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How Principals Influence Program Outcomes: The Challenges of Implementing A Demanding Development Program For Instructional Leaders.

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Improving instruction and achievement in our schools is a hard and demanding task, especially in urban areas where students are often disadvantaged by economic or other circumstances, and teachers frequently work under less-than-optimal conditions. Although school leaders alone cannot change the current system, effective change cannot occur without the development of school leaders who can lead such improvement, pushing their schools towards high quality instruction for all students (Barth, 1986; Leithwood, 1994). The question, then, becomes how to effectively develop principals who can lead teachers and students to new levels of performance. One program, the *National Institute for School Leadership* (NISL), an ambitious leadership program, concentrates on reducing the time and cognition principals put into non-instructional matters, focusing them instead on new information and “best practices” related more directly to improving instruction and achievement. In doing so, NISL sets challenging, and even transformative, goals for principals.

Participation in this program, however, is not enough to ensure that principals will be willing and able to make the changes to their practices advocated by NISL. In fact, recent work in the learning sciences indicates that the traditional modes of instruction typical of many principal training programs often results in a limited transfer of learning from the workshop to the real world (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000). This is not to say that principals cannot benefit from professional development, but it does mean that professional development should be carefully planned to take into account principles of effective adult education, including readiness to learn, motivation, orientation to learning, and, perhaps most important, the prior experiences that these adult learners bring with them to the new learning experience (Knowles, 2005; Galbraith, 2004).

These prior experiences can be both positive and negative – more experienced learners have a wider base of knowledge from which to draw, but experience can also lead learners to rely upon previously developed pathways of thought that may preclude the recognition and usage of new ideas and alternative ways of thinking (Knowles, 2005, p. 66). Experienced practitioners, or experts, bring different perspectives to their learning in any given area. They not only have a wider knowledge base than novices, but they organize their ideas more effectively and are able to retrieve and apply that knowledge more thoroughly.

This paper will examine the difference between expert and novice practitioners as they experienced the *National Instructional Leadership Institute*. Although all principals discussed herein attended the same professional development sessions, principals in each group – expert, novice and moderate – responded differently to the NISL curriculum, and made use of the knowledge and skills provided by the program in different ways. Level of expertise in this paper is defined by the principals’ instructional leadership practices prior to the start of the NISL program. Principals were classified as low, moderate or high instructional leaders according to the percentage of time they reported spending on instructional leadership practices such as monitoring or observing instruction, analyzing student work or student data, supporting teachers’ learning, coaching teachers, and revising procedures related to curriculum and/or instruction.

**Adult Learning Theory, Expertise,
and the *National Institute for School Leadership***

Students in any learning situation come to that learning with preconceptions and prior knowledge about that topic. This is true of any learner, from a five year old first learning to read to a medical or law student at a top university. In order to learn, students must build on that previously acquired knowledge to create a deep foundation of factual knowledge, be able to understand that knowledge in the context of a conceptual framework, and to organize it in ways that facilitate its retrieval and application. Furthermore, the new knowledge must be integrated with the previous knowledge or students may not truly understand the new concepts or may remember them solely for the short term, such as when a child learns information for a test but promptly forgets what he or she learned within a few days (Bransford, et al, 2000, p. 14-16). This is especially important in the case of adult learners: adults have more experience, both in quantity and quality than children, and such diverse backgrounds impact on their ability to both acquire new information and reevaluate old information in light of the new (Knowles, 2005; Galbraith, 2004).

Researchers from fields as diverse as professional education, adult learning theory, cognitive science (notably the expert-novice literature), and studies of effective professional development converge on several elements of effective program design for adult professionals. First is coherent content and sustained learning. Professional growth opportunities for adults should organize foundational knowledge around important concepts and integrate curriculum topics across sessions and over time (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000; Sykes, 2002). Second is the organization of learners into cohorts, teams or communities. Building on the work of Vygotsky, social learning theories argue that people learn best in a community or social context (Bandura, 1989;

Resnick, Levine and Teasley, 2002). Recent reforms in professional education, in fields such as law, medicine, the ministry and leadership programs, therefore, consider professional development programs that organize learning experiences in cohorts or groups as best practices, as these programs develop social scaffolding through peer learning, mentoring, a common language and parallel experiences as exemplars of “best practice” (Kelly and Peterson, 2002; Sironnik and Mueller, 1993; Sykes et al, 2002). Finally, adult learning and cognitive learning theories suggest that professional learners need opportunities for problem solving in context; that is, they should work on actual problems embedded in their practice or work environment (Hart and Pounder, 1999; Bridges and Hallinger, 1993; Hallinger, Leithwood, and Murphy, 1993; Ohde and Murphy, 1993).

The *National Institute for School Leadership* program uses many of these elements characterizing effective professional development in its design. NISL organizes principals into cohorts consisting of members from primary, middle and secondary schools. The designers of NISL intended that these cohorts of learners remain together for two years and work in teams on common problems or interests. They have ample opportunities to apply new knowledge to meaningful problems: for example, principals engage in “action projects,” which address local priorities, and which require principals to apply the concepts and strategies that they have learned in the NISL program to that local context. Through a spiraling curriculum, and a carefully crafted scope and sequence, the NISL content is integrated, and returns to big ideas and concepts repeatedly over multiple sessions. Thus the learning experience as intended is sustained and coherently focused.

Opportunities for practitioners to engage with and learn how to use new knowledge such as NISL are unusual and can be an important instrument of reform implementation (Barnes, 2002; Cohen and Barnes, 1993; Elmore and McLaughlin, 1988; McLaughlin 1976; 1987; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). But demanding curricula and practice-oriented methods alone cannot bring about change in leadership practice. Principals must be motivated to apply the knowledge and skills gained in professional development sessions to their school situations. In many ways, principals are autonomous, self-governing workers, similar to medical doctors described by Yelon and colleagues, who

. . . are not forced by a company to follow a standard procedure exactly as prescribed. Nor are they held accountable by structured supervision. These workers decide how they will operate in some or all of their tasks. They also decide if and when they will apply new ways to act that they have learned in training (Yelon et al, 2004).

Principals can decide if, when, and how to apply the principles of the NISL curriculum in their own schools. Although they are held accountable for the progress of their students, it is exceedingly rare that a principal is required to operate his or her school in a prescribed manner. Instead, it is usually left to one's discretion to decide how he or she should implement his or her own professional development. In the case of NISL, although principals were given little initial choice about participating in the program, the district allowed some principals to drop out of the program and others to join. Furthermore, although the district mandated attendance of many principals at the training, its requirements stopped there (and even then, there was no consequence when principals missed sessions or stopped attending at all). In other words, principals were at least theoretically required to attend the training sessions, but they were not required to

implement what they learned there, although they were highly encouraged to complete homework assignments and action research projects. Motivation on the part of the learner, therefore, joins coherent content and sustained learning, the organization of learners into cohorts and opportunities for problem solving as a vital part of effective professional development.

The final important aspect of adult learning is associated with principals' background and previous knowledge. Some learners come to a professional development experience with very little knowledge in an area (novices), whereas others have a deep and nuanced understanding of the subject at hand (experts). A large body of literature notes that such differences make a large impact on a learners' ability to make sense of and use new information. First, experts have an extensive and deep information base that includes domain-specific knowledge such as factual information, procedural knowledge and definitions of concepts. Knowledge on its own, however, does not confer expertise. It is the expert's ability to organize that knowledge into patterns or meaningful chunks that provides the benefit, reducing the cognitive load of managing such knowledge, leaving him or her free to devote more time and energy to addressing the actual issue, rather than attempting to learn and organize information. This organization in turn makes it easier for experts to determine which information is or is not relevant to the solution of their problems, making them much more efficient problem-solvers (Bransford et al, 2000; Odhe and Murphy, 1993; Yekovich,1993).

The differences between novices and experts' thinking extend beyond pattern recognition and use, however. Experts are more likely to organize their thoughts around

big ideas, classifying problems by principles, laws or major rules rather than by surface features. Bransford and his colleagues use physics as an example:

Experts' thinking seems to be organized around big ideas in physics, such as Newton's second law and how it would apply, while novices tend to perceive problem solving in physics as memorizing, recalling, and manipulating equations and answers. When solving problems, experts in physics often pause to draw a simple qualitative diagram – they do not simply tempt to plug numbers into a formula. The diagram is often elaborated as the expert seeks to find a workable solution path (2000, p. 37-38).

Furthermore, experts are likely to spend more time describing and evaluating the problem and proportionately less time actual executing the solution, whereas novices do just the opposite, spending a small proportion of their time generating the representation of the problem and a large proportion executing potential solutions, although their solutions are less likely to be effective (Odhe and Murphy, 1993; Bransford, 2000). Experts, therefore, think differently than novices in that particular domain.

The learner's path from novice to expert follows a fairly predictable path. Learners begin by acquiring declarative knowledge – facts, concepts and rules – in a domain. During this stage, a learner's use of that knowledge is slow and subject to error because heavy demands are placed on working memory, but as that declarative knowledge grows it begins to be organized in a rudimentary way. The learner continues to add declarative knowledge, but continuously refines such knowledge, organizing it in a much more developed way and making connections and associations between previously unrelated facts. Although not yet an expert, this learner can apply knowledge or skills to domain-specific problems, following a routinized set of behaviors or procedures. In the final stage, that of expertise, learners have refined their problem-solving procedures, using an elaborate and interconnected network of knowledge to purposefully choose his

or her path to an effective and efficient solution (Odhe and Murphy, 1993, p. 77-78; Yekovich, 1993, p. 151-159).

Method and Data

The principals enrolled in the *National Institute for School Leadership* entered at widely varying levels of expertise in instructional leadership. In order to determine the impact that these varying levels of expertise had on the NISL program's effect on principals' practices, we used evidence from "shadowing" and observation data as well as self-reported uses of elements of the NISL program in cognitive and post-professional development session interview data.

We observed the NISL training at four time points. Each NISL unit ran for one or two days, and more than one unit was covered at two of the observation points; we therefore observed six of the seven NISL units in which principals were trained. At each time point, we interviewed principals to ascertain their understanding of the unit, what they learned, and why and how they might use the new ideas broached by NISL in their practice. We also asked principals to describe a typical day in their practice as well as their approach to leadership for improving student learning, and if or how that practice had changed. In interviews following later units we asked further if that practice has changed because of their participation in the NISL training, and if so, what they were doing differently as a result of NISL.

In addition to observation of the NISL sessions and the post-professional development interviews, we twice shadowed a sub-sample of fifteen principals for one day, once in February of 2006 and once in February of 2007, selecting principals based

on their reports of both professional development attendance and time spent on instructional leadership (we sampled both high and low principals on these measures). During these day-long observations, we documented the principals' practices, and at the end of the day we interviewed the principals about our observations, using a set of common prompts to probe on how and why they used new knowledge in their work. We also used our records to triangulate with the principals' end-of-day logs, which they completed on the same day.

In this paper we are focusing our qualitative analysis on six NISL participants, selected from the larger group based on their reports of time spent on instructional leadership prior to the start of the National Institute for School Leadership training.¹ We classified all principals as high, moderate or low instructional leaders, and then selected two NISL attendees from each group. We have observation and post-observation interview data of each of the six principals, with the exception of one low instructional leader, whose attendance at NISL training was sporadic. The rest of the principals – two high, two moderate, and one low instructional leader – attended ten or eleven of the eleven days of NISL training. We have shadowing and post-shadowing interview data for all six of the principals for both years, with the exception of one of the low

¹ We used data from two instruments to analyze principals' instructional leadership practices – daily logs and an annual survey. Daily logs are web-based self-administered questionnaires in which respondents reported their leadership and management activities for a single day. The daily logs have been administered four times: spring 2005, fall 2005, winter 2006, and spring 2006. At each time point, principals filled out logs for five consecutive school days. The first round of NISL trainings were conducted in the summer and fall of 2005. Data from the spring 2005 administration of the logs thus provides a baseline measurement of principals prior to treatment through NISL. In the logs, principals gave a description of their activities and the amount of time they spent on each type of activity. Based on their responses in these logs, we classified principals as relatively low, moderate, or high instructional leaders contingent upon the amount of time they spent on a set of activities such as monitoring or observing instruction, supporting teachers' learning, analyzing student data or student work, and revising procedures related to curriculum or instruction.

instructional leaders who refused participation in the second year. Four of these principals are elementary school principals; two are middle school; four are white; two African American, five female, one male.

**Low Instructional Leaders' Use of the
*National Institute for School Leadership Program***

The two principals who were classified as low instructional leaders prior to the start of the NISL training both started off enthusiastic about the program. Ms. Teem, an elementary school principal, said that she was “looking forward to it” and thought that NISL “is going to be very helpful in what I do day to day and in helping me . . . to learn something new to add to my repertoire” (June 2005). Mr. Jimm, principal at one of the district’s middle schools, said that he welcomed the program, noting that he felt it would be an improvement over previous programs: “I think what NISL will do is just bring a common terminology, some common things that we can do as a system, as opposed to having these isolated efforts of improvement” (June 2005). The following year, after a year of NISL training, Ms. Teem stayed enthusiastic, saying, in February 2006 that although the preparation for the program was time consuming, she appreciated the program: “. . . it’s good. It’s useful, it’s high quality. And it meshes and melds with everything else that is going on here, at this particular school, at this particular time, with the state initiative, and also with the other initiatives that the county has adopted” (February 2006). Principal Jimm continued to state that he was interested in the program, but his attendance record tells a different story: he attended only five of the eleven days of training during the first year.

Both Ms. Teem and Mr. Jimm reported using parts of the *National Institute for School Leadership* curriculum in their practice at school. These changes in their practice, on the other hand, tended to be less than transformative, although still in evidence. Ms. Teem, for example, reported becoming more focused on results, and noted that she now uses more data than she did prior to NISL:

I think the emphasis on data. I think that, particularly where I am now, we, we had a culture of – there were good things going on, but we couldn't prove they were good. It was, just, we think this is good and we think kids are learning from it. And I think that the whole movement has sort of gotten teachers to look at the data, and the more we emphasize that if you know it but don't have the data, then it's not any good to you (February 2006).

She did not report, however, changes in practice due to this new emphasis on data; instead she used the information about data-use acquired via the NISL training program to bolster previous practices.

Another area in which Principal Teem mentioned change due to the NISL program was in her new and heightened attention to standards, saying that “. . .had I not been in NISL I probably would not have been focused on looking for standards-based instruction.” The following excerpt is a description she gave of a classroom observation where she was assessing the teacher's adherence to standards:

I didn't see any standard that was visible. In other classrooms there was a range of things. In Mr. [Teacher 1]'s classroom, standards were posted. The current standard that he was working on was posted; objectives for each lesson were posted. You could look at his classroom, and the kids knew exactly what – if you asked any of those children, “What are you studying?” they could tell you. I'm sure if you asked them, “What standard are you working on?” they could tell you. And in Miss [Teacher 2]'s class it wasn't that striking. She did have standards posted, and she had the first grade standards, and she had clothespins indicating what standards we were currently working on so that she knows, I know, anybody who walks in the class knows, this is what the class is working on. I don't think that her children, in all probability, could

articulate it as well as Mr. [Teacher 1]'s could, but they know that there was a ritual and a routine, and this is the way that they do things (February 2006).

In this case, Ms. Teem indicates a new understanding of the importance of standards, and attributes this understanding to the NISL program. On the other hand, her concern with standards seems to be limited to the presence of posted standards and the students' ability to state the standard that was being studied, seemingly without regard either for whether or how the teacher was teaching them or for the teacher's assessment of the students' progress towards meeting those standards.

Principal Jimm described an experience where he used information gained at NISL training to change safety net programs – programs that provide extra help for student who are at risk of failing – at his school:

The last NISL training I attended, we talked about identifying one area in your school improvement plan and really focusing on that. One area I really didn't think about was our safety nets; I just assumed that because we called it a safety net that we were doing our regular strategies within our safety nets. Come to find out, we had safety nets in place, but the quality of our safety nets was in question. So I think that last training – taking that and then coming back and evaluating our safety nets, our after school programs that are going on right now – making sure that the right people are in there, and that they're doing the right things (February 2006).

Later in the same interview, Principal Jimm explained that in the NISL session he referred to, the principals were given a questionnaire asking them about a program at their school, in order to help them determine what they did and did not know about programs going on in their schools. Mr. Jimm attempted to answer the questionnaire in terms of the safety net programs at his school, but quickly found that he could not – he did not have the necessary information:

I knew, I can rattle them off to you: 4-8 program, instructional extension program, supplemental services – I can name all of our safety nets. But,

again, when they ask those questions, “What is going on in those programs?” I couldn’t [answer] before coming back and involving the design team. (February 2006).

When he returned to his school, Principal Jimm brought this activity with him – he had his design team complete it with him, and found that after doing so he had a much better idea of what was going on in the school. NISL, he said, changed his practice:

[P]rior to NISL, I just would have counted on those things to be in place. . . . But since I've gone to NISL, I know that [monitoring] is something I need to be doing on-going. At least the way that they showed us to monitor those kinds of things are really pro-active measures, on trying to make sure you know what's going on in the program, as opposed to being reactive, and that's how I was doing it prior to going to the NISL training (February 2006).

Despite limited attendance, therefore, Mr. Jimm did make use of his time at the NISL professional development sessions. He took an activity that he did at the training session and replicated in his school, learning more about the functioning of his own school.

When we asked these principals about the most important or most useful idea they both responded with general ideas. Principal Jimm spoke about the advantages of district-wide professional development, seeing NISL as a way to “bring a common terminology, some common things that we can do as a system, as opposed to having these isolated efforts of improvement” (June 2005). Principal Teem, on the other hand, referred back to the first day of NISL training, when she said that

I think some of the things that have impacted me the most and given me 'aha' moments is the learning on the global economy and the whys: why and how did things get the way they are and where are we headed now? And what do we need to be competitive and what will children have to do now to be successful later? And I think that viewing it from the economic aspect, too often we're in our focused little education world and we don't get the full context. We don't exist in a vacuum and we do exist to serve the people (February 2006).

Both Ms. Teem and Mr. Jones, then, found the abstract ideas and concepts of instructional leadership to be the most important ideas of the NISL curriculum.

Moderate Instructional Leaders' Use of the *National Institute for School Leadership Program*

One of the two principals who were classified as moderate instructional leaders prior to the start of the *National Institute for School Leadership*, Ms. Walt, is an elementary school principal; the other, Ms. Cole, is a middle school principal. Similar to Ms. Teem's new use of data, Ms. Cole reported that she also used information from NISL to bolster and affirm her previous actions:

I really think that we already had our professional learning communities on track. We're still not where we need to be. But the, the plan was in place. It was just last week in NISL that we addressed professional development. But, it was very affirming. Many of the things that were shared I could say, we're, great, we're heading in the right direction. Okay, we've done this. And, yeah, so it was, it was a good thing, it was very – you know, it made me feel good realizing, hey, we're already doing a lot of these things, And we need to continue to move forward (February 2006).

Ms. Cole, therefore, felt that she was already on the right track with professional development. She did, however, make use of the time at NISL trainings to reevaluate her current programs, and seemed open to making changes as she moved through the program.

One notable place where such change occurred was in her school's safety net programs. Prior to NISL, she said, the programs that the school offered for struggling students occurred primarily after school or on the weekends. After she completed the same activity as Mr. Jimm during the NISL professional development session, Ms. Cole realized that although her programs were effective, not enough children were attending

regularly, possibly due to parental difficulties with transportation. She decided to revise the school schedule to include more safety net programs during the day, enabling many more students to attend regularly. “The school day,” she said, “we can control what happens between 7:30 and 2:30” (February 2007). Furthermore, although she had always evaluated safety net programs according to their overall effectiveness, she was moving towards a system in which she and her leadership team looked at program effectiveness for individual students rather than at the group as a whole (March 2006).

The principal that reports perhaps the most substantive change due to NISL is Principal Walt. When we asked her to describe a typical day and her current approach to leadership in June of 2005, at the start of the program, Ms. Walt described a chaotic experience, consistent with much of the past literature on principals’ practice (see for example, Wolcott, 1973; Peterson 1981; Martin and Willover, 1981, cited in Fullan, 1991, p. 146):

There is no typical day, there is no typical day. . . . You never know what you’re going to be doing when you get to work. You think you know what you might be doing, but there are days you never even get your calendar out of the book bag.

The same literature on principals’ work is consistent with how this principal described her then-current approach to leadership and work day: myriad interpersonal interactions that were brief, sporadic, highly varied and fragmented – bits and pieces of many different practices.

We have a full range of responsibilities from clerical work, email and correspondence, evaluating teachers, ordering materials, keeping the budget balanced . . . meeting with irate parents, and happy parents, with discipline, dealing with students, dealing with irate and dealing with happy teachers Many times I feel like a negotiator between teachers and parents. It seems like a great deal of our time is spent in conflict-resolution with upset people –whoever those upset people might be – and then you

have all that stuff that you have to take care of like the budget. I never knew I would sign my name so many times.

The picture of her habits of mind and practice that emerges from the interview is one that by her own account is quite fragmented and “scattered.” She seemed to lack focus, intentionality, and purposeful routines for attending to instruction. She described her learning and the content in her development activities in similar terms. In this she was unusual among our cases as most principals reported routines that would at least by intent, focus their work on instruction or some other aspect of work.

But from the second interview we had with Ms. Walt in November 2005 through February and March 2006, this principal seemed to change. She began to recognize her approach as problematic. She appeared to change her expectations and beliefs about how her work world operated; and she reported a change in her behavior. In February, although she still said there were “no typical days” in her work descriptions, Ms. Walt was focusing more attention and time on instructional issues. In describing change and her approach to practice, she talked about more focused and strategic goals and actions, instead of a long list of fragmented activities:

Trying to make the school truly a professional learning community, so that we’re all very clear on what it is the students are supposed to know and be able to do. . . . Focusing on the learning – when you go back to the real reason that you have professional learning communities. . . . And getting everyone to accept even though we *say* our children can learn, what are we going to *do* to make sure that they do? Looking at those pieces.

Ms. Walt credits the NISL unit focusing on strategic planning with the change in her practice. At first, she was taken aback by the NISL program’s requirement that she develop a new strategic plan: “I already had sort of a game plan in mind. When they talked about a strategic plan, I had one. And my first thought was, ‘Oh my, I have to

throw all that out and start over again.’’ (November 2005). Ms. Walt took this idea back to her school, and realized that she did not have to start entirely from scratch; the NISL format gave her a place to start as well as forcing her to find the time to sit down and think about where she and her school were going.

Ms. Walt retells the creation of her strategic plan as an attempt to bring order to the chaos of multiple programs and demands:

. . . I was looking at the components and all of these things that we're doing. And it was just, like, overwhelming. And I couldn't find anything that linked it all together. And so I just sat down one night and listed all the components. Like curriculum, assessment and safety nets and whatever. And then everything I could think of, like common formative assessments – I just started plugging in those pieces. And it kind of fell together in an outline So it's a pretty comprehensive package and also very ambitious. I don't know if we'll get as far as I would like with it. But the teachers are buying into it and all of the stuff that we're doing is not wasted stuff. I mean, like, when we set up pacing guides for the curriculum we've got those in place. We've unpacked the standards. We've got those in place. Now we're starting to work on assessments. And we're going to put all this together in a notebook for them, so that when you walk in next year, there it is. There's what you need (March 2006).

Once she had created the strategic plan, Ms. Walt stated that she felt much more focused. She acknowledged that there would be times when the plan would be superseded, but continued to see it as an organizational tool that helped her focus on instruction:

Every now and then, something comes down from the district that we have to interrupt the plan, and that's always going to happen. But, you know, when I felt like I was getting lost in the fog of all the whatever, I'd go back to the plan and go, "Where are we? What are we working at?" (February 2007).

Principal Walt notes that her strategic plan served as a jumping off point for other changes that she made later in the year. Although she certainly had plans for

improvement prior to the NISL unit on strategic planning and her creation of her strategic plan,

. . . my previous experiences were that I had all these things I wanted us to get done this year and they just never seemed to happen, you know? Come March, “Oh, we were going to do that. . . .” I mean, the bottom line is if you don't have a plan and you don't schedule it, it doesn't happen (March 2006).

This change in Ms. Walt's practice, then, had a far-reaching impact on her work, reformulating the way in which she saw her school and her role. The new NISL-inspired strategic plan enabled her to keep her attention, and that of her teachers, focused on instruction and learning, and pushed them to implement strategies or ideas that might have gone by the wayside in previous years.

High Instructional Leaders' Use of the *National Institute for School Leadership Program*

The two high instructional leaders are both principals in elementary schools. Like the low and moderate instructional leaders, they both report using NISL to confirm previous practices.

It [NISL] confirms many of our, my, the practices that we've had in place. But not only that, it seems to have given that confirmation that a lot of the things we were doing to support teachers, coaching teachers, working with the data to help with instruction and student learning (Ms. Wile, February 2006).

But Ms. Wile did not simply use NISL as confirmation that her goals were appropriate; for her, NISL provided means to reach goals she had already set for herself and her school, bringing efficiency to the process:

It's been helpful because you have a solution, you have a way of achieving your goal, and so NISL has provided that means. I mean, perhaps we would have figured some of these things on our own, after a while of trial and error, but it's been helpful because you can get to that solution much quicker using NISL. And, as I said before, it also confirms some things that you may have been doing, so that's a good practice. That's the best practice you can continue there (February 2006).

The NISL program, therefore, not only confirmed Ms. Wile's previous practices and goals, it provided her with new and effective ways to reach those goals, eliminating a good deal of trial and error on the part of her and/or her staff.

NISL also provided background information to substantiate some of Ms. Wile's current practices. She notes, for example, that she and her teachers did a good deal of assessment but that

we did not always distinguish between formative and summative assessment, so now we know what authentic assessment is and really how to do thatWe were doing some of it, but we really didn't know we were doing it. So there's more knowledge there (March 2006).

Ms. Wile and her teachers, she said, were now much more conscious of how to reach their goals. For them, NISL provided the "steps" to get from point a to point b.

Ms. Orem also benefited from a change in the method for reaching a previously held goal. In November 2005, she responded to the request for a description of a typical day by saying that:

Well, as a principal of a school I don't know that there's a day that's typical, but you do a lot of monitoring of students, you do a lot of monitoring of instruction, [and] try and do more monitoring of the instruction than the paperwork aspect (November 2005).

In her quest to spend more time in classrooms, she noted that she frequently took paperwork home to free her to spend time in classrooms during the day. NISL helped her change this system. In February 2007, when she was asked what the most important or useful idea she learned from NISL, Ms. Orem responded that

well, the biggest thing, I guess, is the whole idea of scheduling time for instruction, for the principal to, almost like on your calendar, on your schedule, say, "I'm going to, from this true to this time today, I'm going to be in classrooms" And sometimes even making parents wait because I'm in an observation or doing instruction" (February 2007).

Principal Orem's goal of observing more instruction did not change, but the new methodology gave her the opportunity for uninterrupted time in classrooms, an unusual occurrence under the pre-NISL system.

Both Ms. Wile and Ms. Orem noted that they had changed the amount of time that they spent in certain activities since beginning the NISL training. Ms. Wile reported that although the strategies advocated by NISL were already in place in her school

we're doing more of these. For instance, we do a lot of instruction, we do professional learning communities. We do safety-netting and we do parent-community involvement, all those kinds of things, and coaching, and so forth. so we're just doing them more" (February 2006).

In addition to a quantitative difference in activities such as professional learning communities, Principal Orem notes a qualitative difference as well.

the other thing we do a lot more of is using our professional learning communities. And that's something we've always done but we use them a lot more effectively I think now And they work really well to talk about the student work and talk about strategies, And we do a lot of the decision-making at that level that's going to make some key decisions for the students. And that's something that we do a lot more effectively, I think, since the NISL training (February 2007).

Not only were Ms. Orem and her staff using professional learning communities more often, but the principal and teachers had also expanded the breadth of activities done there, making the meetings more productive and helpful to both students and teachers.

Ms. Orem also modified her practice in terms of monitoring teachers and instruction because of NISL. In June 2005, at the beginning of NISL training, Principal Orem was already spending a large fraction of her time on instructional leadership. Unlike Ms. Walt, whose practice was quite fragmented at this time, Ms. Orem explained that she always had an “idea” of what she intended a typical day to be, and she described some routines – frequent or recurring activities – that helped her focus her time and attention on instruction. She said that monitoring instruction was

something I strive to do every day . . . getting in the classroom and seeing what is going on in there. . . . The teachers come to expect me in the classroom and see that as, not as threatening (June 2005).

By the following February, however, Ms. Orem had modified this practice, attributing the change to NISL. Unlike her former method of observing classrooms, Ms. Orem described having narrowed her focus to one academic topic – mathematics – in need of improvement, and even more precisely on student learning in that topic. She had also incorporated more specificity in her observations by using a standards book to look for very particular types of teacher or student performances based on an external criterion. She explained in part that “now” rather than dropping by a classroom at any time

I want to go into that room when they’re teaching math . . . in the beginning because [that is the] teacher focused instruction. . . I’ll bring my book of standards. That’s going to tell me what . . . I should be seeing. . . I’ve got a focus for my observations and they are geared towards student achievement and changing some things (February 2006).

She went on to say she was dissatisfied with some of what she was observing and that she would be giving teachers “needs improvement” in their evaluations, something Ms. Orem was anticipating would make teachers very unhappy as this was something new for her, as well as for the teachers.

Finally, Principal Orem talked about her experiences with a NISL homework assignment where she was supposed to evaluate a program at her school (the same assignment that Mr. Jimm used to evaluate his school’s safety nets). Ms. Orem examined student progress reports and identified students who were “not doing well.” She then asked teachers for three samples of assessments on those children, as well as feedback on their progress. The responses, she said, “gave me a really good feel for what was happening in that classroom related to assessment.” But Ms. Orem did not stop there, although the class assignment was finished. She decided that she needed to “take it a step further” and announced her intentions to meet with the teachers in grade level teams to have “hopefully open and candid discussions about what’s going on and where I would like to see things go.” The NISL assignment, then, was useful to Principal Orem, as it gave her a place to focus, but she took it beyond the program’s original intentions, using it in such a way so as to be useful to her individual school.

Discussion

All six of the principals reported using information from the *National Institute for School Leadership* in their practice at their individual schools. Principals found the skills and concepts useful, and all implemented at least some in some way. However, there were differences in the ways that low, moderate and high instructional leaders used this

information, and these differences affected principals' abilities to get the most out of the program. Principals differed in their assessments of the more important parts of the NISL curriculum, in their ability to make use of parts of the NISL curriculum, and their use of NISL to affirm previous practices.

The two low instructional leaders' opinions of the most important and useful ideas imparted by NISL are different than that of the more expert moderate and high instructional leaders. Mr. Jimm was most interested in NISL's potential as a provider of common terminology to enable better communication of ideas among his colleagues (although he did not note what ideas that communication might entail). Ms. Teem considered the ideas presented in the first unit on globalization and the need for an educated American workforce to be paramount. The moderate and high instructional leaders, on the other hand, tended to focus on more concrete aspects of the curriculum, frequently the logistical changes that would enable them to reach goals they had had before entering the program, such as Ms. Walt's focus on her strategic plan or Ms. Orem's change to scheduled instructional leadership time.

Low, moderate and high instructional leaders made different uses of the NISL curriculum in their schools and practices. For example, Mr. Jimm and Ms. Cole both used the NISL questionnaire about a program in their school to address their safety net programs. From there, however, their paths diverged. Mr. Jimm discovered that he had very little knowledge of what went on in his programs, and so he concentrated his energy on educating himself about them, learning more than just the names that were the extent of his previous knowledge. Ms. Cole, on the other hand, already had a good sense of what was going on in each of her programs. She devoted her energy to assessing their

impact on the students who attended, and her study led her to discover that the programs were being underutilized by the children who needed them, due to transportation issues. Mr. Jimm and Ms. Cole dedicated similar amounts of time to their assessments of their safety net programs but their previous knowledge impacted the results. Mr. Jimm had very little prior knowledge, and thus his work consisted of learning about existent programs. Ms. Cole, on the other hand, began with a strong understanding of her school's safety net programs. Her work, therefore, could focus on improving the programs and increasing access for all students, a level Mr. Jimm could not attain because he had to take the same time to find out about what he already had.

Another instance of different implementation of a similar idea by low and high instructional leaders came with Ms. Teem's and Ms. Orem's respective classroom visitations. Ms. Teem reported that NISL changed her perspective on standards, and indeed she did devote a good deal of energy looking for evidence of such standards in the classrooms that she visited, noting that some teachers had posted them on the wall and that she believed that some students could recite those standards, although some probably could not. Ms. Orem's classroom observations were different. She reported that she had already had a plan to visit classrooms regularly; but that the NISL program helped her to change the way she focused on standards. She selected a particular subject – mathematics – where achievement was not as high as she would like, and began to observe using a standards book which aided her in determining whether the teacher and his or her students were reaching that standard. Again, there is a qualitative difference in the way in which the low instructional leader – Ms. Teem – and the high instructional leader – Ms. Orem – approached standards, although they both attributed their change to

NISL. Ms. Teem’s attention is concentrated on the posting of the standard in the classroom, and indications that the teacher and students can recite that standard, whereas Ms. Orem reports looking at the teacher and students’ words and actions for indications that they understand those standards.

A final example of different use of NISL program information by low, moderate and high instructional leaders compares three seemingly different uses of NISL: Mr. Jimm’s evaluation of safety nets, Ms. Walt’s new strategic plan, and Ms. Orem’s assessment of her students’ progress. Although each of the principals implemented a NISL concept or assignment, they did so in very different ways. Mr. Jimm used the questionnaire provided by NISL with members of his school’s design team to acquire knowledge about his school’s programs. Ms. Walt created a strategic plan to connect and streamline the various initiatives and priorities in her school. Ms. Orem took a NISL assignment to evaluate her students’ progress and modified and furthered it to include consideration of the teachers’ assessments, planning to meet with the teachers to rewrite them if necessary. The low instructional leader, Mr. Jimm, followed NISL’s exact script, modifying it very little, if at all. The moderate instructional leader, Ms. Walt, used a NISL concept to create an entirely new document that she then used to help her enact other reforms. The high instructional leader, Ms. Orem, took the same questionnaire as Mr. Jimm, but used it merely as a starting point. She modified the template extensively, shaping it to fit her needs and those of her school.

The six principals reported that the *National Institute for School Leadership* affirmed at least some of their practices. This has both positive and negative connotations. High and moderate instructional leaders felt justified in continuing to

spend such a high percentage of their time on instructional leadership, fulfilling one of NISL's goals, that of increasing the amount of principal's instructional leadership. On the other hand, low instructional leaders also felt that the NISL program validated their practices, perhaps encouraging these principals to continue at their current low percentage of instructional leadership despite NISL's efforts to inspire principals to higher levels.

All six of the principals reported benefits of participating in the *National Institute for School Leadership*. The depth and kind of those benefits differed depending on their status as novice (low), moderate, or expert (high) instructional leaders. Low instructional leaders appeared to be developing their knowledge base, as Mr. Jimm's forays into safety net programs at his school indicate, whereas moderate and high instructional leaders built on previous knowledge, adapting new information to fit the needs of their students, teachers and schools. Although beyond the scope of this paper, further investigations might shed light on how the NISL curriculum could be best adapted to serve the needs of each level of instructional leader, low, moderate and high, so that each might reap the most benefit from this ambitious professional development program.

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