The Impact of Teachers' Learning on Students' Literacy Achievement

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Abstract

We report the results of synthesizing evidence from two independent studies of school leadership that directly or indirectly increased student achievement. Although set in different contexts, the same theoretical framework was used to determine the impact of leadership on school conditions that positively influenced student growth.

Introduction

Study A (Sharratt, 1996), carried out in a small Ontario, Canada, school district, focused on what leadership factors impacted on schools as learning organizations that increased student achievement. Study B (Sharratt, 2004), carried out in a larger Ontario School District, inquired more specifically about the nature of leadership, to understand whether formal leaders and teacher-leaders, together have an impact on student achievement.

All schools involved in the studies were experiencing a rate of external change and expectations that were often overwhelming; however, each study included schools that had enough dynamic leadership, collaborative culture, participatory decision-making, and shared values to sustain meaningful change amid a turbulent environment. We attempt to explain the factors that contributed to leadership success in turbulent times and hence to increased student achievement.

Framing the Research Study

Both studies used the conceptual framework developed by Leithwood et al. (1995) after an extensive review of the literature on organizational learning (OL). School leadership was treated separately in the framework in order to determine whether it was likely to foster school conditions that led to increased student achievement.

Study A defined school leadership as a person in a formal role, such as principal, who helped determine the direction of improvements in the school and who influenced the nature and extent of efforts by teachers to learn how to bring about these improvements (Leithwood et al, 1998, p. 249). However, in the findings of Study A, Sharratt (1996, p.106) stated that distributed leadership (teacher-

leaders) should be investigated further to determine if it promoted individual and collective organizational learning, thereby contributing to student growth

Study B, eight years later, examined the above notion of determining the impact of distributed leadership on student achievement while developing a broader definition of leadership. The definitions in both studies coincided with a model of transformational school leadership developed by Leithwood (1994); thus, that was the model chosen for each.

This transformational perspective on leadership included investigation of eight dimensions of leadership practice: identifying and articulating a vision, fostering acceptance of group goals, providing individualized support for staff members, providing role modeling, holding high performance expectations, aligning resources, strengthening culture, and altering structures to permit broad participation in staff decision-making.

With this initial view of transformational school leadership, both our studies asked: 1) What leadership practices influence school conditions that contribute to teachers' changed classroom practices and students' increased learning? 2) What is the nature of teacher-leadership? 3) Do leaders have a direct impact on student achievement?
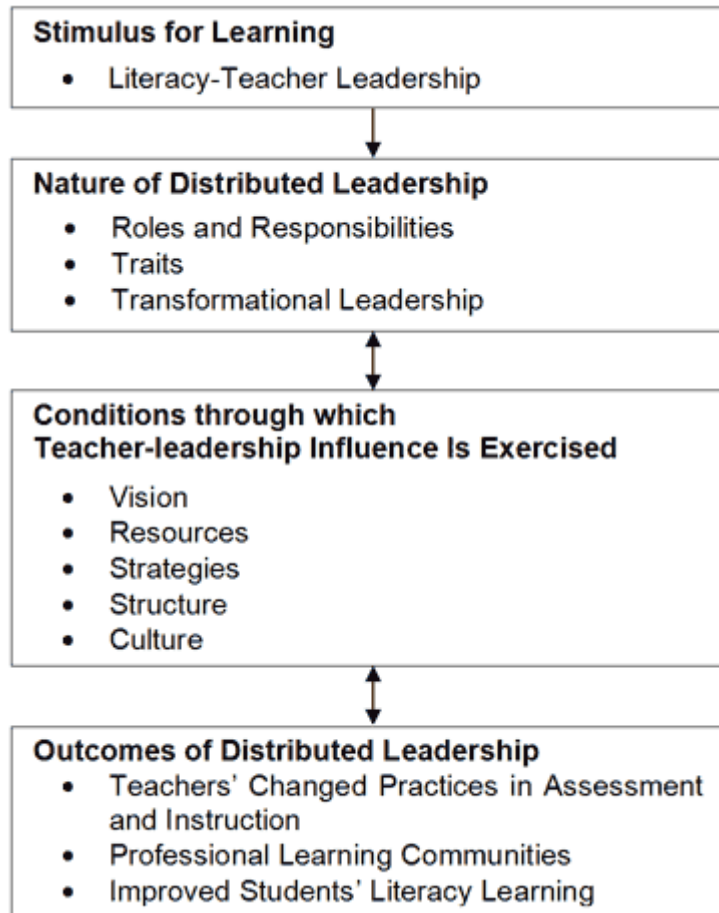
Design

The research design for both studies is best characterized as framework-guided (Figure 1), since a considerable body of relevant research literature was already available (Ibid, p.250). Each study involved interviews of principals and teachers and data analyses. Study A included five schools, interviews with 22 teachers and two principals, and survey analyses. Study B included six schools, interviews with three principals and three teacher-leaders and analyses of three assessments collected by the district.

In both cases, teachers and administrators interviewed had to be part of a district- wide professional development program focused on the district priority. Study A focused on teachers' perceptions of integrating computer technology in their classrooms, using a resource data base as an incentive for teachers' professional development training in how to use the technology to access the resources that would enhance their teaching practices. Study B focused on teachers learning from the district's Literacy Collaborative, a professional development program which had three outcomes for the ongoing teacher and administrator training in literacy to increase student achievement by: (a) using data to drive instruction and select resources; (b) building teacher and administrator content and change capacity; and (c) establishing a professional learning community in and across schools.

Figure 1
Framework for Inquiring Into the Effects of Teacher-leadership on Students' Literacy Learning M. Sharratt, 2004, adapted from Leithwood et al., 1993-1995.

Stimulus for Learning
- Literacy-Teacher Leadership

Nature of Distributed Leadership
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Traits
- Transformational Leadership

Conditions through which Teacher-leadership Influence Is Exercised
- Vision
- Resources
- Strategies
- Structure
- Culture

Outcomes of Distributed Leadership
- Teachers' Changed Practices in Assessment and Instruction
- Professional Learning Communities
- Improved Students' Literacy Learning

Context

Both the geographical locations and educational contexts were quite different in the two studies. Study A was carried out in a southeastern Ontario, Canada, school district with a population of 50,000 students. The district wanted to determine whether their computer purchases would make a difference to teachers' classroom practice of integrating technology seamlessly into instructional strategies. Study B was carried out in a south-central Ontario, Canada, school district with a population of 130,000 students. The district was interested in knowing whether intensive professional development of school-embedded Literacy Teachers made a difference to students' literacy achievement. Both districts provided ongoing professional development for administrators and teachers. It is important to note that, although the districts differed in context and focus, the Organizational Learning conceptual framework used was found to be robust across contexts of school districts. (Leithwood et al, 1998).

Review of Literature

Both studies used Transformational Leadership dimensions (Leithwood, 1999) in the inquiries and provided the justification for using the adapted conceptual framework (Figure 1) which structured both investigations. Leadership is often the key to productively managing turbulence created by constant growth and change in an organization. Leithwood et al (1999, p.22) pointed out that different types of change call for different types of leadership. Leaders of learning organizations foster a climate of risk-taking and inquiry as well as supportive relationships that encourage a community of learners. Promoting the right people into leadership positions shapes organizational strategies and climate for years. This is one of the types of decisions where there is the least opportunity for trial and error learning (Senge, 1990, p. 23). Individuals with low needs for uncertainty avoidance, high tolerances for ambiguity, and lusts to experimentation should be recruited as decision-makers and leaders (Hedberg, 1981, p. 21).

Leithwood's research identified transformational leadership as useful. Leithwood et al (1999, p.23) promoted leadership that moved away from control in order to build commitment and capacity. They noted that the key to organizational learning was structures that allowed for staff interaction and participatory decision-making. Leithwood et al (Ibid, p.87-96) supported principals who encouraged consensus building, teacher-leaders and staff discussions that resolved local problems, used local intelligence and resulted in local solutions.

It was evident from the research for this review that transformational leadership reflected leadership characteristics that were critical for school leaders to embrace in order to lead in our rapidly changing educational environment (Leithwood, 1999, p.12). As Senge (1996, p.45) stated:

> "… we are coming to believe that leaders are those people who 'walk ahead', people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organizations. They lead through developing new skills, capabilities, and understandings. And they come from many places within the organization."

To extend this further, Sharratt (1996, p.106) demonstrated that distributing leadership (teacher-leaders) promoted individual and collective organizational learning which contributed positively to student growth.

Principals who are transformational leaders play the key role in developing teacher-leaders (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000, pp.38-39). Teacher-leaders' practices are perceived to reflect many aspects of transformational school leadership. Most often mentioned in the research of Leithwood et al (1999, p.128) are practices encompassed

by the dimension of transformational leadership labeled 'individualized support', a set of practices also included in many other leadership models, such as Bass (1998, pp. 5-6) and Bass and Avolio (1994, pp. 3-4). In addition, teacher-leaders provided their colleagues with 'intellectual stimulation', 'modelled best practices', and helped 'develop structures to foster participation in school decisions'. Some teachers noted that their leader colleagues were visionary, a dimension of most models of transformational leadership. They also fostered extra effort on their part, (went the extra mile), a key goal of transformational leadership. Three transformational leadership dimensions, individualized support, role modeling, and intellectual stimulation, will be discussed first as they were seen in the literature as directly relating to the work of teacher-leaders in promoting teacher and student learning (Leithwood et al, 2003, pp.8-9).

Gives individualized support. Transformational leaders, who are also teacher-leaders, provide individualized support by being considerate of their colleagues' aspirations and feelings. As well, transformational teacher-leaders provided support for the personal and professional development of staff (Ibid, pp.72-74). Patterson (2003, p.9) concurred that teacher-leaders built professional learning communities by sharing expertise, giving different teachers the opportunity to lead, taking time to talk, and building confidence and trust through dialogue. She found that colleagues were teacher-leaders' best resource.

Is a role model. The dimension of role modeling in transformational leadership theory included practices "that set an example for employees to follow that is consistent with the values the leader espouses". Theoretically, such practices may enhance teachers' beliefs about their own capabilities, their sense of self-efficacy. Modelling may also contribute to teachers' day-to-day enthusiasm for their work by helping create perceptions of a dynamic and changing job (Leithwood et al, 1999, p.80). Devaney (1987) in Lieberman (1988, p.150) expanded on role modeling as one of six important arenas in which teacher-leaders might reasonably demonstrate leadership at the school level. She contended that when teacher-leaders advise, assist and model for individual teachers, then give feedback after demonstrating instructional strategies, they remain credible, build capacity and promote trust with their colleagues.

Provides intellectual stimulation. Teacher-leadership was exercised directly when those in this role engaged in interpersonal practices such as intellectual stimulation. Leadership practices that challenged followers to re-examine some of their work and to re-think how it can be performed, was the meaning of intellectual stimulation in the transformational leadership literature (Podsakoff, 1990, p.112, in Leithwood, 1999, p.75). At least partly sharable leadership tasks, according to Locke (in Leithwood et al, 2003, p.11) included intellectual stimulation. TheseTeacher-leaders directly challenged staff members to pursue their own personal professional development and encouraged staff members to reflect on their practices. Teacher-

leaders persuaded staff members to try new practices without using pressure. As Lieberman (1988, p.150) noted, "their interpersonal skills helped them legitimate their positions in their schools amidst often hostile and resistant staffs".

Articulates a clear vision. This dimension spoke to the school leader who gave staff members a sense of overall purpose and excited them with a vision of what they could accomplish by working together. This school leader used all available opportunities to communicate the school's vision to staff, students and parents.

Fosters acceptance of group goals. This leader had a focus on working toward total staff consensus in establishing priorities for school goals. The individual encouraged teachers to establish and review their own personal professional growth goals and was not afraid to express personal views about goals that were important for the school.

Conveys high performance expectations. This leader commanded high performance expectations from his/her staff and students. This leader expected staff members to be innovative, hard working and professional.

Builds a productive school culture. This leader gave high priority to developing within the school a shared set of values, beliefs and attitudes related to teaching and learning. This leader created and encouraged a caring and collegial environment.

Alters school structures to enhance participation in decisions. This dimension reflected a leader who distributed the responsibility and power for leadership widely throughout the school and shared decision-making power with the staff members. This leader took staff members' opinions into account when making decisions.

Teacher-leadership roles depend heavily on the positive teacher-leader and principal interaction and collaboration. Principals are in first-order positions to block or to support and facilitate, and to shape the nature and function of teacher-leadership in their schools (Little, 1998; Rallis, 1990, in Smylie & Conyers, 1992, p.151). Sackney (2003, p.106) concurred that in exercising leadership, principals have to decide to what degree they will involve teachers. Collaborative decision-making can be a burden.

When analyzing teacher-leadership issues, White and Greenwood (2002, p.30) noted that it was important to understand the relationship between the amount of direction and control a leader gave and the amount of support and encouragement a leader provided.

Similarly, Whitaker (1995, p.78) felt that principals' identification of teacher-leaders was critical to the success and growth of a school. Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992, p.180) extended this belief to

include that it is necessary to build trust, respect and communication avenues between principal and teacher-leader before embarking on their work together.

Results

In Study A, school leadership was ranked first as having an indirect effect on schools as learning organizations. This meant that, for teachers in the five research schools, formal leaders (principal, vice-principal), had a significant influence on the school conditions that promoted reflective practice, changed instructional practices, and increased skills which led directly to increased student achievement. Teachers believed that the most effective leaders shared a vision and the decision-making responsibility and readily involved staff in identifying workable and relevant learning processes and structures within the school. Overall, results indicated that school leadership had the most influence on schools' implicit (the way we've always done things) and explicit (visible learning environment) culture (Sharratt, 1996, p. 100). Specifically, in 2 schools, the principals' high expectations influenced the implicit school culture: "If you have committed administrators, who have certain standards, those standards obviously, rub off not only on the teachers, but on the students (Ibid, p.61)."

In one school, the principal altered the school structure which influenced the explicit culture in the school; this, in turn, influenced learning among the teachers:

> "The Principal wants more, she's really encouraging the stuff across the curriculum…what she's done this year is she's placed classes so three or four teachers are working together…she got the timetable to work so that there is common planning time…"

In another school, the principal's emotional/material support influenced school culture:

> "The principal is good at relieving people for training… we've set up training times for other people to come into the school during the day or after school…so it's pretty good…"

Table 1 summarizes which school conditions were influenced by transformational leadership dimensions in Study A (Ibid, p. 60).

Table 1. Influence of Transformational Leadership on School Conditions

Interestingly, the researcher of Study B acted on the first recommendation for future research found in Study A: "In order to encourage teachers to integrate new practices (use of technology) into their classrooms, researchers should investigate the effects of

distributed leadership on the implementation process (Sharratt, 1996, p.106)". In Study B, it was found that both principals and teacher-leaders influenced school conditions, particularly through strengthening culture and altering structures. These new conditions led to classroom teachers' changed practices, increased skill, and reflective practice that increased students' literacy achievement. The results were demonstrated in reading and writing data at grades three and six and articulated through interviews.

In both studies, transformational leadership dimensions were useful in explaining leaders' influence on teachers' classroom practice. In Study B both teacher-leaders and principals demonstrated transformational leadership characteristics. The three research schools in the study had teacher-leaders and principals who worked together to strengthen culture and alter structure, which resulted in students' increased literacy achievement as demonstrated in Table 2.

Note that EQAO refers to the Education, Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in the province of Ontario which was formed as an arms-length organization to monitor and report publicly on student performance in grades three and six reading, writing and mathematics and grade nine mathematics. Criterion-referenced tests are used based on the Ontario Curriculum, 1997. EQAO has developed assessments since 1997. Study B examined student achievement, in the school district being researched, in grade three reading and writing for six years of EQAO testing from 1998 to 2003 inclusive. The provincial expectation/standard is that students will achieve at levels 3 and 4 in these assessments.

Table 2. EQAO – Grade 3 Reading and Writing: Percentage of Students Performing at Levels 3 & 4

Assessment Reading	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Cumulative Gain (%)
Provincial	49	48	53	53	53	53	4
District	60	59	65	64	62	62	2
School X	35	30	36	41	42	45	10
School Y	48	49	58	67	70	67	19
School Z	53	66	67	70	88	69	16
Writing							
Provincial	52	56	55	56	59	59	7
District	61	66	66	68	68	67	6
School X	47	51	29	33	39	58	11
School Y	49	58	53	63	83	80	31
School Z	54	66	71	74	83	67	13

In examining Table 2, it is important to note two things: 1) all

schools were designated "Performance Plus" schools by the district, indicating low economic status (using Canadian Census data, 2001) and low EQAO scores (a Provincial criterion-referenced assessment described above); and 2) teacher-leaders in these schools had between .25 and .5 staffing time during the school day to work alongside administrators, classroom teachers, and students focused on literacy assessment and instruction.

Specific and Common Characteristics

In assessing the commonalities of Studies A and B, we first addressed the following question:

1) What leadership practices influence school conditions that contribute to teachers' changed practices and students' increased learning?

Two practices common to both studies – district vision and commitment and time –offer a response.

District Vision and Commitment

In Study A, the district vision, of seamless computer technology integration during the school day, when clearly articulated and funded at the board table in terms of professional development and resources, had the greatest impact on what was learned by teachers individually and collectively. Leaders with knowledge of the integration of computer technology and clearly stated goals, who provided pressure and support for its use, had the greatest influence. This can only happen when "people truly share a vision throughout an organization and can articulate it at all levels: then they are connected, bound together by common goals (Sharratt, 1996)."

Table 3: Summary of Coded School District Initiatives Associated with Organization Learning

Similarly, in Study B, one principal made a profound statement which typified all principals' responses about the importance of the districts staying true to its commitment to the literacy priority:

"The board's explicit vision and high expectation on the priority of literacy was very clear… not just by saying it, but by demonstrating it and providing dollars for resources, the school board has increased student learning (Sharratt, 2004, p.104)."

This vision, captured through the work of the district's comprehensive plan for literacy improvement known as Literacy Collaborative focused not only on vertical alignment throughout the system (district, schools and classrooms), but also on horizontal capacity-building across the system (across schools and among

leaders). As another principal reinforced:

"The strong, consistent, and very explicit vision and
statement regarding literacy being the top priority
provides lots of strength and power in what I say and
what the school priority is, and how teachers follow it
(Ibid, p.105)."

A third principal also recommended that the district keep to the
vision:

"Maintain what they're doing. It is very important to
continue to have the professional development for the
literacy teachers and for the people that, in turn, bring
that information to share back at the school, because
then we are able to be as current as we can possibly be.
I feel that that's really very important (Ibid, p. 105)."

One teacher-leader in the study extolled the district's
commitment to change through specific funding:

"The vision of bringing experts like Doctors Michael
Fullan, Carol Rolheiser, and Barrie Bennett to us, front
and centre, you know, time after time, month after month
has really showed a deep commitment for change, at
the board level (Ibid, p. 105)."

It is interesting to note that, in Study B, administrators and
teacher-leaders in the field clearly could not only articulate the
district's priority of Literacy but also point to the coherence from the
centre and field, through Superintendent and external partner
involvement, as being a commitment to the improvement of student
achievement in Literacy, seen in this district as the fulcrum of effective
schooling. Heck and Halinger (1996) cite the focused commitment to
a singular goal as being the only approach that makes a difference in
system and school planning. The district has captured this by
identifying literacy as the priority in system and school plans providing
coherence, alignment and clarity.

Time

In both studies, the issue of time was viewed as problematic.
Interviewees recognized the importance of time for teacher dialogue
and critical conversations during the school day.

Study A found that teachers experimented freely and learned
most in an environment where there was time for sharing of
successful teaching practices. This behaviour translated into
encouraging colleagues to support and help one another; facilitating
team teaching; and focusing on one or two goals for improvement.
With such support, often through creative timetabling or principals
taking classes so teachers could meet, teachers had time to talk to

other colleagues and discovered new relationships with staff members who shared the same values. One teacher described the principal's support this way:

> "The principal is good at finding time to relieve people for training… we've also set up times for expert teachers on staff, district personnel, community members and others to give training on professional activity days…so training is pretty good here (Sharratt, 1996, p. 63)."

This culture of shared learning extended beyond the school to the district through the transparent use of technology for teaching and communicating changed practices.

In Study B, teacher-leaders noted two ways that time needed to be considered: a) when teacher-leaders had time during the school day to work alongside teachers and students, they credited that time with increased student achievement; and, b) interruptions during the school day, such as public address system announcements, assemblies, field trips, and fundraising activities were considered obstacles to time on task and students' purposeful literacy learning. Teachers noted that focused time on literacy instruction was imperative. Teacher-leaders interviewed agreed unanimously that large uninterrupted blocks of time for teachers and students to work together, in precise, intentional ways, had to be kept sacred across all schools in the district. One principal agreed,

> "if we are going to do anything positive for kids, we must have creative interventions in place such as, structuring the role of the literacy teacher-leader and timetabling the school day into three large blocks of instructional time, focused on cross-curricular literacy instruction."

The second question addressed in combining the studies was:

2) What is the nature of teacher-leadership?

Teacher-leadership involved a willingness to share content knowledge and instructional expertise by a teacher-leader who was approachable, nonjudgmental, and a focused advocate for student achievement.

In Study A, teachers said that they learned more about technology from other staff members who were approachable, knowledgeable, supportive, accessible, and creative problem-solvers than from technology professionals. Only 46% of the teachers in the study said that their in-school computer teacher was approachable. Leithwood and his colleagues (1998) argue for a form of leadership that focuses not on control, but on building commitment and capacity. They make the point that the key to organizational learning is structures that allow for staff interaction and participatory decision

making. As one teacher interviewee observed,

"At this school, we probably have the best secondary computer teacher in the district…she's very knowledgeable…she works hard, and most of what we do have in this school is thanks to her …she's skilled; she's good at fixing things, and if she doesn't know something, she'll get help as soon as possible and she isn't the formal Computer Head. (Sharratt, 1996 p. 75)."

Study B made the nature and value of teacher-leadership in increasing students' literacy achievement come to life. Teacher-leadership involved a willingness to work alongside administrators and classroom teachers to share assessment literacy and instructional expertise in literacy on a daily basis. Findings suggested seven dimensions of teacher-leadership that were associated with increased student achievement (Sharratt, 2004, p. 71). Teacher-leaders:

1) Exhibit drive and perseverance
Teacher-leaders demonstrated their willingness to maintain commitment and energy in the face of teacher skepticism and low morale. One teacher-leader haltingly described the drive and perseverance needed to convince teachers to learn new practices:

"…how to maintain that opportunity for the tussling of the ideas…it's so overwhelming and there's so much… That's an ongoing process of getting teachers to actually use the results from the assessment to inform their teaching Ibid, p. 72)."

2) Set high expectations
Teacher-leaders modelled intentional, purposeful teaching that encouraged individuals and small groups of students to increase their achievement in literacy. This approach demanded setting clear school and classroom targets and working alongside staff, in non-threatening ways, to achieve them, in addition to modelling the belief that all students can learn. One teacher-leader commented:

"As you know, as the literacy teacher-leader and Reading Recovery teacher, I work with the lowest. One person said the other day, it was kind of a neat term, working with the out-liers, the children that just don't quite fit... (Sharratt, 2004, p. 74)."

3) See wholes, not parts
Teacher-leaders understood the vision of literacy in the district, which meant seeing the school culture as a whole as opposed to fragmented parts. This vision demanded that teacher-leaders model a concern for all students, not just the struggling few. It also included working with all teachers, not just those in one division.

4) Build learning power across boundaries
Teacher-leaders focused on learning for all, not just teaching. In Study

B, learning was the common thread critical for not only teacher-leaders but also for students, principals, support staff, district leaders, and parents. Teacher-leaders modelled actions that built school and individual learning capacity. Teacher-leaders knew how to manage teachers' good ideas, turning them into focused instructional strategies that increased students' learning.

5) Focus on writing to teach reading

Teacher-leaders and principals provided on-going learning for staff members about balanced literacy programming. In the most successful school, 2a, the principal, literacy teacher, and staff focused on writing to increase student achievement: As Meek (1991, p.27) reiterated, to look at writing is, of course, to read. Meek (Ibid, p.140) summed up the importance of teacher-leaders' clear focus on writing to enhance students' thinking and increase literacy achievement:

> "The teachers' basic task is not to examine children's language, not even to invite children to examine it, but to extend and enrich children's experience of it in both speech and writing so that their intuitions about language use can be transformed into more developed awareness."

6) Create time to talk

Teacher-leaders in Study B used time differently. They found ways to work with teachers to think and be creative together. During the day, literacy teacher-leaders organized structured meetings to focus on student achievement in classrooms. Reflection on practice must focus positively on what students can do. Time during the school day is an asset when teachers, together, can scrutinize students' learning by being keen observers of their learning behaviour in the classroom.

7) Involve the community

Teacher-leaders in all schools found creative ways to involve parents and the community in the literacy priority. Being explicit about literacy assessment and instruction extended beyond teachers in their schools to embrace parents in doing focused activities with their children.

> "We invited parents to come twice a week for a full morning, and it was usually grandparents or caregivers who came with these pre-school children. Seneca Community College Early Childhood Education students provided a wonderful program, where the children got to see a school, and to sit in a little circle and have a story, and to move from centre to centre for different activities (Sharratt, 2004, p. 82)."

Teacher-leadership in the district involved not only a change in school culture but also a change in attitude towards parents as important contributors to their children's education. One teacher-leader put this very succinctly:

"We shifted away from what you often hear in schools
as, well, you know, it's these children, their parents are
never home, they never do anything with them (Ibid,
p.82)."

The final question we set out to answer from the combined
studies is:

3) Do leaders have a direct impact on student achievement?

Both studies noted that, when teachers feel that they are not
alone, but working together with a common purpose, a cultural shift
occurs. Teachers who invite administrators into their classrooms to
witness their changed practices and work with them promote
increased student learning. One principal aptly explained:

"when teachers realized that they didn't have to solve
problems alone and that every student was important,
then they understood that every student belonged to
every teacher and administrator, not just to them. It was
then that they opened their classroom doors" (Sharratt,
2004, pp114-115)."

Together, principals and teacher-leaders made successful
teaching practices public.

Specifically, in Study B, two dimensions made a direct difference
to increased students' literacy achievement:

1) Setting high expectations
Teacher-leaders and principals, together, need to be explicit about
target setting for school and classroom performance and about
assessment and instructional approaches that increase student
achievement. Teachers will change practices and learn new ways of
engaging students in learning, given sufficient time and support for
improvement. Improvement is ensured when teachers set high
expectations and reasonable performance targets. Students must be
clear about what teachers expect of them. Therefore, students must
be involved in their own goal-setting as part of their learning process.
Teacher-leaders and administrators must focus on what classroom
teachers already do well and then work together to expand teachers'
repertoire of data-driven instructional strategies.

2) Being knowledgeable about assessment that drives
instruction
Principals and teacher-leaders need to make extraordinary efforts to
be visible in classrooms, daily, to support teachers, to understand
effective assessment and instructional practice, and to recognize
student and teacher accomplishments. School leaders should know
what precise and focused practice looks like in classrooms and be
accessible to discuss student and teacher problems at any time.
Teachers are more likely to learn new practices when they are

reassured that they are not alone in the change process.

These studies concur with the findings of Belchetz (2004, p. 238) that to be a leader today demands highly energetic educators who embrace not only Transformational Leadership but also combine it with Instructional Leadership to ensure increased student achievement. The research in Study B found this to be the case in the district studied. The commitment and participation of not only Principals and Literacy Teachers but also district leaders in the Literacy Collaborative program provided the focus and coherence necessary to increase student achievement across the district.

Policy Implications for District and School Leadership Practices

The findings in these two studies support both researchers' beliefs that co-transformational and instructional leaders (principals, and teacher-leaders together) make a significant difference in increased student achievement when highly skilled literacy teacher-leaders have time and principals take time, during the school day, to work alongside students and teachers in classrooms. Both studies suggest that district and school leaders may have to radically reconsider school structures in order to ensure that there is time during the school day for purposeful teacher/student/administrator dialogue focused on student learning. Should changes that focus on students' literacy achievement become embedded in policy as a right of all learners? According to Barber (1997, p.241):

> "…a learning society is one in which every person is an active learner. Britain would cease to be a nation of shopkeepers and become instead a nation of learners. A learning society in this sense, unlike an information society, is not inevitable. We have to decide whether we want it and, if we do, we will have to create it. In short, it is a question of policy. It might be argued that even attempting to create a learning society defined in this way is utopian nonsense. The idea of everyone learning, it could be argued, is absurd. I would admit that, as a goal, it is very ambitious. It is indeed a goal which has never been set for policy before, never mind achieved."

To support Barber's policy development notion, S. Murray, Director-General of Institutions and Social Statistics at Statistics Canada, recently reported, "Finland has included educational excellence and equity in all of its social and economic policies yielding better in student achievement test scores (OSSTF, 2005)." Only students in Finland scored better than Canadian students on Reading alone in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study. The rankings were Finland (1), Hong Kong (2), Canada (3) and USA (28) out of the 41-nation test for 15-year-olds in Math, Reading, Science, and Problem-Solving.

We believe that the statistics make the case for embedding

"excellence and equity in literacy education" in economic and social development policy. Thus, we would make education a recognized natural and national resource, worthy of everyone's efforts and part of everyone's responsibility.

Conclusion

Students' increased learning is at the heart of both studies. Setting high expectations and articulating explicit assessment processes that drive instructional strategies in literacy form the solid foundation that sustains successful distributed instructional leadership.

Clear vision and commitment, time to learn from each other during the school day, and leadership distributed throughout schools and districts will ensure that districts become symmetrical organizations focused on learning and increasing student achievement.

In both studies, teacher-leaders and principals, together, made a difference when they were focused on learning with one another and caring, passionately, about students' increased achievement.

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Professor at York University in their pre-service program; Executive Assistant, professional development, with the Federation of Women Teachers' Association in Ontario; and Director of Curriculum at the Ontario Public Schools Boards Association working with trustees across the Province of Ontario. She has written many articles on Technology Implementation, School Improvement, Change, Leadership Development and Increasing Student Achievement through Literacy. Her proudest moment was hooding her eldest daughter, Michelle, at OISE's convocation, followed by co-authoring this article with her, as their work flows from one to the other.

Study B was authored by **Michelle Sharratt**, as her masters' thesis in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Currently, Michelle is a grade 5 teacher and a Literacy Teacher in York Region District School Board. She is Reading Recovery trained, a Junior Lead Teacher and a Course Instructor for a Classroom Management Course for the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario. Michelle has taught both in the Primary and Junior divisions over the past 8 years of her teaching career, and has been a Math Mentor Teacher, Primary Lead teacher and a District Literacy Leader for the Ontario Ministry of Education training. As a result of her position of responsibility as a Literacy Teacher, her thesis on "The Effects of Teacher-leadership on Students' Literacy Learning" is current and authentic. Michelle also volunteers in her summers at Camp Oochigeas, a summer camp for children with cancer.

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