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## Becoming a Leader For Equity and Excellence: It Starts With Instruction

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Becoming a Leader for Equity and Excellence: It Starts with Instruction

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## Becoming a Leader for Equity and Excellence: It Starts with Instruction

### Introduction

There are no silver bullets in school leadership. No matter how much we search for the “right” program, the “right” instructional strategy, the “right” leadership style, the “right” faculty, or the “right” students, there is not one “right” way for leaders to improve schools. To improve schools, particularly in an era of high stakes accountability and increased student diversity, takes well-prepared, smart, hard-working, reflective teachers and leaders.

In this chapter we focus mainly on the principal as leader, although the principal is certainly not the only leader in a school. Many people in schools serve formally or informally in leadership roles. Moreover, we discuss the principalship within a context of high stakes accountability and increased student diversity. Indeed, our schools are rich with diversity, including language differences; learning differences; ethnic, racial, and cultural differences; economic differences; gender and sexual orientation differences; etc. These differences, for us, should be embraced and seen as an asset rather than a deficit. However, much of the literature, popular and otherwise, equate difference with deficit (for a discussion of deficit thinking see McKenzie (2004); Valencia, (1997) and for example of difference as deficit see Payne (1996)<sup>1</sup>. Difference is seen as an obstacle to overcome rather than an opportunity to learn about ourselves, others, and the relationship between ourselves and others. This concept of “diversity as an obstacle” is a fundamental problem in schools and one we will address herein. Therefore, what follows is a

discussion of the principalship in a context of high stakes accountability that demands excellent and equitable schools.

#### Historical Context of Leadership Models

In the last twenty years there has been on-going debate regarding two leadership models: instructional leadership and transformational leadership. Hallinger's 2003 article, "Leading Educational Change: Reflections on the Practice of Instructional and Transformational Leadership," offers a thorough review of "the conceptual and empirical development" of these two models (p. 329). Whereas, Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe's (2008) meta-analysis, "The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types," examines the impact of these leadership models on "students' academic and nonacademic outcomes" (p.634). We relied mainly on these articles to inform and provide the theoretical frame for this work.

According to Hallinger, (Hallinger 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1999) instructional leadership emerged in the 1980s from the effective schools research conducted by Ronald Edmonds. One of the correlates of this research specifically addressed instructional leadership. Edmonds (1982) states, "The characteristics of an effective school include... the principal's leadership and attention to the quality of instruction..." (p. 4). At that time, though, there were critics of the effective schools' research and particularly the instructional leadership component of this research (e.g., Cuban, 1984; Miskel, 1982; Murphy, 1988; Leithwood, 1992). According to the critics, instructional leadership, as defined by the effective schools movement, placed the principal as the sole leader of instruction. This created a hierarchical structure that alienated teachers (Murphy, 1988). Moreover, many principals did not have the expertise to be instructional leaders

(Leithwood, 1992), and there was little support to assist them in this area, which ultimately lead to their failure (Cuban, 1984).

There was, however, another leadership model at this time: transformational leadership. The root of transformational leadership came from Burns (1978) and was called “transforming leadership.” He distinguished transforming leadership from other forms of leadership stating that it is moral as it “raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” (p. 20). However, it was not until the 1990s, as a result of the critique of instructional leadership and “the top-down emphasis of American school reform” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 342), that the transformational model emerged as a viable alternative to instructional leadership. Instructional leadership was characterized as direct principal involvement in curriculum and instruction, including monitoring of classroom instruction and student progress, and working intimately with teachers to improve teaching practices and student outcomes (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994; Blase & Blase, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1991; Leithwood, Tomlinson & Genge, 1996; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Southworth, 2002). Transformational leadership was characterized as charismatic and inspirational (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996), resulting in followers feeling trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader (Bass, 1997). The underlying influence process between leader and led was seen to motivate followers by making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes and inducing them to transcend their own self interest for the sake of the organization (Bass, 1997). Then in the late 1990s and into the new century, there was an accelerated focus on student outcomes and “closing the achievement gap.” This brought

about a renewed interest in a more directive involvement in teaching and learning, a renewed interest in instructional leadership.

Today, with the continued emphasis on student outcomes, along with shifting demographic patterns resulting in more diversity within schools, there is a renewed interest in and debate about the efficacy of both instructional and transformational leadership. This debate is evidenced by recent works addressing these models (e.g., Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, (2005); Brown & Keeping, (2005); Griffith, (2004); Hallinger, (2003); Leithwood & Jantzi, (2005, 2006); Marks & Printy, (2003); Nelson & Sassi, (2005); Sheppard, (1996, 2003). Included in these works is Robinson's et al. meta-analysis referenced earlier and titled, "The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types," that won the Division A, article of the year at the 2009 American Educational Research Conference. The next section draws from this work and discusses the findings related to the efficacy of these two leadership models.

#### Impact of Instructional and Transformational Leadership

In Robinson's et al. 2008 article, they set the purpose of the work as addressing "the paradoxical differences between the qualitative and quantitative evidence on leadership impacts by taking a fresh approach to the analysis of the quantitative evidence (p. 637). Moreover, they state that "Rather than conduct a further meta-analysis of the overall impact of leadership on student outcomes, we focus on identifying the relative impact of different types of leadership" (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 637). The paradoxical differences they refer to are based on qualitative "case studies of 'turn around' schools" and "interventions in teaching and learning," leaders at the school and district level, are

credited with improving instruction and student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 637). Whereas, the quantitative research on both the direct and indirect effects of leadership has shown weak impact. What sets Robinson's et al. (2008) work apart from previous work on the impact of leadership on student outcomes is that their work is a meta-analysis; whereas, according to them, the work of others were reviews of literature on empirical studies (e.g., Bell, Bolam, & Cubillo, 2003; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). Moreover, Robinson's et al. work focused specifically on the impact of two leadership models: transformational versus instructional.

In this work, Robinson et al. (2008) conducted two meta-analyses. The first was a "comparison of the effects of transformational and instructional leadership on student outcomes" and the second meta-analysis was "a comparison of the effects of five inductively derived sets of leadership practices on student outcomes" (p. 635). In regards to the first analysis, they found that the effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes "was three to four times that of transformational leadership" (p. 635). Moreover, revealed in the surveys they analyzed were five sets of leadership practices that were used to measure leadership. These included "establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment" (p. 635). The second meta-analysis revealed "strong average effects for the leadership dimension involving promoting and participating in teacher learning and development and moderate effects for the

dimensions concerned with goal setting and planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum” (p. 635).

Therefore, one can conclude that instructional leadership has a stronger impact on student learning than transformational leadership, and specifically when leaders promote and participate in teacher learning and development, there is a strong effect on student learning. Simply put, “the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students’ outcomes” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 664).

### Discussion

In reading Robinson’s et al. work (2008), we drew a connection to our research and the research of our colleagues on the qualities of successful diverse classrooms, schools, and districts and the leadership needed to bring about success (e.g., McKenzie et al., 2008; McKenzie & Lozano, 2008; McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2004; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009; Rorrer & Skrla, 2005; Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008; Skrla, & Scheurich, 2001; Skrla & Scheurich, 2003; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson Jr., 2001). The above research was conducted over the last two decades and influenced by the authors’ lived experiences in schools as teachers and school leaders. McKenzie, one of the authors of the current work, had a 25 year career in public education, mostly in large urban schools, as a teacher, curriculum specialist, principal and as a trainer of principals. From the aforementioned research and our lived experiences, we have developed in our more recent works (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009) a conceptual frame for instructional leadership for social justice (See figure 1). A focus on social justice is critical in this time of increased student diversity and high stakes accountability, and we consider equity



consciousness and high quality teaching skills to be the vehicles through which social justice can be achieved in schools.

To explain, first, we believe every teacher, and everyone in a school for that matter, should have an equity consciousness.

By equity consciousness we mean that teachers are aware of, accept, and act on four central beliefs:

1. That *all* children (except only a very small percentage, e.g., those with profound disabilities) are capable of high levels of academic success.
2. That *all* children means *all*, regardless of a child's race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, learning differences, culture, language, religion, and so on.
3. That the adults in schools are primarily responsible for student learning.
4. That traditional school practices may work for some students but are not working for all children. Therefore, if we are going to eliminate the achievement gap, it requires a change in our practices (Skrla, McKenzie, Scheurich, 2009, p. 82-83).

Second, we believe every teacher should have high quality teaching skills, which according to research on teaching, learning, and culture (e.g., Bell, 2003; Carledge, Tillman, & Talbert-Johnson, 2001; Festinger, 1957; Gay 2000; Gonzalez & Huerta-Macias, 1997; Gregory, 2003; Hunter, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995,1997; McKenzie et al. 2008; McKenzie & Lozano, 2008; Resnick & Hall, 2001; Tomlinson, 1999;

Tomlinson et al., 2003; Valencia, 1997; Williamson, Bondy, Langley, & Mayne, 2005; Wong & Wong, 2004; Yair, 2000) should at a minimum include for following skills:

Skill 1. Using consistent and reliable classroom procedures and routines

Skill 2. Clearly communicating expectations for learning

Skill 3. Stimulating students with high-level and complex tasks

Skill 4. Ensuring students are actively, cognitively, engaged

Skill 5. Extending student learning through teacher-to-student and student-to-student discussion

Skill 6. Frequently assessing individual student learning

Skill 7. Differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs and capitalize on individual assets

Skill 8. Using an asset model to respond to students' varying cultures

Skill 9. Demonstrating respect and care in all interactions with all students and students' families (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009, p.90-96).

Third, if there are enough teachers in a school that have both an equity consciousness and high quality teaching skills then this quality is taken to scale and there is systemic coherence. (Insert Figure 2 here) Meaning, the system will have consistent high quality. Put another way, "success begets success." Thus, to take this out to scale, if enough schools have systemic coherence around high quality teaching, then the entire school district will have consistent teaching quality and high levels of student success.

We realize this sounds simplistic, and furthermore we understand the complexity of teaching, learning, and leading. However, we do believe, and Robinson's et al. work would confirm, that leaders, that is *instructional* leaders, can have a direct impact on

teaching and thereby learning in a school. However what we typically see in the schools we work with, either through research or consulting, is that few principals are instructional leaders. Certainly, we can not generalize to all principals. There are some that are incredible instructional leaders, there are some that are trying to be instructional leaders but allow micro-diversions to derail their leadership, and there are some who aspire to transformational leadership, but this does not seem to be working.

### Instructional and Transformational Leadership in Schools

#### Strong Instructional Leaders

The principals we have worked with that are strong instructional leaders, like Steve Kinney at Tice Elementary, often lead in unconventional ways, yet they are keenly focused on and involved in “the core business of teaching and learning” (Robinson et al., 2008 p. 664). Tice is an elementary school in the Galena Park School District of Houston, Texas. One of us, McKenzie, and colleagues (Skrla, Scheurich, & Dickerson) studied the Galena Park school district in 2004-2006, as part of a Hewlett Foundation funded project examining high performing school districts that serve predominately low income students and students of color. At that time the demographics at Tice were 52% Hispanic, 43% African American, 4% White, 0.7% Asian, and 0.2% Native American. Twenty-four percent of the students were categorized as Limited English Proficient, and 79% were eligible for free and reduced lunch.

It was during this project that we met Steve Kinney, who had been principal of Tice for five years. Prior to Steve’s tenure at Tice the school was rated acceptable<sup>2</sup> on the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). At that time, the superintendent in Galena Park was Dr. Shirley Neeley. Shirley later went on to become the Commissioner

of Education for the State of Texas. As superintendent of Galena Park, Shirley gave the principals the directive that they needed to have their schools at the “recognized” level within three years or they would be removed as principals of their campuses. According to Kinney, Dr. Neeley said, "We're scoring from 50%-70% right now, and some people are happy with that, saying we're a poor district and that's just how its going to be. We're not going to accept that any more. We're going to average 90% passing in this district, and if your school can't get recognized, I'll remove the principal after three years." She also told them that they had the autonomy to do whatever they needed to do to raise their campuses to recognized status as long as it was ethical, legal, and was in the best interest of the students.

Steve took both the charge and the latitude seriously. He reworked his school. He hired faculty of color. He took four master teachers out of their classrooms and reassigned them to a learning lab where they pulled the lowest performing five students out of each 1st-5th grade teacher’s classrooms and provided intensive small group daily instruction in reading and math. Additionally, Kinney and the Dean of Instruction at Tice met daily with teacher teams to develop and align curriculum and pedagogy and to assess student work. In other words, he was intimately involved in the “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” (Robinson et al., 2008, p.667). Surprisingly, he required that everyone leave the school at 3:30p.m. every day. He said, “...this building’s empty at 3:30 everyday. We want them [the teachers] working really hard, then going home to their families.” The work of Steve and the faculty and staff at Tice paid off. During his time as principal, the school went from an acceptable rating to exemplary, the highest rating possible, exceeding the rating required by the

superintendent. Moreover, Tice had 18-44% of their students at commended level, depending on the subject, which means the students not only passed the state exam, but passed with high scores. Thus, Tice Elementary, which served predominantly low income students and students of color, performed higher than most of the middle income predominantly White schools in the state. This we believe is a testament to the instructional leadership provided at Tice.

Looking at the Tice story in relation to both Robinson's et al. (2008) findings related to instructional and transformational leadership and our work on equity consciousness, high quality teaching skills (Srkla, McKenzie, & Scherich, 2009) and systemic coherence, the following can be surmised. First, Steve is an example of a principal who was an instructional leader. He exhibited the dimensions Robinson et al. (2008) found to have strong or moderate effects on student outcomes. Indeed, all the strategies he used to bring about high quality teaching and learning, including the weekly curriculum and instruction meetings and the employment of master teachers to provide intensive instructional support to students who lacked requisite skills, were examples of "promoting and participating in teacher learning and development" and "goal setting and planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum" (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 656).

Second, when the leadership of a campus focuses initially and directly on instruction, as Steve did at Tice, transformation can occur at the individual and organizational level. This direct focus on teaching and learning supports individual teachers in developing both equity consciousness and high quality teaching skills, which then gets taken to scale as more and more teachers develop these skills. We contend,

however, that a focus on instruction must *precede* or at least occur concurrently with a focus on transformation. For example, when one of us, McKenzie, was a principal in a large urban elementary, she never inspired or talked any teacher into changing attitudes, that is equity consciousness, about students whom the teacher believed were unmotivated, did not care about learning, or were incapable of learning at high levels. It should be noted that these students, typically, were students of color, those living in poverty, or those with learning differences (McKenzie, 2001; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). However, with a clear and directed focus on instruction, including aligning curriculum and instructional practices, frequent assessment and monitoring of student work, monitoring teachers' instructional practices, and offering professional development and instructional support to teachers, the teachers became successful with students with whom they had not been successful. Once this occurred, teachers began to change their attitudes toward their students and other students who were "like" their students. Therefore, a focus *first* on instruction brought about a transformation in teaching skills and equity consciousness. Again, as Robinson et al. (2008) state, "the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students' outcomes" (p. 664). We contend that instructional leadership precedes and creates transformation, which then leads to positive impacts on student outcomes.

### Leaders Derailed by Diversions

Next, we discuss principals that allow diversions, some at the macro level, such as true urgencies, and some at the micro level, such as minor disruptions that can usually be handled by others, to prevent them from being instructional leaders. These principals

know that they should be “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 635) but often they just can not quite get to it, too many things get in the way, too many macro and micro-diversions. Certainly, principals must address serious issues, but we have worked with or known principals who spend much of their time on the micro-diversions, the things that have nothing to do with instruction and could be delegated to others. For example, we know one principal that spends little time in classrooms but frequently walks the halls of the school taking down outdated posters of upcoming events. Another goes around and pulls all the plastic bottles out of the trash cans for recycling. And, the most radical, one principal that makes sure that all the blinds in the building are lowered to the exact same level on all the windows at the end of the day. Yes, these examples seem extreme, but when one considers the possible psychology behind these actions, they are important to examine. Possibly these principals are under enormous stress, and therefore as a strategy to alleviate some of the stress, they focus on things they can control, like taking down outdated posters or manipulating blinds. Possibly these principals are insecure about their instructional or pedagogical knowledge and avoid working directly with teachers. There may be other interpretations, but regardless, these principals are not working on the “core business of teaching and learning” (Robinson et al., 2008, p.664).

Beyond these extreme examples, most of what we hear from principals is that they just can not get into classrooms or work directly with teachers on instruction because of a variety of “musts” that have to be done, including special education Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings, discipline issues, issues with teachers and parents, paperwork, demands from the central office of the district, etc. Furthermore,

these diversions seem to occur more frequently in schools that serve mainly students of color or those living in poverty, that is, schools with the greatest needs. One only needs to look at the National Center for Education's Institute of Educational Statistics website (<http://nces.ed.gov/>) and the statistics provided therein to determine that we continue to fail our students of color and those living in poverty. In fact, students of color and those from poor households continue to achieve at levels lower than their White counterparts, are more often referred for special education, and are more often suspended and expelled from school. Therefore, in the schools with the greatest needs, there may be more diversions, making it less likely that there will be strong instructional leadership.

However, some of these diversions might dissipate, like discipline, parent, and teacher issues, if the instruction at the school was at high levels. We assert that one can not wait for these issues, like discipline, to get better before teaching and learning begins. It is the converse. For example, high quality teaching that engages all students at their instructional level eliminates much student frustration that may lead to discipline problems. So, one must start with the instruction. This may require, however, that principals literally schedule classroom visits or work times with teachers. This should be done weekly, if not daily like Steve Kinney's approach at Tice, and be held sacred. Meaning, only a true urgency should divert these activities.

#### Leaders Who Aspire to Transform

The next principal type is the principal who aspires to be a transformational leader. As we stated earlier, a transformational leader is one that is characterized as moral, inspirational, charismatic (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996). One who motivates followers by making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes and inducing



them to transcend their own self interest for the sake of the organization (Bass, 1997). However, we believe, and Robinson's et al. findings would support, that when principals keenly focus on "the business of teaching and learning" (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 636) they have a greater impact on the teaching and the learning in a school. Yet, many of the principals we work with spend most of their time and resources trying to inspire their faculty to teach better or to teach *all* their students. This is problematic particularly in schools that, according to state and national accountability data, need the most transformation, that is, schools that mainly serve students of color and those living in poverty. These are the schools where there is the greatest need for all teachers to have an equity consciousness and high quality teaching skills, which we contend, requires instructional leadership. Like the principals who allow diversions to derail their instructional efforts, principals attempting to inspire their faculty to transform engage in a range of strategies to inspire, from the superficial to the more substantive.

In the category of superficial, we would place the monthly token of appreciation in the teachers' mailboxes, for example the Bar None candy bar with the attached note, "Bar None, you're the best." Here, appreciation is seen as a way to inspire. Certainly, teachers work hard for little pay and any form of appreciation is warranted. However, token appreciation will not directly improve practice. Another strategy to inspire, which is less superficial but still not substantive, is the attempt to involve faculty in the mission, vision, and goals of the school in the belief that this involvement will promote "buy in" that will then lead to a transformation in attitudes toward students or improved teaching. We even had a student in one of our principalship classes say that at her school the faculty had been working with the principal for five years on perfecting the school

mission statement. We are not saying that a principal should not involve staff and faculty in determining the mission and/or vision of the school. Indeed, the organizational literature (Boucher, 2001; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Sherr & Lozier 1991) is clear that “buy in” is an important factor in advancing goals of an educational organization. We are saying, however, that “buy in” alone does not correlate to improved equity consciousness or teaching skills.

Of course, there are substantive efforts to inspire and transform, and these would include, but not be limited to, activities in which the principal engages in thoughtful discussions with faculty around their practice in an effort to enhance self-reflection, with the goal of this self-reflection resulting in improved practice. We know that self-reflection is a viable strategy for examining and improving both attitudes and practices (Schon, 1983). However, we have worked with principals and teacher leaders who get frustrated when they feel they have had these thoughtful discussions with teachers, but the teachers do not seem to become more reflective and do not change their practice.

However, based on Robinson’s et al. (2008) findings and our work in schools, these efforts toward transformation alone do not seem to make much difference in changing teachers’ equity consciousness or teaching skills. It is direct involvement in teaching and learning by the principal or designated leader on a campus that makes a difference in transforming teachers’ practices. Thus, we are left wondering why principals or teacher leaders continue to engage in strategies with teachers that do not appear to be working, particularly when we know that direct principal involvement in teaching and learning does make a difference. Is it because these leaders hold on to the transformational model as it seems the more democratic way to go about leading? Is it

because they want to avoid the conflict that might occur when they directly confront teachers about their attitudes and practices? Is it because they do not know enough about teaching and learning to help their teachers and do not want to delegate this work to others who have the skills to help teachers improve their practices?

Any or all of the above may be the case. Furthermore, addressing specifically the dilemma of principals who may not feel secure in their own knowledge about teaching and learning, we have worked with principals who have delegated this work to teacher leaders who, indeed, are “master teachers.” In other words, they are outstanding teachers who understand teaching and learning. At one school in which we studied teacher leaders, whose responsibilities were to work with novice teachers to improve instruction, the master teacher leaders exhibited the same behaviors we observed in principals. Instead of directly addressing the practices of the inexperienced teachers they were assigned to help, they attempted to motivate teachers to improve and then got aggravated when teachers did not improve their practice.

One teacher leader explained to us that in an effort to help her mentees, she told them, “I want you all to be happy, but you need to tell me how I can help you be happy. What can I do?” It appeared this teacher leader assumed that being happy is correlated to being motivated and that motivation would improve practice. Another teacher leader explained that her mentees complained that they could not do their job because they did not have the materials they needed. The teacher leader stated, “I went to the computer, got my visa and I ordered everything they need. That still does not get them where they need to be.” Here the teacher leader seemed to think that getting teachers the materials they wanted would improve their practice, but it did not. When these strategies did not

improve teacher attitudes and practices, the teacher leaders became upset. One said, “These kids cannot go home and get what they are not getting at school. They cannot get crap and no one on that team [of mentees] understands that. And we don’t know how to get that from them.” Another teacher leader referring to her mentees said, “Nobody is thinking. And that is what kills me at night when I lay in my bed.”

It appears, then, that using the strategies most often associated with transformational leadership, like motivating and inspiring others to transcend their own interests for the sake of the organization, does not improve teachers’ equity consciousness, their teaching skills, or student outcomes.

## Conclusion

As we stated in the introduction, there are no silver bullets for improving schools. It takes good leaders and good teachers. This is even more evident in this time of high stakes accountability and increased student diversity. For schools to be equitable and excellent, to take this quality to scale, every teacher in every classroom must be equitable and excellent; this requires a well-developed equity consciousness as well as high quality teaching skills. To help teachers develop and maintain these skills requires leadership, specifically instructional leadership. As Robinson’s et al (2008) meta-analysis clearly reveals, the effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times the effect of transformational leadership. Furthermore, there was a “strong average effects for the leadership dimension involving promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” (p. 664). Thus, as we have stated throughout, “the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students’ outcomes” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 664).

The conclusions drawn by Robinson et al. (2008) and supported by our own research (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; McKenzie, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2006; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009) have implications for research, leadership preparation, and leadership practice. First, there needs to be more research on why principals and teacher leaders are reluctant to involve themselves in the promotion of teacher learning and development, a primary component of the instructional leadership model and one that has direct effects on successful student outcomes. Second, programs preparing school and teacher leaders need to choose students who are already strong instructionally and then train them in how to work with adults. Specifically, these leadership programs need to include courses in adult learning and conflict management. Third, leaders need to be mindful consumers of research, adopting only those practices that are supported by rigorous inquiry and which have been shown to positively effect the improvement of teaching and learning and thus student learning. Instructional leadership is one example of research supported educational practice.

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<sup>1</sup> It is our opinion that Ruby Payne's work, while offering some important insights into the disconnect between middle class teachers and their students who come from families living in poverty, neglects the socio-structural aspects of poverty, is based on the illusion of a meritocracy, is ahistoric, and promotes a deficit view of those who live in poverty.

<sup>2</sup> At this time, the Texas accountability system had four ratings for schools: exemplary, recognized, acceptable, and low-performing. For more information of this system or to get specifics on the criteria of each of the rating categories see [www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/).

Figure 1

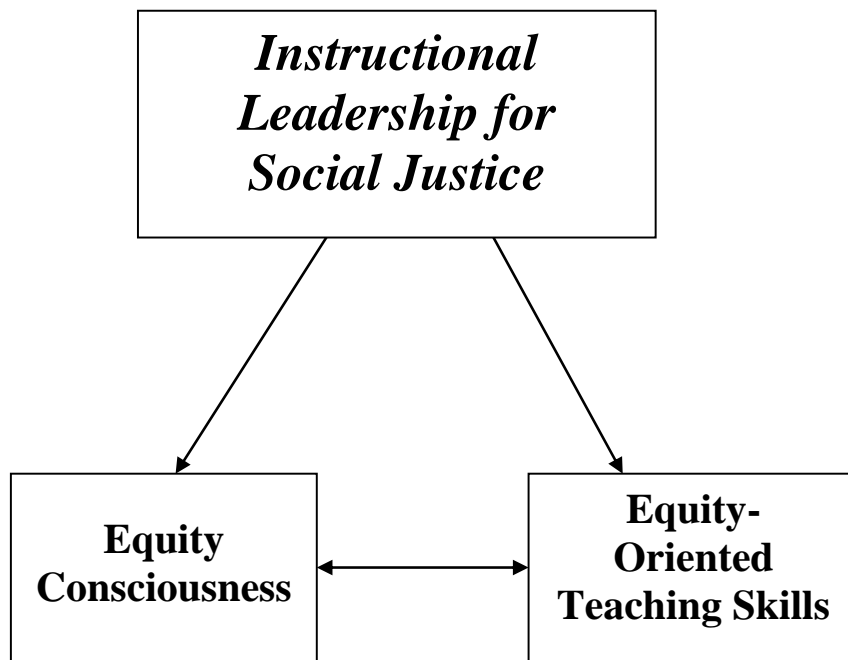


Figure 2

