
Rethinking Instructional Leadership, a Review: What Do We Know About Principal, Teacher, and Coach Instructional Leadership, and Where Should We Go From Here?

Educational Administration Quarterly
XX(X) 1-38

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DOI: 10.1177/0013161X12456700
<http://eaq.sagepub.com>



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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to uncover what scholars know and do not know about instructional leadership, paying particular attention to what they have learned about how this work is done and where knowledge falls short. The author takes a first step at integrating three distinct literatures: (a) the traditional instructional leadership literature (centered primarily on the principal), (b) the teacher instructional leadership literature, and (c) the coach instructional leadership literature. **Research Design:** The author utilizes a distributed lens to examine the principal, teacher leader, and coach instructional leadership literatures. This lens illuminates what scholars know about instructional leaders in interaction with one another, their followers, and particular contexts as they work toward the improvement of teaching and learning. The author proposes that analyzing these three literatures together may allow scholars to apply findings

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from one research area to another, as well as to generate new knowledge around how leaders improve instruction. **Conclusions:** An integrated, comprehensive understanding of what scholars do and do not know about instructional leadership can begin to shape future studies that will address existing shortcomings around the “how” of leadership that emerge across these literatures.

Keywords

instructional leadership, instructional coaching, teacher leadership, leadership practice, distributed leadership

More than 30 years ago, Ronald Edmonds’s landmark study provided an empirical foundation for what many knew intuitively: effective schools almost always have leaders focused on instruction (Edmonds, 1979). Subsequent research has markedly expanded Edmonds’s original notion of “instructional leadership,” demonstrating that the work of improving teaching not only rests in the hands of the principal but also is distributed across a host of leaders (Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003), such as teacher leaders and instructional coaches. Yet despite substantial developments in principal, coach, and teacher leadership studies (e.g., Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), scholars contend that our knowledge of *how* these instructional leaders improve teaching remains limited (Elmore, 2000; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lord & Miller, 2000; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Stoelinga & Mangin, 2008). We know many of the behaviors necessary to improve instruction, but much less about how leaders enact these behaviors on a daily basis (Spillane et al., 2003).

In this article, I argue that the ways we have organized studies of instructional leadership into separate and disjointed bodies of literature may constrain our ability to learn how leaders improve instruction. I explore the possibility that integrating the studies on principals, teacher leaders, and instructional coaches may help us uncover what we have learned about the elusive “how” of instructional leadership as well as what else we may need to learn.

To begin, consider that the instructional leadership literature remains overwhelmingly centered on the principal (Hallinger, 2005), and despite

emerging literatures identifying the potential for teacher leaders and instructional coaches to improve teaching (e.g., Biancarosa et al., 2010; Gigante & Firestone, 2008; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010), they are rarely referred to as “instructional leaders.” The problem is not just one of semantics, however. More troubling is that instead of a cohesive conversation around leading the improvement of instruction, we have created separate bodies of knowledge, each typically published in its own subset of academic journals. The result (notwithstanding a handful of exceptions)¹ is a body of literature on what principals should do to lead instruction, a separate body on what teacher leaders should do, and still another on what instructional coaches should do.

Why is this separation problematic? First, we know a lot about what principals, teacher leaders, and instructional coaches do. Yet cataloguing existing knowledge into separate literatures makes it difficult to apply findings from one body of research to another. For example, we cannot easily answer questions such as the following: Have we learned things about teacher leadership that could offer insight into the work of the principal? Can coaches improve instruction by drawing on ways principals have been effective? Integrating the literatures on principal, teacher leaders, and coaches might create a comprehensive framework on instructional leadership such that what is known in one area can inform work in another.

Second, organizing our knowledge of these three types of leaders in separate ways may not only create problems for informing different lines of research but also alter the *kinds* of knowledge we generate. Schools do not operate in compartmentalized ways; leaders do not work in isolation. Leaders—even when they do not work well together—coexist in schools and often share responsibilities for instructional improvement (Spillane et al., 2004). By compartmentalizing our research by type of leader, we are not mirroring the ways in which school leadership is organized or how it plays out on a daily basis.

Furthermore, the existence of several disconnected literatures, each concentrating on different leadership “roles,” seems to move the field further from determining *how* various leaders lead, instead emphasizing *who* the leader is or should be, that is, the principal, teacher leader, or coach. What is missing is an integrated literature that centers on how various instructional leaders lead, regardless of position, title, or combination of leaders.

Of course, there are historical reasons why these literatures likely developed separately from one another.² The principal literature reflects the evolution of the principal’s job, which long privileged the “managerial imperative” (Cuban, 1988) and has only recently included the expectation of principal as

instructional leader. Egalitarian views of teachers, coupled with the fact that formal teacher leadership positions are relatively new (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), are likely reasons why teacher leader studies emerged separate from those of the principal. Coaches, also a recent phenomenon, are sometimes external to the school context, another possible reason for the separate examination of such leaders. Yet principals, teachers, and coaches are increasingly asked to collaborate with one another; their work is intertwined and interconnected (Spillane et al., 2004). Our research should reflect this current reality.

The purpose of this article is to uncover what we know and do not know about instructional leadership, paying particular attention to what—if anything—we have learned about how this work is done and where we fall short of this. I take a first step at integrating three distinct literatures: (a) the traditional instructional leadership literature (centered primarily on the principal), (b) the teacher instructional leadership literature, and (c) the coach instructional leadership literature.

I begin by situating the review both conceptually and methodologically. Then, I orient the reader with a historical overview of each term—principal, teacher, and coach instructional leadership—explaining what I mean by each term as well as how each concept has developed and been defined. Next, I put the three instructional leadership literatures in conversation with one another, interrogating each through a distributed lens (explained below), looking specifically at what we know and do not know about: (a) interactions among instructional leaders and followers, (b) the relationship between instructional leadership and context, and (c) the relationship among instructional leadership, teaching, and learning. I found that across all three literatures, researchers have learned ways in which instructional leaders support or fail to support one another, contextual factors that aid or impede their work, and some leadership behaviors that are associated with instruction. However, much remains to be learned about how instructional leaders interact in specific contexts to improve teaching and learning. I conclude the article with recommendations for future research. Before turning to an explanation of why I frame the literature with a distributed lens, I offer a few caveats to the analysis.

A Few Caveats

Bear in mind that the call for a more cohesive body of literature on instructional leadership is not meant to negate the fact that one's role may influence how work around instruction is done. For example, the authority of a principal may make it possible for him or her to do things a teacher leader cannot; a teacher leader may be able to work with co-teachers in a way that the principal

role does not afford. Thus, the goal is not to move research to a more generic, abstract understanding of instructional leadership; rather, it is to develop a nuanced understanding that moves beyond compartmentalized sets of studies focusing substantially on roles.

I suggest looking across the three literatures may generate new knowledge that we cannot create with an individual leader as our unit of analysis. Such a claim is, admittedly, an assertion, not a fact. There is no empirical proof that such knowledge will be beneficial, as an integrated set of literatures does not yet exist. However, it is reasonable to take our cue from others who have argued that schools need to be considered in more integrated ways. As an example, the reform literature calls for us to conceptualize schools as interconnected organizations and to press on an entire system, rather than reforming one aspect of schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Smith & O'Day, 1991). Literature on effective instruction suggests we study teachers, students, and their materials—not merely one of these components—to best understand teaching and learning (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003). Others criticize studies for focusing narrowly on one subset of schooling (Purkey & Smith, 1983). It seems sensible that we apply this same logic to our understanding of leadership.

Finally, consider the risk of not integrating our instructional leadership knowledge base. Many district and charter school networks have invested heavily in leadership for the improvement of instruction (Neuman & Wright, 2010). They expect principals to manage and lead instructional changes; many also employ instructional coaches to work directly with teachers on this improvement process. Some states link teacher evaluations with student performance, increasing the pressure on leaders to help teachers alter instruction in ways that boost student achievement (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). However, we do not have the appropriate knowledge to offer adequate guidance, support, and training to our instructional leaders (Elmore, 2000). If we continue our preoccupation with the principal as synonymous for instructional leadership, it is unlikely that our schools will make the improvements our policy climate mandates (Spillane et al., 2003). Each day others work with principals to lead the improvement of instruction; a failure to expand our conceptualization of instructional leadership to account for this shared work seriously constrains our understanding.

Situating the Review Theoretically and Methodologically: A Distributed Perspective

In this section, I explain the distributed perspective (Gronn, 2002; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) as well as why and

how I use this perspective to frame the review of the principal, teacher, and coach instructional leadership literatures. To begin, this article is based on the assumption that it is important to learn more about the “how” of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Spillane et al., 2004). I utilize James Spillane’s distributed perspective on leadership precisely because he posits this frame may help us examine not only *what* school leaders do, but *how* and *why* they do it (Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Spillane et al., 2004). Applying this frame to the literatures may help surface the strengths and shortcomings of extant literature around the question of how.

A distributed leadership perspective is an analytic tool, not a claim that one way of leading is superior to another (Spillane et al., 2004). There are two aspects of a distributed perspective: (a) the leader-plus aspect and (b) the leadership practice aspect (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The first is an acknowledgment that multiple individuals in both formal and informal positions assume school leadership roles. Undergirding this is a belief that accounting for multiple leaders creates a fuller, more comprehensive understanding of leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The leader-plus aspect is not a suggestion that individual leaders are unimportant, but one that states we should consider the work of “all individuals who have a hand in leadership” (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p. 7). I utilize the leader-plus aspect by considering principals, teacher leaders, and coaches as instructional leaders, examining their respective literatures side by side.

The other aspect of the distributed lens—leadership practice—foregrounds the interactions among leaders, followers, and their contexts around particular leadership tasks (Spillane et al., 2003).³ To clarify, I examine the three components of this definition (interactions, context, and leadership tasks) one by one. First, consider that leadership has largely been understood in the actions or behaviors of individual leaders; a distributed perspective challenges us to rethink leadership as constituted of interactions between leaders and followers (Spillane et al., 2003). Second, these interactions cannot be extracted from context. The “actual doing of leadership in particular places and times” constitutes practice (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p. 6). Such a view has its roots in distributed cognition and activity theory (Spillane et al., 2004), which suggest social context is integral to activity and cognition (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Just as context is not merely a backdrop for activity and thought, context does not simply affect leadership but is constitutive of leadership practice. Sense making in cognition is thought to be enabled or constrained by context (Resnick, 1991); so too can leadership be enabled or constrained by context. Third, practice occurs in the interactions between leaders and followers in particular contexts

around particular tasks. Because my focus is on instructional leadership, the leadership tasks at hand are those that relate to teaching and learning. In other words, we must ask, instructional leadership to what end (Spillane & Diamond, 2007)? The aims of instructional leadership are tied to the core work of schools: teaching and learning. Thus, instructional leadership practice must include the connection between instructional leadership and instruction itself.

I use the leadership practice aspect of the distributed lens by analyzing what the principal, teacher leader, and coach literatures tell us about these three components: (a) interactions between leaders and followers, (b) the relationship between context and instructional leadership, (c) and the connection among teaching, learning, and instructional leadership. Keep in mind that integrating the literatures does not magically change studies that use the individual as the unit of analysis into those that attend to the leader-plus aspect, nor does it make them foreground leadership practice, considering leaders in interaction with one another, in particular contexts, and working toward improving teaching and learning. Yet these components are considered critical to unraveling the black box of how leaders improve instruction, and it is imperative to examine what we know and do not know about them across and within each literature.

Finally, this is meant to be a representative review of the principal, teacher, and coach instructional leadership literatures, not an exhaustive one. I utilized an iterative process to uncover what we know and do not know about instructional leaders, or those who manage or lead instruction. At each step of this process, I used a version of “snowball sampling,” carefully following citations, colleagues’ suggestions, and personal knowledge of published and presented research to identify additional studies that would represent both historical patterns and new, emerging thoughts. The majority of the 129 sources in this review are journal articles, but I also relied on conference presentations, books, and policy documents to capture a more complete picture.

To conduct this iterative process, I began with a broad search of peer-reviewed journals to identify seminal pieces, literature reviews, and recent critiques that offered a historical overview of each term and its development over time. I highlighted key theories, findings, and patterns in each literature, categorizing and coding them. Once I had established categories (instructional leadership interactions, context, and teaching and learning), I reviewed this first set of studies again to confirm patterns and to search for disconfirming evidence; in other words, I searched for studies that addressed the “how” of instructional leadership. I then explored the literature again, combing

abstracts of key journals from the past 10 years because I theorized that recent studies may deviate from the patterns that had emerged in each literature. The search process took place over several years, and I was reasonably sure I had adequately represented each literature once the same findings, sources, and critiques began to surface repeatedly.

An Overview of Each Term: Principal, Teacher, and Coach Instructional Leadership

In this section, I orient the reader to the terms *principal*, *teacher*, and *coach instructional leadership* by providing a brief historical overview of each. Specifically, I examine how each term originated, developed, and has been defined and critiqued. The purpose of this section is to ground the later analysis of instructional leadership interactions, context, teaching, and learning.

Principal Instructional Leadership

I begin with an overview of principal instructional leadership, tracing the field's early focus on leadership traits to that of general behaviors, as well as the emergence of instruments to assess instructional leadership and standards for administrative practice. I argue that our current focus on principal behaviors without attending to the process of leadership may be one reason why we are without a strong sense of how principals improve instruction.

The term *instructional leadership* originated during the 1970s effective schools movement, at which time researchers compared schools that were “effective”—schools that were successful in educating all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background—with those schools that were “ineffective” (Lezotte, 2001). The result of this movement was a list of characteristics of effective schools, and key among them was the role of the principal as a strong instructional leader (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1981; Edmonds & Frederikson, 1978; Lezotte, 2001; Madden, Lawson, & Sweet, 1976; Rosenholtz, 1985; Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995; Weber, 1971). In fact, those studies demonstrated that there was “no evidence of effective schools with weak leadership” (Sammons et al., 1995, p. 17). Unfortunately, what did not emerge from the effective schools movement was a consensus as to precisely what an instructional leader was, what he or she would do to make the school effective (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Sammons et al., 1995), how he or she would do this work, and whether the work would vary by context. Instead, what resulted was a vague notion that successful school leaders are

not just managers but are *instructional* leaders; in other words, their work is highly focused on the core technology of schools, that is, teaching and learning.

Early definitions of instructional leaders tended to be broad and centered on the idea that a principal in an effective school is

less an in-house bureaucrat or accountant than a principal teacher (the origin of the title, now long forgotten) and a mobilizer, departing from the tradition in American public education of separating management from practice and administration from teaching. (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 256)

Such definitions provided a general overview but little consideration as to what the principal's work around instruction included. In fact, early research on instructional leadership focused on characteristics of successful leaders, isolating personal traits such as gender and leadership style that correlated with "effective" schools (Elmore, 2000; Heck et al., 1990). This suggested a principal was successful because of certain personal qualities rather than because he or she had mastered a body of professional knowledge or proven himself or herself competent (Elmore, 2000; Hallinger, 2005; Spillane et al., 2003). It capitalized on the long-standing romantic belief in the solitary, heroic American leader, one who could "save" the failing school (Elmore, 2000). A few studies suggested more expansive characteristics of instructional leaders, such as a strong results orientation, strength of purpose, and a willingness to involve others in decision making (Rosenholtz, 1985; Sammons et al., 1995), but the implication remained that a leader either was born with these traits or was not going to be successful.

Later studies moved beyond personal characteristics, focusing on general behaviors of principals in effective schools. For example, successful principals systematically monitored student progress and were highly visible in their supervisory role (Tyack & Hansot, 1982); they visited classes, observed teaching, and then responded to those observations; (Bossert et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1981); they were experts in curricular development and teaching and generated a common sense of vision among their staff (Adams, 1999; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). They were assertive, strong disciplinarians and evaluated the achievement of basic objectives (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Perhaps most common among lists of behaviors, instructional leadership was to be carried out by the principal alone, and he or she was to be a strong, directive leader, focused on building school culture, academic press, and high expectations for student

achievement (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger, 2005; Heck et al., 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1985).

As interest grew in the new, instructionally focused role for the principal, Philip Hallinger developed one of the most widely used tools for measuring instructional leadership, the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) in the 1980s (Hallinger, 1982/1990). The PIMRS isolates 50 principal behaviors, assessing three dimensions and 10 functions of instructional leadership: (a) defining the school's mission (framing and communicating goals), (b) managing the instructional program (supervising instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress), and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate (protecting instructional time, professional development, a visible presence, promoting high expectations, and providing incentives for teachers and students; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger (2005) reasserted the usefulness of this construct in his meta-analytic review of the literature; the PIMRS has been used in more than 199 studies (Hallinger, 2008).

In 1996, the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium created the national Standards for School Leaders, influenced in part by Hallinger's framework. Revised in 2008, these standards have been adopted by at least 43 states (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008), some of which have redesigned their principal training programs and evaluations to align with the standards. Although these standards focus on school administration and not instructional leadership in particular, they do highlight some of the behaviors identified as critical to instructional leadership: (a) developing and facilitating a school vision of learning, (b) advocating and nurturing a school culture conducive to student learning, (c) managing the organization for an effective learning environment, (d) collaborating with families and community members and responding to needs and mobilizing resources, (e) acting with integrity and fairness, and (f) understanding and influencing the larger sociopolitical context (CCSSO, 2008).

Much like Hallinger's framework and the work preceding it, these standards provide a general sense of what an administrator should do, but not enough guidance as to how, why, or whether the work varies by context. Although these recent conceptualizations of instructional leadership moved beyond a trait approach, they offer lists of behaviors and actions, not an understanding of the process behind enacting those behaviors. This may be one reason why the term remains conceptually weak and ill-defined (Portin et al., 2009; Prestine & Nelson, 2005). We are without a strong sense of how this work is done decades after the term was first coined.

Teacher Leadership

I now provide an overview of teacher leadership, highlighting its roots in school reform and the variation in its definitions of purposes. I argue that only a small number of studies examine teacher leaders aiming to improve instruction; these studies constitute the “teacher instructional leadership literature.” Although I claim the principal literature’s limitation is a focus on behaviors over processes, I assert here that the teacher leadership literature is even further behind in its understanding of the “how” of leading, as it has mainly examined teacher leader characteristics.

Only in the past few decades have schools and districts developed formal teacher leadership positions (Smylie & Denny, 1990). Spurred by the decentralization of decision making in school reform during the 1980s and 1990s, practitioners and researchers began to view teachers as a more legitimate force in school improvement (Mangin, 2007). Teacher leadership also became seen as a means of addressing the isolated nature of teaching and the desire to increase teacher status (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). School accountability brought the idea to fruition, and interest in teacher leadership as a means to improve teaching has grown considerably in the past few years (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002).

Unfortunately, there is little consensus around what constitutes “teacher leadership” (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It tends to be an umbrella term referring to a myriad of work (Lord, Cress, & Miller, 2008): Teacher leaders promote changes in instruction (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Katzenmyer & Moller, 1996; Lord & Miller, 2000; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008), take on administrative duties (Smylie et al., 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), or hold a combination of positions. There is no consistent definition of what a teacher leader does (Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010), and we “lack a comprehensive view of what teacher leadership is [and] how it works” (Lord & Miller, 2000, p. 9).

Given such wide variation in teacher leader definitions, it is unsurprising their work differs both within and across schools. For example, teacher leaders can be consultants, curriculum managers, department chairs, mentor teachers, professional development coordinators, resource teachers, specialists, coaches, and demonstration teachers (Lord & Miller, 2000; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Many are out of the classroom full-time, although some assume leadership tasks in addition to full-time teaching; others combine part-time teaching and part-time leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). They may work in one school or across multiple schools or might represent an

entire district or charter school network. Some focus on one subject area or grade level; others span multiple subjects and grades (Lord & Miller, 2000).

Such variation means only some of the work of teacher leadership centers on instructional improvement. And despite important recent work by Mangin and Stoelinga (2008, p. 1) that defines a teacher leader as anyone who takes on “nonsupervisory, school based, instructional leadership roles,” there is only a subset of teacher leadership research that focuses on its relationship to instruction (Smylie & Denny, 1990). For the purposes of this article, I examine this subset to understand what we know about how teacher leaders function as instructional leaders. I refer to this as the *teacher instructional leadership literature*.

This teacher instructional leadership literature illustrates that teachers are sometimes placed in leadership positions because of a belief that “most of the knowledge required for improvement must inevitably reside in the people who deliver instruction, not in the people who manage them” (Elmore, 2000, p. 14; also see Supovitz, 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders, as those who have the greatest amount of contact with classroom teachers, are thought to have the greatest likelihood to change schoolwide instruction (Lord & Miller, 2000; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Of course, this is not true across the board, for great teachers do not necessarily make great leaders (Lord & Miller, 2000). However, some teach and lead well, and increasingly they are asked to facilitate instructional improvement.

In sum, most of the literature on teacher leadership is largely qualitative and descriptive in nature. Like early studies of the principal, teacher instructional leadership studies tend to spotlight characteristics, although there is an emerging focus on specific behaviors, such as building trust, collaborating, communicating, and modeling (Lord et al., 2008; Sherrill, 1999; Yarger & Lee, 1994) and their connection to instruction (Stoelinga & Mangin, 2008). Few studies attend to how teacher leaders define and perform their roles (Lord et al., 2008), how other teachers respond to their work (Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), or how they improve instruction (Lord et al., 2008).

Instructional Coaching

In this section, I provide an overview of instructional coaching, tracing its roots in new ideas about learning to its wide adoption in schools today. I demonstrate that the purposes behind coaching are more squarely focused on instructional improvement than those of teacher leadership. I argue that like the teacher leadership literature, the coaching literature is also weaker

than the principal literature in understanding how leaders improve instruction, as most studies have focused on characteristics, with only a handful examining coaching behaviors.

The concept of instructional coaching developed in the early 1980s as a response to new ideas about teacher learning. Districts recognized that some teachers needed to learn how to meet the mandated, more stringent standards for student learning. As such, prevailing conceptualizations of teacher professional development shifted from stand-alone, didactic workshops to a belief that teacher learning should occur within the context of everyday instructional practices (Cohen & Ball, 1999). Instructional coaching emerged as one form of this type of professional development (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Influenced by cognitive and situational learning theories, early coaching models envisioned teachers as co-constructors of knowledge who would learn through interactions with their more expert peers.

Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers were among the first researchers to seriously explore the idea of coaching, and their concept of “peer coaching”—the idea that teachers should coach one another in reciprocal ways (Poglinco et al., 2003)—dominated the 1980s. In a series of studies, Joyce and Showers concluded that peer coaching led teachers to practice and implement new teaching skills (Showers & Joyce, 1996). Later research echoed these findings, reinforcing the idea that coaching leads teachers to adopt new teaching strategies (Knight, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Notably, these studies did not determine how or why coaching led teachers to try new types of instruction, only that this change occurred.

As coaching has gained national attention, the lack of attention to how coaches improve instruction has become increasingly problematic. Substantial financial resources have been leveraged to develop coaching positions (Neuman & Wright, 2010), and the concept has been widely adopted in districts and charter schools (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010). Yet no one definition of coaching exists, making it challenging for schools to determine the use of these leaders (Taylor, 2008). For example, some consider coaching to be any type of school-based professional development designed in light of specific instructional needs (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Others describe it more narrowly, as “sustained class-based support from a qualified and knowledgeable individual who models research-based strategies and explores with teachers how to increase these practices using the teacher’s own students” (Sailors & Shanklin, 2010, p. 1). Some emphasize that it is nonevaluative and individualized (Taylor, 2008), whereas others define coaches not only as experts who work with teachers but also as those who mentor, support whole-school

reform, and build school capacity (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

There are also subsets of coaches, such as “technical coaches,” who help teachers use new practices, and “collegial coaches,” who increase teachers’ dialogue and reflections. Subject area coaches (primarily in math and literacy) are also defined uniquely. For example, literacy coaches provide teacher support and guidance (Bean, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004) and have been defined by the International Reading Association (2004) as reading specialists who provide professional development for teachers, offering support needed to implement instruction.

There is no standard form of instructional coaching; its applications vary widely, both within and between schools (Poglinco et al., 2003; Resnick, 2010). Like teacher leaders, coaches can work across grades or schools, or focus on one subject or grade. A coach can be a teacher leader (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Taylor, 2008) who coaches in addition to classroom teaching, or he or she can be from outside the school. Not only do researchers describe the purpose of coaching differently, but coaches vary in the ways they define themselves (Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010).

Like early principal instructional leadership research, the coaching literature highlights specific characteristics of coaches, such as strong interpersonal skills, tact, patience, good communication skills, and flexibility (Poglinco et al., 2003). Research has only recently begun to move from emphasizing qualities of “being” a coach to the behaviors involved in “doing” coaching (Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007), but without attending to the process of this work. Most studies have been prescriptive, focusing on what coaches do or how they should spend their time (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). For example, there is considerable literature on whether coaches should be directive—assuming an explicit, assertive role—or responsive—emphasizing teacher self-reflection, or if a balanced approach between the two is best (Burkins, 2007; Ippolito, 2010).

Recent analyses demonstrate that coaches vary widely in how they spend their time, even when trained in specific roles as part of well-defined coaching programs (Atteberry, Bryk, Walker, & Biancarosa, 2008). It is interesting that several studies show that coaches rarely engage in observing and modeling teaching—often considered the primary work of coaching. Atteberry et al. (2008) found that coaches engaged in the desired four-step process of planning, observation, modeling, and debriefing with teachers only 4% of the time. Bean, Draper, and Hall (2010) found coaches never engaged in all four steps. Instead, coaches took on a multitude of activities, such as helping teachers plan lessons, providing professional development, organizing materials,

teaching lessons, analyzing data, and managing activities (Bean et al., 2010; Deussen et al., 2007; Poglinco et al., 2003; Walpole & Blamey, 2008).

Most studies around coaching have been qualitative and have used nonexperimental designs; many have not been published in peer-reviewed journals (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). We know little about the “content, purpose or focus of the coach” (Bean et al., 2010, p. 90). We cannot answer critical questions, such as why the coach met with certain teachers or leaders, why he or she worked on particular topics with teachers, and what kind of strategies the coach used (Bean et al., 2010). We lack information about the intensity, depth, and duration of the most effective coaching strategies (Ramey & Ramey, 2008; Taylor, 2008) or how coaches improve teaching.

Summary of Principal, Teacher, and Coach Instructional Leadership Literatures

Researchers have moved far beyond the broad notion of “instructional leadership” as first introduced by Edmonds, yet much remains to be learned. Thus far, the principal, teacher, and coach instructional leadership literatures have each failed to adequately attend to *how* the daily work of leadership unfolds. Differences do exist among these literatures, however. Lists of leadership traits and general behaviors have dominated principal instructional leadership literature, but recent studies have begun to identify specific principal behaviors related to instruction. Although we lack an understanding of the process behind how any of these leaders enact behaviors, the principal literature is certainly more expansive and long-standing than the teacher or coach literature (Leithwood & Reihl, 2005). Behaviors needed for teachers or coaches to lead instructional improvement are less well defined than those for principals, with much research focusing on descriptive or prescriptive characteristics of these leaders.

Applying a Distributed Lens: Interactions, Context, Teaching, and Learning

A distributed lens suggests that to get at the “how” of leadership, studies should capture instructional leaders in interaction with one another, their followers, and context around the work of teaching and learning (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). For this reason, I examine the literatures specifically in terms of these components of instructional leadership practice: (a) interactions between leaders and followers, (b) the relationship between instructional leadership and context, and (c) the relationship among instructional leadership,

teaching, and learning. Although the components ideally should be studied simultaneously, I parse them out for the sake of analysis. What do we know about these three components, and what remains to be learned?

Instructional Leadership Interactions

In this section, I analyze what we know and do not know about instructional leaders in interaction with one another and their followers. I argue that few studies fully attend to such interactions, but that some, at the very least, have examined more than one leader at a time. Such studies tend to highlight the conditions, actions, and behaviors necessary for leaders to support one another. What can we learn from such studies?

Studies within the principal, teacher leader, and coach instructional leadership literature that include multiple leaders as their unit of analysis tend to focus on the ways in which one leader may support—or fail to support—the other. For example, several studies demonstrate principal support as crucial for coaching effectiveness (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Mangin, 2007), such as when the principal acknowledges and endorses the coaching program (Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier, 2009). In one study, coaches observed teachers more frequently when the principal explicitly explained to teachers that the coach could improve teaching (Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010). In another, coaches provided more coaching when they felt supported by both the principal and teachers (Atteberry et al., 2008).

Similarly, studies suggest teacher leaders are more effective when they have principal support (Leithwood et al., 2004), such as when the principal acknowledges the role of the teacher leader or provides time for them to work with teachers (Gigante & Firestone, 2008). A recent study by Mangin (2007) demonstrated the link between principals' knowledge of teacher leadership and their work with math teacher leaders in elementary schools; the most supportive principals were those who worked with teacher leaders and had high levels of knowledge about teacher leadership. Similarly, Burch and Spillane (2003) noted principals who were very involved in the school's math reform were likely to support their teacher leaders.

Other studies point to benefits principals glean from utilizing teacher leaders and coaches. Youngs and King (2002) found principals built school capacity by working with teacher leaders. Datnow and Castellano (2001) demonstrated that some administrators felt a sense of satisfaction when they distributed their power through teacher leadership; they also perceived an increased positive influence over classroom teaching when they involved teachers in curriculum issues. Marks and Nance (2007) found shared decision

making between principals and teachers beneficial for both groups, as principals perceived their own influence as strong when they also perceived teachers' influence on supervisory and instructional decisions as strong. Marks and Printy (2003) observed shared instructional leadership between principals and teachers led to pedagogical and student achievement changes.

Principals are not always supportive of other leaders and can be a barrier to coaching and teacher leadership (Mangin, 2007). When principals demand coaches take on administrative tasks, they may limit the opportunities for coaches to offer instructional support (Camburn, Kimball, & Lowenhaupt, 2008). They can create role ambiguity for teacher leaders by failing to define their role and sometimes see teacher leaders as a threat to their own work (Little, 1998).

There are only a few studies that examine teacher leadership and coaching from the teacher's perspective. For example, Gigante and Firestone (2008) documented that a high level of trust between teacher leaders and teachers tends to be a resource for the teacher leaders (Gigante & Firestone, 2008). Supovitz (2008) noted high school teachers were more likely to turn to informal, rather than formal, teacher leaders for instructional advice. Mangin (2006) found teachers had different perceptions about the usefulness of four math teacher leadership activities—providing materials, helping in their classrooms, modeling lessons, and facilitating group sessions—and that particular combinations of those activities seemed to have the most potential to alter instruction. Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) illustrated that teachers viewed coaches as useful when they demonstrated lessons, interpreted data, or focused on teachers' needs. Finally, Bean et al. (2010) found teachers were more likely to view coaches negatively when they spent more time on management and administrative duties (Bean et al., 2010).

It is no doubt essential to continue uncovering the ways in which instructional leaders support or fail to support one another, as such support provides the basis for the conditions necessary for leaders to succeed. Yet looking at the relationship primarily as conditional, rather than interactional (e.g., principal support is a condition for successful teacher leadership), does not tell us how the instructional leaders interact with one another, their followers, and context.

However, there are several exceptions that suggest research is beginning to move in the right direction. For example, Printy, Marks, and Bowers (2009) extended an earlier study (Marks & Printy, 2003) to uncover how principals and teachers mutually contributed to leadership in high-performing schools. They focused on the integrated, interdependent nature of transformational and instructional leadership, concluding that the combined

efforts of principals and teachers were greater than the sum of their individual actions. Portin et al. (2009) examined distributed instructional leadership as part of a study of urban schools and districts seeking improvement. The authors asserted the importance of viewing “learning-focused leadership” as interdependent and process oriented. Spillane and Diamond’s (2007) edited book offers a collection of case studies articulating daily interactions of school leaders in context. Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010) utilized survey data connected to student learning outcomes to discover that principals fostered an environment in which teachers worked together around instruction, thus enabling one another to improve. The collection of studies in Mangin and Stoelinga’s (2008) edited book takes a step toward integrating our knowledge of coaches and teacher leaders and, to an extent, viewing them in interaction with others.

On the whole, these few examples break the mold because they ask different kinds of research questions. They focus on the how or why of leadership, and their methodological approaches attempt to get at interactions among leaders and followers. Despite these advances, much remains unanswered. How do interactions among leaders and followers improve instruction? How do leaders interact with particular contexts?

Instructional Leadership and Context

In this section, I analyze what we know and do not know about the relationship between instructional leadership and context. I make multiple points: (a) the search for decontextualized leadership behaviors is problematic; (b) we may be able to find common instructional leadership behaviors in common contexts; (c) there has been a tendency across all three literatures to study context at the school, district, and, to a lesser extent, state levels; and (d) we need to examine the larger context of the United States and its various instructional systems in relation to instructional leadership.

Many researchers have criticized the treatment of context in instructional leadership studies (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger, 2005; Murphy, 1988; Spillane & Diamond, 2007), albeit for different reasons. On one hand, the search for decontextualized behaviors, without attention to what influenced leaders to enact those behaviors, is problematic (Stein & Spillane, 2005). Not all instructional leadership behaviors are likely transferable from one context to another. I argue that attempting to understand instructional leadership in context-neutral terms may be one reason why lists of behaviors dominate the principal leadership and have begun to emerge in the teacher and coach literatures. Others have pointed out that such lists of decontextualized behaviors

make it difficult to provide guidance for leaders about when, where, and how they might enact such behaviors (Stein & Spillane, 2005).

On the other hand, to suggest that each context involves a completely different way of leading is also problematic. It implies all instructional leaders have to invent their own unique wheel to determine how to best work with teachers. Instead, it is likely we could find common leadership behaviors among schools in common contexts, such as within high-poverty urban schools. If this is true, we must still ask how instructional leaders interact with one another, their followers, and context to improve teaching and learning. What do the three literatures tell us about this? How have they examined the relationship between context and leadership?

Some have argued that instructional leadership effectiveness is dependent, in part, on various contextual factors (Lord & Miller, 2000; Smylie et al., 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Several researchers claim numerous contextual variables and their relationship to instructional leadership have been underexplored. For example, we know much more about instructional leadership in elementary schools than secondary schools (Bossert et al., 1982; Heck et al., 1990; Murphy, 1988; Supovitz, 2008). Yet given subject area specialization, departmentalization, and developmental stages of students, it is likely that instructional leadership differs in elementary and secondary schools. Similarly, much research has centered on urban schools, yet whether the school is urban, suburban, or rural area likely alters the work of instructional leaders (Bossert et al., 1982; Heck et al., 1990; Murphy, 1988).

Studies across the literatures have tended to look at contextual variables at the school, district, and, on occasion, state levels. However, these studies tend to view context as a backdrop, not an integral component of leadership. For example, at the school level, norms, shared values, and agreed-upon goals can influence the work of teacher leaders (Portin et al., 2009). In one study, school norms around privacy of practice combined with a lack of structural support was one reason why teacher leaders rarely provided the “hard feedback” necessary to facilitate changes in instruction (Lord et al., 2008). Trust within a group of teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) as well as high expectations and a shared focus on student achievement have also been found to be important for teacher leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Coaches’ interpretation of and beliefs about their role—which may stem from their school context—may be linked to how they spend time (Bean et al., 2010). Teachers’ experience levels, beliefs about the coach’s role, the ratio between teachers and the coach, and the school-level norms for teachers’ professional community are also related to coaching (Atteberry et al., 2008; Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010). In one study, a strong

community of collaboration among teachers made them less likely to participate in coaching (Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010).

Several studies indicate the relationships between coaches and teachers are also affected by policies at the district level (Camburn et al., 2008; Coburn & Russell, 2008). The district may influence who is qualified to be a coach (Frost & Bean, 2006; Roller, 2006), how the job is defined or interpreted (Deussen et al., 2007), and the level of support provided to the coach and to the principal in supporting the coach (Camburn et al., 2008). The district also plays a role in teacher leadership, specifically because the ways in which districts communicate their vision of teacher leadership can influence a principal's support for teacher leaders (Mangin, 2007); the design of teacher leadership initiatives at the district level can also affect the enactment of those initiatives (Mangin, 2008). Although we seem to know less about how context influences principal instructional leaders (Firestone & Shippis, 2003), the district has also been found to affect the work of the principal, building confidence and a sense of collective efficacy among principals by placing a priority on achievement, instruction, and school improvement. Indirectly, the district can help create conditions viewed by principals as supporting their work (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). In fact, various accountability contexts have been found to support or constrain the influence of the principal on instructional and supervisory decisions (Marks & Nance, 2007). Little is known about how or why. Fewer studies account for the state level, but Deussen et al. (2007) examined Reading First coaches in five western states, concluding a state's guidance around Reading First influenced whether its coaches were more likely to focus on data, students, management, or teachers.

Just as it has been important to examine instructional leadership in relation to the school-, district-, and state-level contexts, I argue it is also essential to account for the ways in which the larger context of U.S. schooling may affect leadership. In fact, local control over curricula, standards, and pedagogical approaches may create a considerable barrier to a research agenda centered on the "how" of instructional leadership. Before we can determine how an instructional leader improves instruction, we must agree on the goals of instructional improvement. In other words, instructional leaders must understand what they want to improve before determining how to assist teachers in doing so. In the United States, there is little consensus around what constitutes instructional improvement. Districts typically establish curricula, and individual teachers often decide what content will be taught and how. Teachers, often in isolation, make decisions about how to make their teaching effective. There is little supervision, let alone guidance, around such decisions.

This means instructional leaders could face different definitions of quality teaching and instructional improvement both within and across the same school, district, and charter organizations.

Another way of putting this dilemma is to consider the variation in U.S. instructional systems—or sets of instructional goals, curricula, and assessments (Bryk, 2009; Cohen, 2010; Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Raudenbush, 2008; Resnick, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Some systems include curricula and assessments tied to a clear set of instructional goals; others are unspecified, lacking instructional goals or using assessments misaligned to the curricula (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Tucker, 2004). Still others lack instructional systems altogether, leaving individual teachers to determine what and how they should teach. Variation in instructional systems suggests how instructional leaders improve instruction may also vary, yet very few studies have examined the potential relationship between instructional systems and instructional leadership. Notably, Rowan and Miller (2007) studied comprehensive school reforms (CSRs), some of which utilize specified instructional systems, and uncovered new roles for leaders within those CSRs. Datnow and Castellano (2001) studied the ways in which principals in Success for All schools (a CSR with a highly specified instructional system) both changed and were changed by the reform model.

Another factor that may have stymied our understanding of instructional improvement and, in turn, how instructional leaders lead is our limited understanding of quality instruction. Although there has been modest progress in defining quality instruction (e.g., Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Heneman, Milanowski, Kimball, & Odden, 2006; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002; Schacter & Thum, 2004), such proposals are emergent and fraught with potential problems of validity and reliability (Cohen, 2010). We remain a nation without a clear sense of what we want our students to learn, how we want our teachers to teach, and, in turn, what instructional leaders need to do to facilitate improved teaching. This makes it challenging to determine how instructional leaders foster instructional change, for until we agree on a standard of quality teaching, on what criteria would we measure instructional improvement? Without necessary criteria, how would we build knowledge of the processes by which leaders facilitate instructional improvement? To further illustrate this point, consider the ways in which instruction varies greatly, “for example, between teachers who cultivate students’ ability to reason and those who inculcate facts and skills” (Cohen & Ball, 1999, p. 27). Just as teaching may vary depending on the aims of instruction, so too how instructional leaders work with teachers likely depends on the aims of instruction. As such, an understanding of the “how”

of instructional leadership must be closely tied to an understanding of instruction.

Instructional Leadership, Teaching, and Learning

In this section, I examine instructional leadership, teaching, and learning, demonstrating that although we do have some empirical evidence of a relationship among these components, there is much work left to be done. I critique the tendency to study opportunities for learning, without attending to actual learning. I also argue we may need to tap into the professional development, teaching, and teacher education literatures to better understand this relationship.

Only a few studies have made empirical connections among principal instructional leadership and teaching. For example, Quinn (2002) found principal instructional leadership was related to frequent use of student-centered teaching. Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, and Berebitsky (2010) demonstrated teachers who perceived their principals as engaging in instructional and transformational behaviors were more likely to differentiate instruction. McGhee and Lew (2007) noted that principals with strong knowledge of and belief in effective writing practices helped teachers with their writing instruction. Youngs (2007) showed some principals promote instructional growth in new teachers. Supovitz et al. (2010) found principal and teacher leadership associated with a change in both English language arts and math instruction. In contrast, other studies reveal that principals are removed from instructional concerns and are unlikely to influence teachers' instructional competence (Printy, 2008).

Studies linking teacher leadership with instructional change are even more scant than those in the principal instructional leadership literature. Variation in purposes behind teacher leadership may be one reason why the effectiveness of teacher leaders in altering teaching is simply not known (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Lord & Miller, 2000; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke (2004) summarized the effects of teacher leadership on teacher leaders themselves, their colleagues, and students. They found effects to be greatest on the teacher leaders themselves, as some changed their own instruction because of exposure to new information and opportunities to interact with and observe others. The authors noted a handful of studies in which teacher leaders affected other teachers' instruction; however, they also found school culture and relationships among teacher leaders and colleagues sometimes prevented instructional change. More recently, Gigante and Firestone (2008) elucidated that teacher leaders helped to improve math and

science teaching, but only when they engaged in specific tasks: designing lessons, answering content questions, modeling or team teaching, and facilitating professional development. Manno and Firestone (2008) suggested teacher leaders' content knowledge enabled them to identify areas in which teachers needed to improve. Lord et al. (2008) found teacher leaders used "show and tell" strategies, rather than hard feedback, to help teachers, but that this was not adequate to develop sustained improvement in teaching.

A number of studies have investigated the relationship between coaching and instruction; yet there is little evidence about its effects (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Taylor, 2008). Studies that do exist have yielded mixed results, which is unsurprising given the variation in the amount, quality, and type of coaching teachers receive (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Matsumura et al., 2009). Although we know little about the instructional practices teacher change because of their interactions with coaches or why (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010), there are several studies that demonstrate a link between coaching and a change in literacy instruction (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, & Resnick, 2010; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Nielsen, Barry, & Staab, 2008; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010). For example, Carlisle and Berebitsky (2010) found that teachers used small-group instruction more frequently and relied less on whole-class phonics instruction when they worked with literacy coaches. Matsumura, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, and Bickel (2010) observed that the quality of teachers' reported and observed instructional practices for class discussions improved with the use of a coaching program. Walpole et al. (2010) discovered the frequency of coaches' collaboration with teachers, coaching for differentiation, and leadership support for coaching predicted aspects of reading instruction and that this differed by grade.

There are also a small number of studies connecting instructional leadership with student learning. For example, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) found teacher leaders improved student learning by promoting a shared vision and acceptance of group goals, strengthening culture, and developing people through individual support and intellectual stimulation. Marks and Louis (1997) found teacher participation in site-based governance was related to teacher quality and student performance. Marks and Printy (2003) concluded student achievement and teaching improved when teachers shared instructional leadership with principals and took on transformational leadership roles. Although some studies indicate no positive relationship between coaching and student achievement, a few found an increase in student achievement associated with coaching (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011; Matsumura, Garnier, Correnti,

Junker, & Bickel, 2010; Ross, 1992). Perhaps most striking, Biancarosa et al. (2010) found value-added effects of the Literacy Collaborative coaching program over 4 years, with achievement increasing in kindergarten through second grade and the magnitude of the program's effects growing with each year of implementation. This coaching program included substantial training for the coaches and a well-specified instructional system, namely, six core components (interactive read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, interactive writing, writing workshop, and word study). It is noteworthy that teacher leadership and coaching have been linked to instructional change; what is needed is more detail about how, why, and in what context these changes occurred.

Many studies suggest principal effects on student learning are indirect and small, although educationally significant, and that those effects are stronger in lower rather than higher socioeconomic schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found weak, indirect, but significant effects of principal leadership efficacy on the proportion of students reaching or exceeding the state's proficiency level; these effects occurred through the principal's influence on school and classroom conditions. Others found principal leadership had an indirect, positive effect on student proficiency on the English language arts state assessment when the principal fostered collaboration and community around instruction (Supovitz et al., 2010).

Despite these modest advances, few studies adequately examine the influence of instructional leaders on teaching and learning (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Prestine & Nelson, 2005; Stoelinga & Mangin, 2008). Most focus on the relationship between leadership and school effectiveness writ large without attending to the process of instructional change. Principal instructional research concentrates on leadership behaviors that create conditions for teacher or student learning (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Printy, 2008) but does not always acknowledge that those conditions alone may be insufficient for instructional change. Providing *opportunities* for teachers to learn how to improve instruction is sometimes confounded with *actual learning*. Researchers contend that principals should focus on school-level factors that will "trickle down," altering teaching and learning at the classroom level (Bossert et al., 1982; Heck et al., 1990). In fact, much research centers on principals' influence on student learning by shaping aspects of the school broadly (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994). Altering structures can create the necessary conditions for teachers to learn to improve their instruction (Hallinger, 2005), but structures alone are unlikely to create desired schoolwide changes.

Certainly creating opportunities for teachers to learn to make changes in instruction is essential. However, “there is little evidence that individuals unhesitatingly and unquestioningly engage in any practice simply because the opportunity is afforded them” (Prestine & Nelson, 2005, p. 52). Instead, learning is likely to be co-constructed, not only between leaders and teachers but among groups of leaders, teachers, students, and their contexts. For example, instructional leaders may schedule time for teacher reflection, foster teacher collaboration, and analyze student achievement data. These may be conditions that assist teachers in developing their instruction; they are structures that provide opportunities for teachers to learn how to improve. However, they don’t do the learning for the teachers. Even with reflection, collaboration, and adequate data, some teachers may not know how to learn to improve or have the desire to do so. We lack an understanding of what happens inside the conditions for learning and improvement. How do leaders interact with one another, with teachers, and with particular contexts to create learning? What is the process by which they create instructional change? If we intend to understand how instructional leaders improve instruction, we must refocus instructional leadership research more squarely on instruction itself.

Further Integrating Leadership, Teaching, and Learning

These studies across the literatures are not to be minimized. They investigate a vital connection between leadership and learning. Knowing that such relationships are empirically substantiated provides credibility for instructional leadership positions. However, we need to uncover more about how, why, and when instructional leaders are successful in altering teaching and learning. Knowing that middle school history teachers with greater contact with coaches had students with greater achievement gains (Ross, 1992) is important but does not tell us what those coaches did to enhance student learning, let alone how. Knowing that student achievement increased when principals fostered collaboration around instruction does not tell us what happened inside those moments of collaboration. Neither indicates how specific contexts—such as the instructional system in which leaders work—interact with them to achieve results.

To address these shortcomings, we may need to do more than put the principal, teacher, and coaching literatures in conversation with one another. Each of these literatures is disconnected not only from one another but also from other literatures that may offer insight into teacher and student learning. For example, recent research has investigated the link among professional

development, teachers' learning during the professional development, and changes in classroom teaching (Borko, 2004). Connecting the principal, teacher, and coaching literatures with such studies—and with professional development research in general—may better inform us about how teachers learn, in turn helping us to understand how instructional leaders may facilitate such teacher learning. Stein and Spillane (2005) comment that a failure to connect leadership research with teaching and teacher education research is one reason why the leadership field has been “silent on how students learn, how teachers can help students learn, and—most important—how [they] can help both students and teachers learn” (Stein & Spillane, 2005, p. 28). Similarly, Robinson et al. (2008) noted that they found only 27 published studies on leadership and student outcomes in their recent analysis of the literature, further illustrating the disconnect between leadership research and research on teaching and learning. We must begin to integrate these literatures if we are to develop a more nuanced understanding of the “how” of instructional leadership.

Discussion: The Future of Instructional Leadership Research

In this article, I have argued that the way we have organized our studies on principal, teacher leader, and coach instructional leadership into separate and distinct bodies of literature may constrain our ability to develop new types of knowledge around “how” leaders improve instruction. I have suggested we rethink our approach to instructional leadership research, developing an integrated, cohesive literature base. I hypothesized that looking at extant findings from each literature in relation to one another will help us better understand what we know about how leaders improve instruction, and what remains to be learned.

Because I assert it is critical to uncover more about the “how” of instructional leadership, I utilized a distributed lens to frame this review. I captured the leader-plus aspect of this lens by considering principals, teacher leaders, and coaches as potential instructional leaders, examining their literatures side by side. I grounded my analyses with a historical overview of each literature, tracing key developments, definitions, and critiques of each. I utilized the practice aspect of the distributed lens by analyzing the literatures in terms of the relationship among instructional leaders interacting with one another, followers, context, teaching, and learning.

What do we know, and where should we go from here? We know a lot about instructional leadership. For example, we know some about principal

instructional leadership behaviors and their connection to instruction, as well as how to assess such behaviors; an understanding of important teacher leader and coach behaviors is also emerging. We know there are contextual factors related to instructional leadership, particularly at the school and district levels. And we have learned some of the ways instructional leaders support—or fail to support—one another in their work. Perhaps most promising are the empirical links among instructional leaders and teaching and learning. We have begun to uncover specific behaviors linked to specific instructional practices and, to a lesser extent, student learning.

Despite these advances, much remains unanswered. Although some studies have examined multiple leaders simultaneously, we have largely failed to uncover the interactions (as opposed actions or behaviors) among leaders and their followers. We also need to consider these interactions with context, moving beyond lists of decontextualized leadership behaviors, which appear prominently in the principal literature and are emerging in the teacher leader and coach literatures. Such an approach will involve viewing context as more than a backdrop, but as integral to instructional leadership. We know almost nothing about how instructional leadership varies within the different instructional systems throughout the United States.

So, too, our knowledge of instructional leadership in relation to teaching and learning is in its infancy. Although we know some of the conditions leaders create for teachers and students to learn, we know much less about what happens inside these moments of learning or what type of interactions facilitate them. Drawing on the literature of professional development, teacher education, teaching, and student learning will likely enhance our knowledge of how learning takes place, as will shifting our starting point for research. If we begin with what it is we want students to learn, we can then determine what kinds of instruction will lead to that goal, what teachers need to learn to be able to implement that kind of instruction, and, finally, how leaders facilitate teacher learning around that targeted instruction.

But this work will not be without its challenges. A broader, more inclusive unit of analysis may lead us to different hypotheses, methodologies, and analyses, ones that hopefully will better enable us to get at the “how.” Yet getting at how instructional leaders improve instruction is methodologically hard, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finding ways to measure characteristics and behaviors of leaders seems more straightforward; getting inside the process of how leaders enact those behaviors in context to improve instruction is another matter entirely. Studies that have managed to tackle the leadership practice aspect of the distributed lens have typically been small and ethnographic in

nature; developing measurement tools that allow us to study larger samples will be crucial (Spillane & Diamond, 2007), but likely difficult.

The academy itself poses another set of challenges to future research on instructional leadership. Faculties within schools of education take on specialties and subspecialties, searching for their niche within a narrow focus (Cuban, 1988). Such an approach does not lend itself to a broad examination of multiple leaders and their literatures. Yet the reality is that instructional leaders must work together to lead instruction—or at least work in the same school—and such a reality should be mirrored in future research.

Despite these challenges, it is essential that we try. This article is meant as only a first step at integrating these literatures. How do we move forward from here? An integrated knowledge base on instructional leadership will start with what we know and do not know across the instructional leadership literatures and use this to develop a future research agenda. Future studies must consider the work of all potential instructional leaders, not principals or teacher leaders or coaches alone. They must capture more fully the “how” of this work, developing methodological tools to uncover interactions among leaders, followers, and context toward improving teaching and learning. Drawing on existing research that starts to reach this goal (e.g., Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Portin et al., 2009; Printy et al., 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007) will be imperative as we move forward.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks David K. Cohen, Carla O'Connor, and Kristin Holmstrom for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. A small set of recent studies (e.g., Mangin, 2007; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008) have attempted to interweave the concept of teacher leadership and coaching, integrating some findings across the two literatures. Despite this very important step forward, these studies are exceptions; the principal, teacher leader, and coaching literatures remain overwhelmingly separate and distinct from one another.

2. I would like to cite (and thank) an anonymous reviewer for *Educational Administration Quarterly* for noting the importance of the historical reasons behind these literatures developing separately.
3. This idea is also closely related to Cohen and Ball's (1999) "instructional triangle," which considers instruction as the interactions among teachers, students, and materials in particular environments.

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Bio

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