important finding. It suggests that leadership is not by itself a solution to the 'problem' of school improvement. Change in schools must be systemic (Fullan, 2001) and the development of leadership capacity in the school must be accompanied by simultaneous measures to develop the school's academic improvement capacity. With these results in mind, we assert that research has made important progress in understanding both if and how leadership contributes to student learning (Heck & Hallinger, 2009, in press; Leithwood et al., 2006, in press; Robinson et al., 2008).

### **Building Capacity for School Improvement**

Building capacity for school improvement received increased attention with the onset of studies of organizational learning in the late 1990s (e.g., Leithwood & Louis, 2000; Mulford & Silins, 2003, 2009). Fullan, a strong proponent of this perspective, asserted: "It has become increasingly clear that leadership at all levels of the system is the key lever for reform, especially leaders who focus on capacity building and develop other leaders who can carry on" (2001, p. 21). But where should principals put their focus in order to develop the school's capacity to produce a positive impact on student learning? For example, should goal-setting, curriculum alignment, teaching observations, staff development, or strategic planning receive greater

attention and priority for resource allocation? The earlier sections of this paper addressed this question indirectly. Now we wish to place this question squarely at the center of our focus.

Robinson and colleague's (2008) meta-analysis again offers insight into this issue. Their results are shown in Table 1. The effect sizes shown in Table 1 suggest that the principal's 'Support for and Participation in the Professional Learning of Staff' produced the largest effect size on learning outcomes of students. This was followed by Setting Goals and Expectations and Planning, Coordinating and Evaluating Teaching and the Curriculum.

Insert Table 1 about here

These results are fascinating in light of earlier questions about if and whether principals (and these studies mostly focused on principals) could fulfill the instructional leadership role. It does not seem a coincidence that the highest impact functions in Table 1 all related to instructional leadership. This suggests that when principals are able to maintain an instructional leadership focus in these key areas, it does pay off. The importance of this finding should not be underestimated as it is based on a large body of research completed over a substantial period of time.

Another underutilized model for examining school capacity that I wish to draw attention to was proposed 25 years ago by Saphier and King (1985) and is shown in Figure 5. In our experience of using this model with school leaders, it also appears to have strong face validity. Moreover, we note that the *norms* of successful school cultures noted by Saphier and King in this model overlap considerably with variables that comprised the academic capacity factor in the recent Heck and Hallinger (2009, in press) studies of school improvement (e.g., participation in decision making, communication, professional learning, student and faculty support, high



expectations). Thus, we recommend this model to practitioners as a useful means of organizing one's thinking about building a school culture that breeds a learning focus, continuous improvement, and high performance.

Insert Figure 5 about here

### **The Context for Leadership**

We earlier noted that the initial impetus for the empirical study of instructional leadership, the precursor of leadership for learning, came from the studies of effective schools (Edmonds, 1979). A key strength and limitation of this research was the focus on urban elementary schools in challenging circumstances. While improving this class of schools represented an important policy goal, selected scholars reasonably questioned if and how the results about 'what works' in this narrowly defined set of schools could generalize to the wider population of schools (Barth, 1986; Bossert et al., 1982; Cuban, 1984).

Implicit in this critique was the recognition that the school context represents an important factor in understanding both leadership and student learning results (Bossert et al., 1982). Leadership theories such as situational and contingency leadership (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1977) had, for example, proposed that the leadership effectiveness was dependent or contingent upon identifiable features of the context or situation in which the leader worked (e.g., staff characteristics, hierarchy, availability of resources, power relationships etc.).

Different leadership styles were therefore recommended in response to different situational factors (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). Indeed, the descriptions of highly 'directive' instructional leadership that emerged from the effective schools studies brought to mind a basic tenet of situational leadership. Contexts that are characterized by an urgent need for

improvement, a lack of demonstrated success, and uncertain confidence require a directive style of leadership.

The limited empirical research that did explore this issue appeared to support this theoretical proposition that leadership styles would be differentially effective across school contexts (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Yet, despite this convergence of theory and empirical data, limited though it may have been, policymakers ignored the impact of context when framing new policies, programs and curricula for school leadership (Barth, 1986; Hallinger & Wimpelberg, 1992). Barth (1986) eloquently decried the pervasive effects of ‘list logic’ whereby a set of descriptors of effective leadership from one small set of schools was conceived to be suitable for all schools. Nonetheless, a ‘one size fits all’ approach took hold that failed to take into account the contextual differences in which leadership was enacted.

It is only in recent years that researchers have begun to redress this oversight and illuminate the relationship between school context and leadership. In a mixed methods longitudinal study of 200 American elementary schools, Heck and Hallinger (2009, in press) examined patterns of change in leadership, school capacity and growth in student learning over a four year period. They found that each school was characterized by a particular ‘school improvement trajectory’ that described its pattern of change in learning outcomes in math and reading. These growth trajectories could be plotted against changes in perceptions of leadership and school capacity. Analysis of these patterns of school improvement found that leadership made different contributions to growth in capacity and learning at different points in the improvement journey (Heck & Hallinger, 2009).

Similar findings have emerged out of a recent study of school improvement in the UK (Day et al., 2010). A team of researchers examined patterns of leadership across a set of 'high improvement schools'. They were able to identify four broad stages of school improvement and approaches to leadership for learning: (1) Coming out of special measures (turn around phase), (2) Taking ownership, (3) Developing creativity, (4) Everyone a leader (see Figure 6). This analysis offers strong support for linking patterns of leadership behavior to successful school improvement across different contexts (Day et al., 2010). It counters both the perception and the policy prescription that one style of leadership is suitable across all school contexts. More specifically, it begins to provide an empirical basis for action that is based on the needs of the school rather than normative prescriptions about 'good leadership'. We shall return to this point in our discussion of shared leadership in the following section of the paper.

Insert Figure 6 about here

A second contribution made by the UK study concerns the more in-depth description of how leadership was enacted over time, what the researchers termed 'layered leadership' (Day et al., 2010). Layered leadership refers to the 'density of focus' or priority assigned to different leadership foci at different stages in the school improvement journey. The linkage between leadership foci and improvement over time observed at one school during its improvement journey is displayed in Figure 7.

Insert Figure 7 about here

While these findings are not definitive, this is quite useful information for school leaders. Rather than working with a single set of 'commandments' about 'effective leadership', they can work towards developing a more finely tuned set of leadership strategies that are grounded in

the needs of their schools. Moreover, a principal working in a challenging situation, for the first time, has empirical support for the proposition that adopting a directive leadership style may be necessary, for the short to medium term. Similarly, a principal who has been using a highly directive style and succeeded in ‘turning the ship’ onto a more productive heading will be prompted to see that use of this style may have run its course. Fundamentally, this research demonstrates that leaders must adapt their styles to changing circumstances and highlights the need for leadership development that enhances flexibility in leadership styles and strategies.

### **Sharing Leadership**

The questions of whether, why and how to share leadership have been central in discussions of leadership for centuries, not decades (Bass, 1990). The ‘why’ question often conjures up rationales related to democratic decision making and social justice. The ‘whether’ question relates back to contingency theories that link organizational conditions to leadership styles. As Bridges (1967) noted 40 years ago, ‘how’ a principal chooses to ‘share leadership’ is also more complex than might appear at first glance. Shared leadership is not a unitary construct, but rather is comprised of a range of different behaviors or strategies for involving others in decision making (e.g., consensus decision making, voting, input, delegation etc.).

The prior section on context highlighted an important set of conditions, that bear on whether and how to share leadership. As Figures 6 and 7 both suggest, a school that is under special measures may require more centralized, directive leadership in order to create a sense of urgency and jump start the change (Kotter, 1996). As the school’s capacity develops over time, part of that process of capacity development will involve broadening the sources of leadership within the school (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 2001). Finally, during the latter stages during which the

school is experiencing success, succession planning must already be in place. This is the time to truly increase the density of leadership throughout the school (see Figure 6). While this pattern of leadership distribution or sharing is suggested by these studies of school improvement, further research is needed to verify that this actually works as a planned intervention strategy.

Finally, we wish to comment on the role of the principal in *fostering* shared leadership. Heck and Hallinger's (2009) study addressed this issue in two ways. First they noted that that Principal Stability demonstrated a small but statistically significant effect on growth in school capacity. That is, there was a measurable difference in perceptions of school capacity at the end of the three-year period in schools where the same principal had been present over the course of the study. Moreover, lower principal turnover in schools with larger numbers of low SES, non-English speaking students was associated with positive changes in School Capacity (e.g., Sustained Focus on Improvement, Staff Capacity, etc.). The impact of principal turnover on the relationship between collaborative leadership and math achievement is shown in Figure 8. These findings further that principals have a central role to play even as schools seek to broaden and deepen their leadership capacity.

## **Conclusion**

This paper started with the goal of illustrating the evolution of research findings on school leadership over the past three decades. It is our premise that this knowledge base, while still incomplete, provides better guidance for those occupying the role of principal today than was the case 30 years ago. In this final section, I will summarize the key findings and briefly comments on the application of this knowledge base in schools.

- *You are a value leader.* Both awareness of and the ability to articulate your personal values and beliefs represent foundational competencies for leaders in any sector. Values will guide your decision making and approaches to problem solving, either implicitly or explicitly; we suggest that explicit is the preferred mode. Learning to use your values, beliefs, and expectations in concert with the values of the school is a requirement for leadership for learning. Be the change you want to you see in your school.
- *Your ability to articulate a learning focused vision that is shared by others and to set clear goals creates a base for all other leadership strategies and actions.* Your vision and goals should be linked to core values of your leadership team and the school community more broadly. Note that a vision on paper only comes to life through the routines and actions that you craft into your daily calendar. This was the message from research conducted by Dwyer and colleagues (1986) 25 years ago and stands us in good stead today. Instructional leadership is not the dramatic flourish or grand announcement of a new innovation. Rather it the persistent focus on improving the conditions for learning and creating coherence across classrooms, programs, and activities day in and day out in the school.
- *Yes, as the leader you are important, but you can only achieve success through the cooperation of others.* The impact of your leadership is mediated by the culture, work processes and people. More specifically, the ‘mutual influence’ model emphasizes the profound impact that the school’s capacity has on both leadership and on learning. This perspective should be both encouraging and humbling.
- *Leadership should be aimed at building the school’s capacity for improvement.* Both education and school improvement are about the development of human capacity. Leadership for learning should be as well. Robinson and colleagues (2008) produced the rather startling finding about the important effects of principal involvement in the professional learning of teachers. This recalls Barth’s

(1990) characterization of the school as a community of learners and the important linkages between the learning of school heads, teachers and students.

- *Take time to understand your context first, then develop suitable leadership strategies.* Leaders who possess a single set of tools will find themselves bouncing around from success to failure without understanding why. The capacity to read your context correctly and adapt *your* leadership to the needs largely determines your success. There is no one best leadership style for fostering learning in schools. We are learning more and more about the ways that leaders need to match strategies to contexts; more research on this point is needed.
- *Our goal should be to share leadership and empower others, but pick the right time and methods.* Shared leadership, collaborative leadership, and distributed leadership have become mantras in the profession over the past decade. Unfortunately, much of the discussion is prescriptive, based on values rather than data. Both theory and empirical research suggest that there is a time and a place for sharing leadership. Guidance is available for analyzing when and how to share leadership for learning. When used well, shared leadership is a powerful tool for expanding the school's capacity to achieve its vision and create its own desired future. Note that research does suggest that even where shared leadership is being supported by policy measures, the principal's own leadership is essential to fostering the leadership others.

At the outset of this paper, I asserted that recent empirical findings about leadership for learning represent a sounder foundation for leadership practice in schools compared with 30 years ago. Nonetheless, we caution principals and other school leaders to use their judgment in applying these findings across different contexts. We recall the words of Fullan and Hargreaves who claimed:

There is no ready answer to the “how” question. Singular recipes oversimplify what it will take to bring about change in your own situation. Even when you know what research and published advice tell you, no one can prescribe exactly how to apply to your

particular school and all the unique problems, opportunities and peculiarities it contains. (p. 106)

The next generation of research in our field will need to focus on contextualizing the types of leadership strategies and practices discussed in this paper. That is, we need to obtain better information not just about ‘what works’ but ‘what works’ in different settings. This research will require both quantitative and qualitative studies that describe successful leadership practices across different school levels, at different points in the ‘school improvement journey’ and across different cultures. This is an ambitious but worthy agenda.



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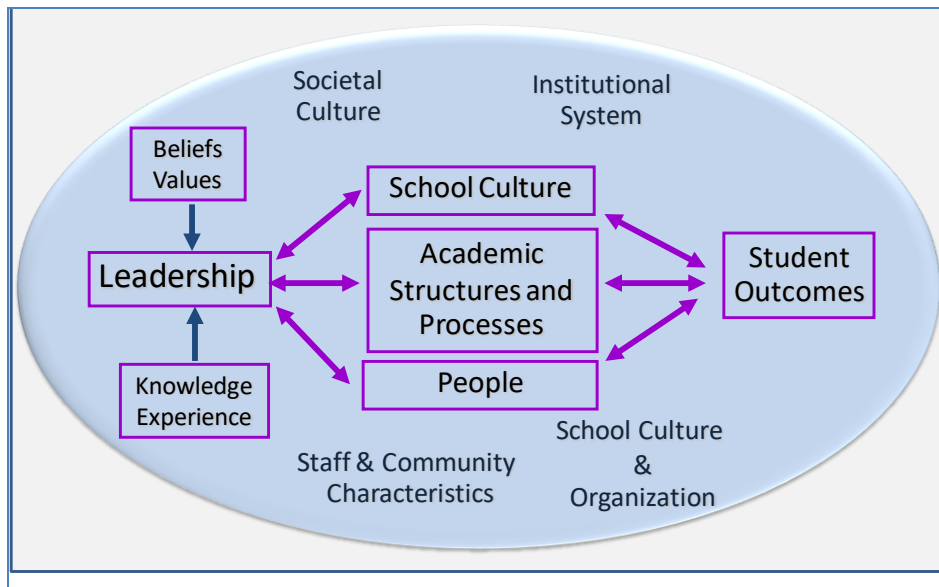
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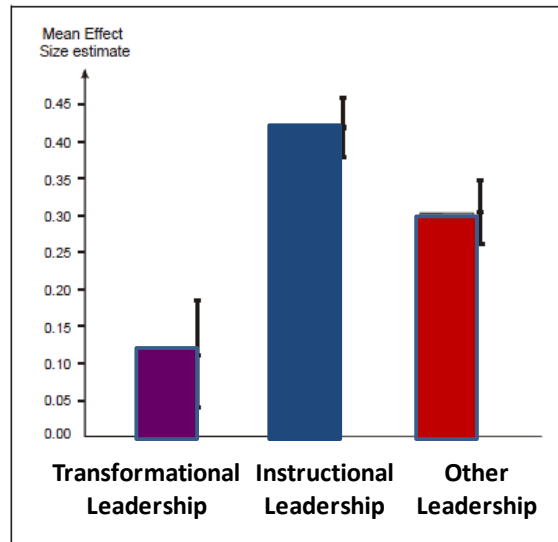
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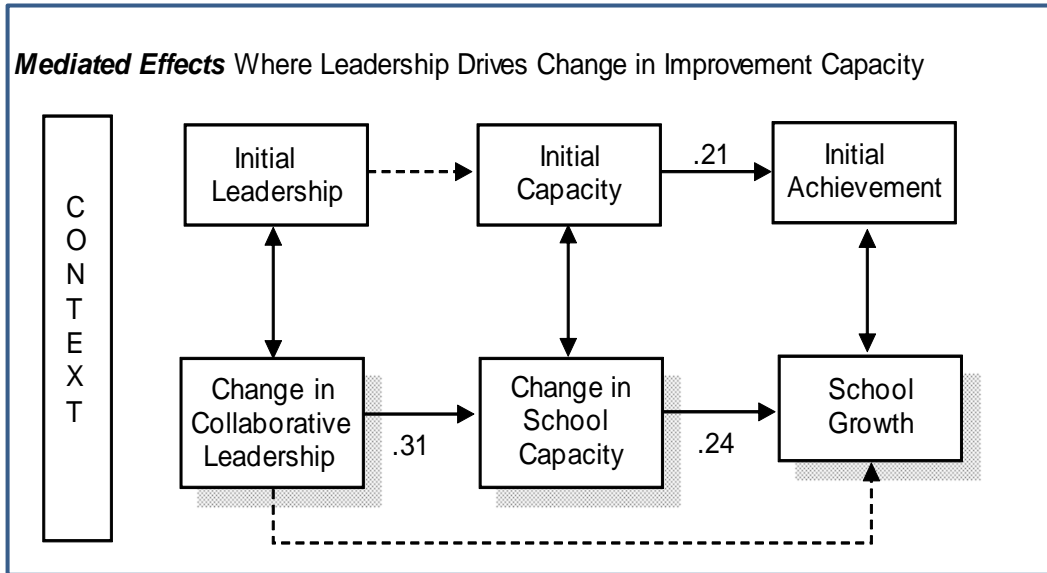
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*Figure 1*  
*A Synthesized Model of Leadership for Learning*

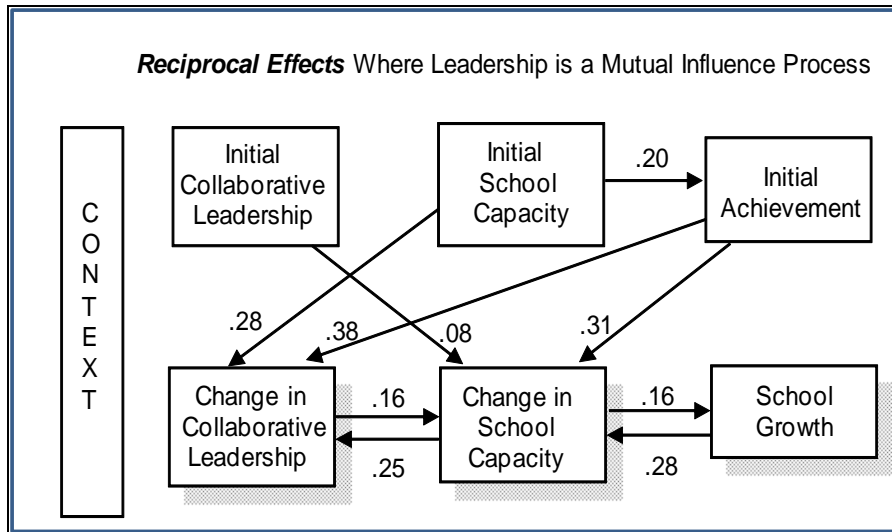


*Figure 2*  
*Comparison of Effect Sizes Attributed to Different Leadership Models*  
*Robinson et al., 2008, p.656*



*Figure 3*  
*Mediated Effects Model of Leadership on School Capacity and Learning*  
*(Hallinger & Heck, 2010)*

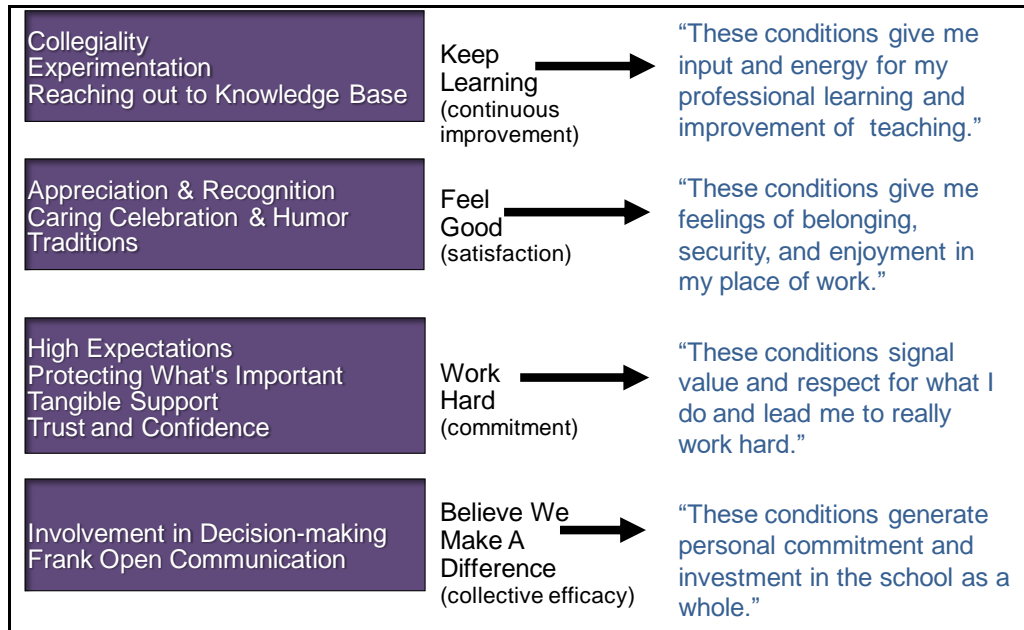




*Figure 4*  
*Reciprocal Effects Model of Leadership on School Capacity and Learning*  
*(Hallinger & Heck, 2010)*

Leadership Dimension	Definition	Effect
Establishing Goals and Expectations	Sets, communicates and monitors learning goals, standards and expectations; involves staff and others in the process so that there is goal clarity and consensus.	ES = 0.42 (0.07)
Strategic Resourcing	Aligns resource selection and allocation to priority teaching goals. Ensure quality staffing.	ES = 0.31 (0.10)
Planning, Coordinating and Evaluating Teaching and the Curriculum	Direct involvement in the support and evaluation of teaching through regular classroom visits and feedback to teachers. Direct oversight of curriculum	ES = 0.42 (0.06)
Promoting and Taking Part in Teacher Learning	Promotes and participates with teachers in formal or informal professional learning.	ES = 0.84 (0.14)
Ensuring an Orderly and Supportive Environment	Protects time for learning by reducing interruptions; establishes orderly and supportive environment	ES = 0.27 (0.09)

*Table 1*  
*Leadership Impact on Learning: Results from a Meta-analysis*  
*(Robinson et al., 2008, p. 657)*



*Figure 5*  
*Norms Comprising Successful Learning Cultures in Schools*  
*Saphier & King, 1985*

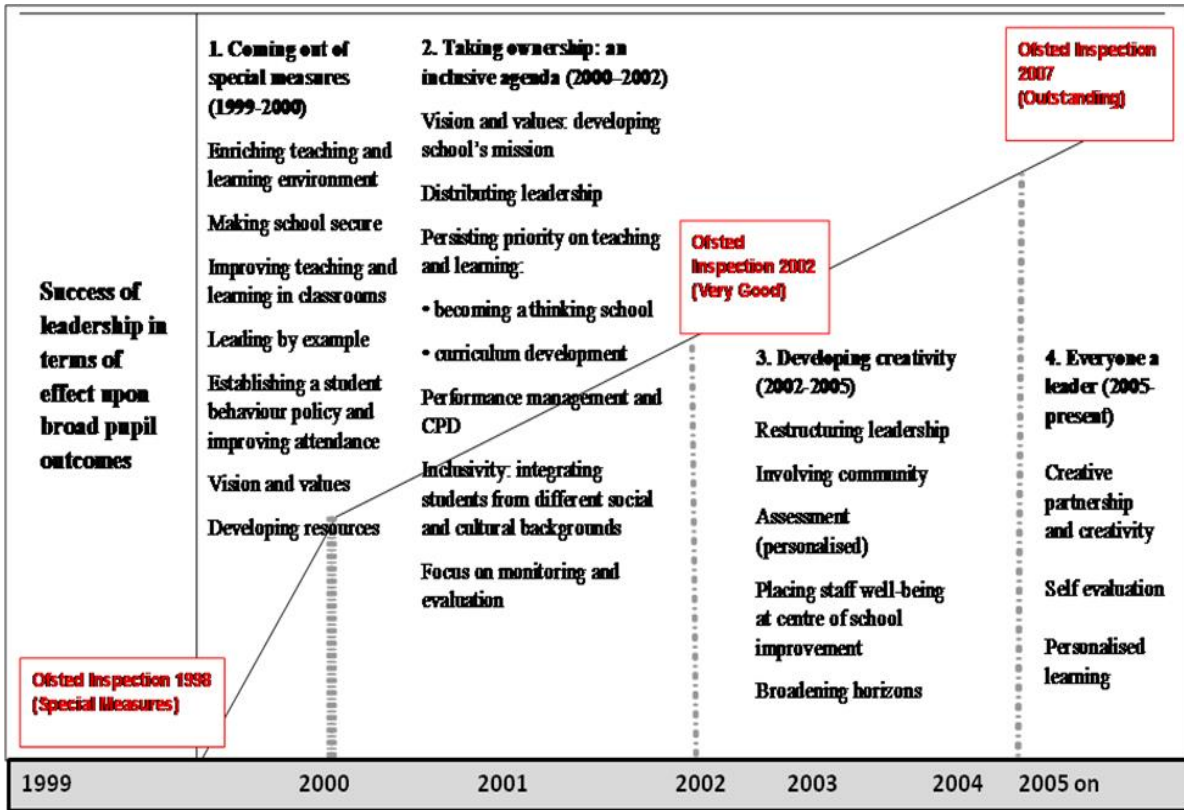
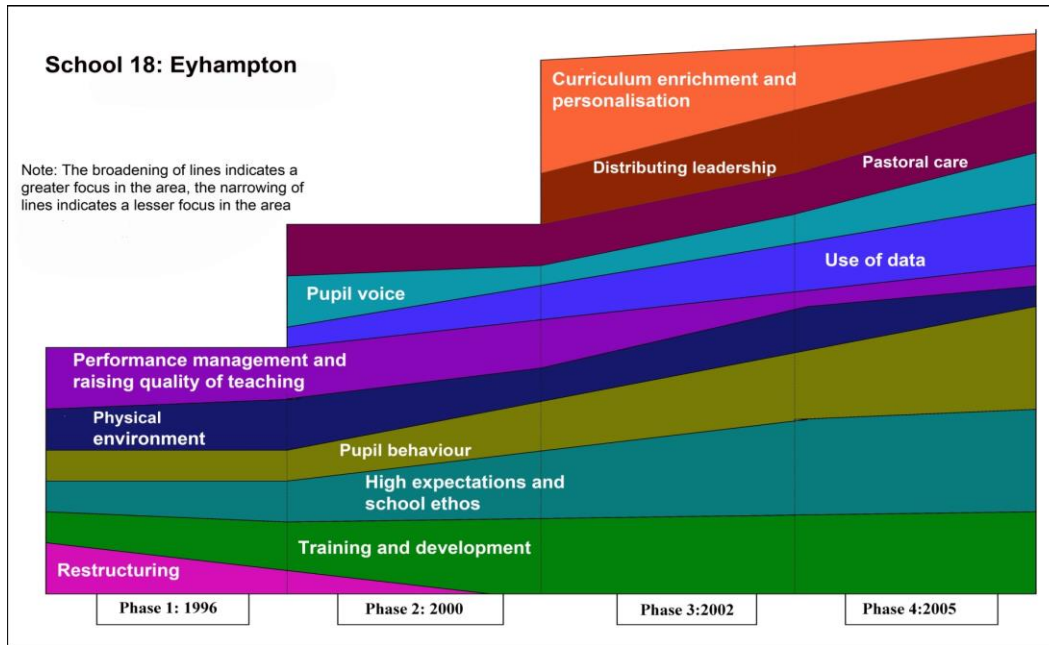
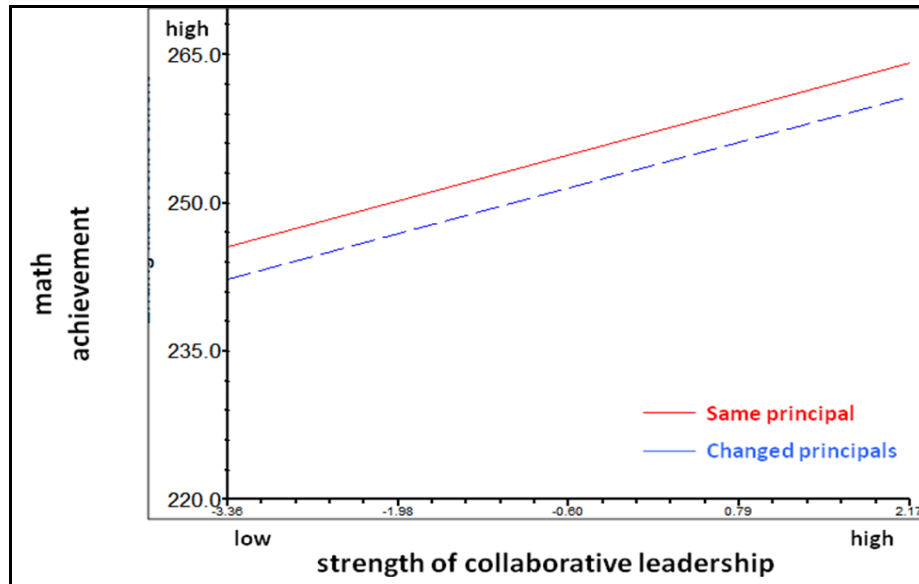


Figure 6  
 Linking Leadership to Stages of School Improvement  
 Day et al., 2010



*Figure 7*  
*Leadership Layers During the Journey of School Improvement*  
*Day et al., 2010*



*Figure 8*  
*Association of Principal Stability with Collaborative Leadership and Student Achievement*

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<sup>ii</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the funding support of the Research Grant Council (RGC) of Hong Kong for its support through the General Research Fund (GRF 840509).