

Preparing Instructional Leaders: Evaluating a Regional Program to Gauge Perceived Effectiveness

Gregory Rodney MacKinnon, *Acadia University*

David Young, *St. Francis Xavier University*

Sophie Paish, *MindBloom Consulting*

Sue LeBel, *Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy*

Abstract An instructional leadership program (ILP) has offered education and support to three cohorts of educational leaders in Nova Scotia, Canada, amounting to approximately 130 participants. Quantitative and qualitative feedback from a convenience sample ($n = 90$) suggests that the ILP offers an extremely useful practical program; in fact, 95 percent of the sample indicates advances in the categories of professional growth, improved instructional leadership, and tangible progress in administrative effectiveness. Systemic and school environment trends have dictated that educational leaders need a skill set that positions them to respond more aptly to issues of poverty, socioemotional health, and mental health while attending to improved community building both within the school and in the greater public. This study uses surveys, interviews, and focus groups to identify emerging and impending challenges.

Keywords Instructional leadership; Program review; Professional development

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With the challenges facing modern schools (Van de Werfhorst, 2014) and the changing dynamic of the student population (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Dede, 2005, 2007), it has become increasingly important to prepare effective leaders for the public school system. While school leadership may have been identified in the past as “managing” the workings of a school, an administrative role, it may be argued, has never been more important for principals to provide instructional leadership that allows faculty to adequately respond to the pedagogical aims of school development plans. This article attempts to deconstruct the qualities and weaknesses of a particular instructional leadership program in eastern Canada. The study contributes to the literature by illuminating the tension between programs that emphasize leadership strategies and those that might consider more carefully the affective domain of relationship building in the school community. The tenets of this particular leadership program have been described in order to nest the work in the literature concerning best practices. It remains, in the ensuing discussion, to undertake a cursory consideration of what has already been studied in this professional development category in order to situate this regional work in the context of prior understandings.

Given that the role of the principal is constantly being revisited and is inherently linked to the school’s community, the notion of the principal solely as instructional leader may seem narrow according to some standards (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Mombourquette, 2017). Ellen Reames (2010) suggests that any principal training should also align with “leadership based on school improvement and student achievement and creating schools as socially just, democratic learning communities” (p. 436). One might posit that a leadership curriculum in itself is insufficient to instantly transform a would-be leader. In fact, research has established (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016) that the coaching of principals in authentic contexts during a program is often most valuable in providing an induction period as they enter the administrative profession. An induction period in an educational setting (e.g., beginning teachers) is not a new idea but, unfortunately, instructional leadership programs do not always have the human resources to track and assist new administrators (Fullan, 2002). Furthermore, many administrators exist in a very complicated reactive job environment that leaves little room for professional development in a traditional setting. Gina Ikemoto (2007) asserts that “principals’ sense making is inhibited by such district conditions as limited time and resources ...” (p. 3). Considering the sometimes-chaotic context of principals’ work, alternate delivery modes of instructional leadership programs have been explored (Gurley & Mendiola, 2016), with mixed indicators of success.

While leadership programs are prevalent in the literature, most professional development of this description lacks in post-program support. An important outcome of a representative report (Patterson, Jiang, Chandler, & Chan, 2012) offered the following comment: “We acknowledge the need to provide continuous professional support to our program graduates to ensure their success particularly in their early years as beginning school administrators” (p. 51).

Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe, Debra Meyerson, Margaret Orr, and Carol Cohen (2007) undertook arguably the most comprehensive study of instructional leadership programs. It examined “eight exemplary pre- and in-service

program models designed to address key issues in developing strong leaders” (p. 7). The analysis suggests that it is not only possible to create responsive, relevant, practical, and high-quality pre-service and in-service programs but, moreover, that these programs share common features (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). In the realm of pre-service programs, the following features were noted:

- A comprehensive and coherent curriculum aligned to state and professional standards;
- A program philosophy and curriculum that emphasize leadership of instruction and school improvement;
- Active, student-centered instruction employing pedagogies that facilitate the integration of theory and practice and stimulate reflection, such as problem based learning; action research; field-based projects; journal writing; and portfolios that feature substantial use of feedback and ongoing self, peer, and faculty assessment;
- Faculty who are knowledgeable in their subject area, including practitioners who have had experience in school administration;
- Social and professional support in the form of a cohort structure as well as formalized mentoring and advising from expert principals;
- Vigorous, carefully targeted recruitment and selection processes that proactively bring expert teachers with potential for leadership into the principalship; and
- Well-designed and supervised administrative internships that provide opportunities for candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the tutelage of expert veterans. (quoted verbatim, p. 145)

Within the exemplary in-service programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) concluded that “In addition to offering extensive, high-quality learning opportunities focused on curriculum and instruction, the programs typically offered supports in the form of mentoring, participation in principals’ networks and study groups, collegial school visits, and peer coaching” (p. 146). Further, these programs had the following shared characteristics:

- A learning continuum operating systematically from pre-service preparation through induction and throughout the career, involving mature and retired principals in mentoring others;
- Leadership learning grounded in practice, including analyses of classroom practice, supervision, and professional development using on-the-job observations connected readings and discussions and organized around a model of leadership; and
- Collegial learning networks, such as principals’ networks, study groups, and mentoring or peer coaching, that offer communities of practice and sources of ongoing support for problem solving. (quoted verbatim, p. 146)

These findings serve as a foundation for the range of program outcomes that might be expected in a well-designed professional development effort directed toward instructional leadership in schools.

Context

This study is a mixed-methods analysis of an instructional leadership program (ILP) offered in Nova Scotia, Canada:

Preparing
Instructional
Leaders

The Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy (NSILA) Program is offered by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in partnership with the Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Consortium. The goal of the Academy's program is to improve the capacity for school-based instructional leadership, aimed at increasing student learning and achievement in Nova Scotia public schools. The NSILA program extends over three years and leads to a Diploma in Instructional Leadership. The diploma is granted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It signifies that holders of the Diploma in Instructional Leadership have achieved and demonstrated competency in instructional leadership. Under the Education Act Regulations, the Instructional Leadership Program is a means for a teacher to upgrade his/her teacher certificate level. (NSILAA, 2018)

The core content of the Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy's (NSILA) ILP focuses on increasing knowledge, skills, and competencies around the seven standards of excellence in instructional leadership (see Table 1).

Table 1. Instructional leadership standards*

| Standard | Description |
|--|---|
| 1. Vision for instruction | The instructional leader facilitates the development, implementation, and stewardship of a shared vision for instruction that supports learning for all. |
| 2. Leading and managing change | The instructional leader identifies and articulates the urgency for instructional improvement and is knowledgeable and strategic about change management and systems thinking. |
| 3. Collaborative learning culture | The instructional leader builds a school culture that is characterized by caring, trust, and respectful relationships that motivates teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry for instructional improvement. |
| 4. Professional learning | The instructional leader facilitates high-quality and job-embedded learning for teachers based on research, best practices, and teacher development needs. |
| 5. High quality instruction | The instructional leader is knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the effective implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. |
| 6. Understanding and using data to improve instruction | The instructional leader uses data to ensure a consistent and continuous school-wide focus on improving instruction and student achievement. |
| 7. Positive learning environment | The instructional leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring that staff acts with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner to create and sustain an inclusive and equitable school learning environment. |

*(NSILAb, 2018) Note: The three-year course schedule, including the six modules that respond to these standards, is listed in Appendix A.

Research aims

In an effort to understand the impact of ILP on the practice of educational leaders, the NSILA approached an independent group to sample feedback from participants in the first three years (cohorts) of the program. It is important to note the ILP is now engaging its seventh cohort and, as such, is in a continuous and systematic self-review of program strengths and concomitant improvements.

In an action research mode (Beaulieu, 2013; Sagor & Williams, 2017), the research team chose to access both quantitative and qualitative indicators to access feedback on the tangible impacts of the program on professional practice, as well as perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current program. This cycle, based on Valsa Koshy's (2005) notion of plan-act-observe-reflect, is best represented in Figure 1 (Interactive Design Foundation, 2016).

Figure 1. An action research cycle



A longitudinal study of the impact on a wider range of stakeholders (and in particular the long-term influence on student achievement data) may be implied, but that was beyond the scope of this introductory work. Rather, this study focuses solely on the impressions of the ILP participants with regard to the perceived professional impact on their practice in the schools that they led at the time of the study.

In all programs, there are intentional goals that shape both the content and delivery. As an extension to the primary research questions, this research also sought to access the general educational literature and pose possible content for future program offerings. In this research context, it is important to note that in accessing both the impacts and the qualities of the program, researchers also prompted participants to consider program components that were not necessarily intended in the initial design. The nature of this particular participant feedback is forward-looking rather than inherently evaluative and may offer some direction to the curriculum design team.

Methods

The research employed a mixed-methods approach. An introductory survey of the sample was undertaken to identify trends, whereas interviews and focus groups

served to deconstruct the rationale behind the observed survey results. The surveys in themselves were not deemed sufficient to understand the complexities of curriculum designers' intentions or participants' experiences and perceptions. Further, it was not the intent to use surveys to establish statistical significance but rather to drive the qualitative investigation. After the empirical materials were analyzed, it was decided that a further survey would be useful in categorizing specific areas of growth. The details of this additional survey are outlined below.

Characteristics of the initial survey sample

The study was initiated by survey sampling the impressions of leaders in the ILP program spanning three cohort groups. The total participant number included 130 leaders from the region A survey was developed to probe the following: 1) leadership demographics; 2) program impact features; 3) the quality of component courses; 4) attention to leadership standards; 5) attention to the furthering of the public school program; and 5) the encouragement of professional reflection. It was administered to the sample ($n = 130$) with 90 leaders responding (21% cohort one, 43% cohort two, and 36% cohort three). The 90-leader sample was characterized in several ways. The sample declared itself as 58.9 percent female and 41.1 percent male, with 42 percent residing in elementary schools only and 11 percent residing in high schools only (the remainder of the group was spread across mixtures of experiences as administrators). In terms of ancestry, 81 percent declared European descent, eight percent Acadian, three percent Indigenous North American, and two percent African. Of those surveyed, 51.1 percent reported that they had taught for more than 15 years. In the same sample, 24.4 percent suggested that they had been teaching for six to ten years. This was indicative of a good to excellent measure of pedagogical experience in the group as they undertook a study of leadership.

In terms of administrative experience, 38.3 percent reported seven to ten years, while 43.3 percent suggested they had spent more than 11 years at an administrative post. With regard to participation in the ILP, as reported above, 21 percent were from cohort one, 43 percent from cohort two, and 36 percent from cohort three.

Interviews and focus groups

Based on the trends identified in the surveys (Patton, 2002), a standardized open-ended interview schedule was developed (see Appendix B) to ascertain the reason why participants responded the way they did in the surveys. The interview questions were piloted with three education faculty members and a research assistant to remove any ambiguity in the language and validity of purpose. Based on informed consent and appropriate ethics approval, audio recordings were made of the approximately one-hour interviews conducted with 12 ILP participants who were secured by invitation: a convenience sample from across the region. Two independent analysts coded the transcribed interviews for themes (Huberman & Miles, 2002) to enhance inter-rater reliability. In an iterative process that invoked open coding, axial coding, theory memos, and selective coding, the researchers discussed and compared their themes, formalized the code relationships through notes, and collapsed similar trends, all the while adding more inclusive categories as necessary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In order to corroborate or refute the views of interview participants, two focus groups of three leaders each engaged in a conversation based on a standardized series of findings statements (Kreuger & Casey, 2009). The focus group questions are listed in Appendix C.

Iterative analysis invokes a second survey

The initial survey requested participants to assess the overall impact of the ILP in the categories of professional growth, improved instructional leadership, and tangible progress in administrative effectiveness. In all three domains, over 95 percent of the sample ($n = 90$) agreed or strongly agreed that they had developed in these aspects of their work.

A further survey of an invited convenience sample ($n = 48$) of the original population ($n = 90$) was invoked to unpack the specific areas of improved practice among leaders.

Results

Surveys, interviews, and focus groups served as the triangulated basis for determining the strengths and weaknesses of the ILP program.

The survey and ensuing interviews and focus groups posed questions that, in some cases, delved into possible improvements beyond the intended aims of the ILP as it was designed. For instance, the program was intended to offer strategies for the “principal as instructional leader” as opposed to an emphasis on school management, so it was not a surprise when ILP participants quite emphatically stated management strategies were not the focus. Nonetheless, the researchers were interested in exploring possible supplemental foci that perhaps intrinsically related to instructional leadership.

Initial survey

In several core areas, the survey results were very positive. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- The ILP program has helped me grow as an instructional leader: 100 percent in agreement.
- The ILP program has improved my understanding of what constitutes effective instruction in the classroom: 98 percent in agreement.
- The ILP program has clearly identified the qualities of an effective administrator: 98 percent in agreement.
- Embedded within the ILP program were adequate elements of best practices in instruction: 99 percent in agreement.
- Embedded within the ILP program were adequate elements of best practices in assessment: 98 percent in agreement.

Overall, while the respondents were very positive about the content of the ILP, given that less than two-thirds of participants agreed with these statements, these were considered suggested areas of improvement. Table 2 indicates areas of further consideration that were either: 1) not a planned component, or 2) a planned com-

ponent that might require revisiting. The table entries were addressed quite specifically in interview questions so as to uncover the rationale for the response trend.

Table 2. Areas to consider for possible review or inclusion

| Topic | Percent of the cohort that either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement |
|---|--|
| The ILP introduced strategies to reduce time on administration management. | 47 |
| The ILP introduced strategies to be more systematic in my conversations with community members. | 46 |
| The ILP introduced strategies to be more sensitive in my conversations with community members. | 56 |
| The ILP introduced strategies to be more sensitive in my conversations with central office personnel. | 62 |
| The ILP adequately addressed school issues associated with high poverty. | 45 |
| The ILP adequately addressed issues associated with rural schools. | 37 |
| The ILP adequately addressed issues associated with urban schools. | 51 |

Preparing
Instructional
Leaders

Note: Those survey items below 66 percent overall agreement were arbitrarily included in the table. All survey questions with a greater aggregate score of 66 percent were considered to be a very positive reflection of the program in a range of areas (see survey questions, Appendix A).

The survey ranked the core curriculum of ILP as perceived by the sampled participants in cohorts one to three. The ILP courses deemed the most valuable were in assessment and instruction. Those deemed less valuable focused around school improvement and developing a community in schools and with parents.

The survey identified the least common school-achievement indicators observed in respondents' schools as: a) engagement with parents, and b) engagement with community. Categories of entirely missed indicators (i.e., added by respondents) included but were not limited to: mental health, teacher engagement, family dynamics, relationships with students, school climate, and student support.

Participants were asked to rank those aspects of the ILP that empowered them to advance the public school program. Assessment for learning was ranked strongly, whereas socioemotional learning and culturally sensitive pedagogy were ranked lower.

The survey asked participants to rank the instructional-leadership standards that were best promoted by the ILP in terms of their capacity to enact the standard. "High-quality instruction" was most frequently ranked the highest, whereas "properly using data" and "professional learning" were among a group ranked the lowest.

Qualitative interviews

It is important to consider that the convenience sample ($n = 90$) was drawn from cohorts one to three, and as such, some opinions reflect changes suggested from earlier cohorts whereas responses in later cohorts may be to changes already made by the

time their cohort undertook the program. The analysis of the interview data through iterative coding culminated in representative categories that accurately convey the concerns and perspectives of the sampled group.

Expectations of the participants

From the initial sample of 90 survey respondents, a convenience sample of 12 was invited for an interview (see Appendix B). After interview transcripts were reviewed and coded (as per the methodology above), two focus groups of three participants each were convened, again a convenience sample by invitation (see focus group statements, Appendix C).

These feedback instruments in tandem with survey results established that participants engaged in the ILP with the full expectation that the emphasis would be:

1. Instructional leadership as opposed to managerial strategies;
and
2. Instructional leadership strategies rather than relationship building, community building, and contexts/characteristics of students.

The sample was near unanimous in suggesting that while the emphasis was not efficiency models for managing schools, the ILP was very helpful in setting priorities and, moreover, redefining their role of “principal as instructional leader.” Participants also suggested that without some emphasis on managing their time in schools, they would find it difficult to employ the instructional leadership strategies. A representative comment was: “with the confusion of schools and my job managing the day to day barrage of immediate issues ... without time management strategies the instructional leadership piece is irrelevant, I will never realistically get to it!”

Perceived strengths of the ILP

In the interviews and focus groups, the expressions of the perceived strengths of the ILP were very consistent in conversations and mapped onto the survey results quite well:

- Assessment for learning
- Coaching process
- Instructional strategies
- Community building through coaching
- Useful to all administrators (early and late career), but participant should have at least five years' experience
- Most effective for those who assume reflective practitioner stance
- Much more useful than a master's of education program because of the practical slant
- Use of research data to support approaches builds confidence
- Networking with peers in the cohort addressed urban and rural differences
- Practical assignments
- Prioritizing work as a principal

Perceived weaknesses in the ILP

In the interviews and focus groups, the expressions of the perceived weaknesses of the ILP included the following (note that interviewees made it clear that some of the components they would like to see may have never been intended in the initial design of the ILP):

- Not enough consideration of the issues of diversity (mitigated to some extent by the addition of a “culturally sensitive pedagogy” focus in later cohorts)
- Culturally sensitive pedagogy course an improvement but the least favorite course (not effective as an add-on—very repetitive ideology; much better to integrate across courses—and the course should focus more on what classrooms look like)
- Lack of diversity of instructors
- Better to avoid instructors that are not currently teachers/administrators; credibility issue (tried and true approaches better)
- Use of technology in early cohorts was disastrous
- Mismatch of curriculum with reality (e.g., learning communities advanced in ILP, but not adopted by some school boards)

Extended trends

While not immediately evident in the surveys, ensuing interviews uncovered some trends worth corroborating. Many interviewees expressed a preconception that the ILP was to address exclusively their need for practical strategies in providing instructional support. When it was suggested that issues of poverty, mental health, and socioemotional learning are arguably inextricably linked to leadership, there was considerable feedback that suggested the participants would delegate that to others and saw it as beyond the scope of their definition of a principal. A representative comment included, “my job is to manage the instruction in the school, I don’t have time or see it within my purview to be a nurse and counselor too. . . . I delegate pretty quickly.” Conversely, the culturally sensitive pedagogy focus—in that it dealt directly with instruction—was readily accepted as relevant to the ILP training.

When the topic of parental relationships was addressed, many participants felt that this developed as a natural extension of their relationship with the children and that it did not require special consideration. Paraphrasing a number of respondents, “I deal with children and by necessity this may involve parents or not. . . . I don’t make it a priority to connect with parents; usually I interact most with parents of children with difficulties.” In a similar vein, few participants saw any relevance in considering the differing dynamic of urban versus rural schools. Those that conceded it was worthy of attention were quick to suggest that the interaction participants had of different contexts within cohorts was adequate for considering any logistical differences.

Closing the loop: Corroborating the views of the sample through focus groups

The interviews yielded emergent trends based on individual opinions as outlined above. The focus groups offer a different dynamic in terms of congealing or challeng-

ing the interview trends. The focus groups were asked to comment on ten findings that the surveys and interviews seemed to indicate (see Appendix C). The statements and consensus responses from two focus groups are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Focus group responses

Preparing
Instructional
Leaders

| Research statement | Consensus response |
|--|--|
| <i>Purpose discussion</i> | |
| Participants have perceived the ILP to be primarily about coaching teachers to invoke research-based instructional strategies. | Coaching was an important part of the program that warranted one year of practice. Because the ILP was later offered to a mix of principals and vice principals, a distinction in the reality of their roles as instructional leaders in schools would be useful. |
| While managerial strategies are not central content to the ILP, participants have suggested that the program has helped them to prioritize how their time is applied as principal in a school. This has, in turn, helped them define more clearly their role as principal. | Seeing the priorities and being able to realistically respond are a challenge. The constraints to providing good instructional leadership remain significant in two areas: day-to-day managerial pressures and moving from an evaluative administrator to a comfortable principal-teacher coaching relationship. |
| <i>Content discussion</i> | |
| ILP participants, while appreciating the importance of considering issues of poverty, mental health, and parental communication, did not see these topics as central to their study of instructional leadership. | These topics not overtly addressed and with increasing importance in the system, the ILP should reflect increased focus. Vice principals tend to deal with more of these areas and the program may offer a distinction in roles. |
| ILP participants have suggested that community building within the school is a natural extension of building up relationships with teachers through the effective instructional coaching process they have learned. | There is increasing focus in the public system on building community, so the ILP should reflect that emphasis. Those current ILP activities and assignments in this realm were particularly useful. |
| The exposure to differences in the leadership contexts of rural and urban schools was primarily through informal conversations within the cohort. | Overt coverage was not evident, but informal discussions tended to bring about discussions of elementary/ secondary school differences more often than rural/urban comparisons. As such, the comparisons only arose based on the cohort demographic. Visits to schools were alluded to as being particularly illuminating. |
| ILP participants saw issues of socioemotional and mental health as being the purview of health professionals and not strictly within their scope or expertise as instructional leaders. They were content to “direct” concerned individuals to the appropriate supports. | The system emphasis on responding to the socioemotional and mental health of children is an important one that is placing more responsibility on both principals and vice principals. In recent years, administrators have taken an increased role and the ILP should reflect the growth that is necessary in this area. In the past, administrators reacted to behavioral challenges; ILP should assist them to access school-based support and only direct mental health issues to professionals as necessary. |

Table 3 (continued)

| Research statement | Consensus response |
|--|--|
| <i>Responses to needs in the program</i> | |
| The instructional faculty and delivery of the ILP was from a perspective that did not specifically include or address diversity in earlier cohort offerings. The culturally sensitive pedagogy course has responded to this weakness, but a range of instructors from diverse backgrounds would be a helpful addition to the ILP. | The participants in the cohorts were not culturally diverse in themselves, so differences in “ways of knowing” was not explored. Accessing culturally diverse instructors would improve credibility and align well with a system focus on culturally relevant pedagogy. |
| ILP participants, in later years, appreciated the emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy, although they suggested it should be embedded across the program and not included as a single course. Some felt the content was not only an add-on but also repetitive at times. | The addition of a course, while moving in the right direction, appears as “lip service.” The preference is to integrate culturally relevant pedagogy across the ILP. |
| <i>Preparation and suitability for ILP</i> | |
| Interviewees felt that those considering the ILP should have significant teaching experience (at least five to ten years in the classroom) so that they had context in which to situate the instructional leadership training. Furthermore, ILP graduates suggested that for maximum impact, the participant had to be self-reflective, regardless of their experiential base. | Participants should have significant school experience to understand the nature of children, their psychological development, and their socioemotional needs. Participant should not only be reflective, but they should also have some leadership experience (e.g., vice principal, lead teacher, etc.) that allows them to understand how hierarchal systems can be accessed and managed to assist with instructional growth in schools. |
| Principals with a range of career experience (young vs. veteran) were united in feeling the ILP offered useful practical advice and approaches. | The practicality of the ILP has served participants far better than their experiences in master’s of education programs. The ILP inherently creates a network—a professional learning community of leaders that extends beyond the program to support in the system. |

A second survey identifying growth areas

As noted above, the initial survey requested that participants assess the overall impact of the ILP in the categories of: 1) *professional growth*, 2) *improved instructional leadership*, and 3) *tangible progress in administrative effectiveness*. In all three domains, over 95 percent of the sample ($n = 90$) agreed or strongly agreed that they had developed in these aspects of their work.

A survey of an invited convenience sample ($n = 48$) of the original population ($n = 90$) was invoked to unpack the specific areas of improved practice among leaders.

Figure 2 (2a and 2b) shows the distribution of responses in the three aforementioned categories namely: professional growth, improved instructional leadership, and tangible progress in administrative effectiveness. In each category, respondents were asked to rank the possible impacts on their practice. Figure 2a identifies the

highest-ranked impact, whereas Figure 2b identifies the lowest-ranked impact. For example, in Category 1, the bar graph (Figure 2a) shows that the b response (i.e., creating learning opportunities for teachers to serve as instructional leaders in the school and across networked learning communities) was the most popular in the sample (n = 48). Likewise, in Figure 2b, under Category 1, the “c” response was most often ranked the lowest.

Figure 2a. Highest impact on practice

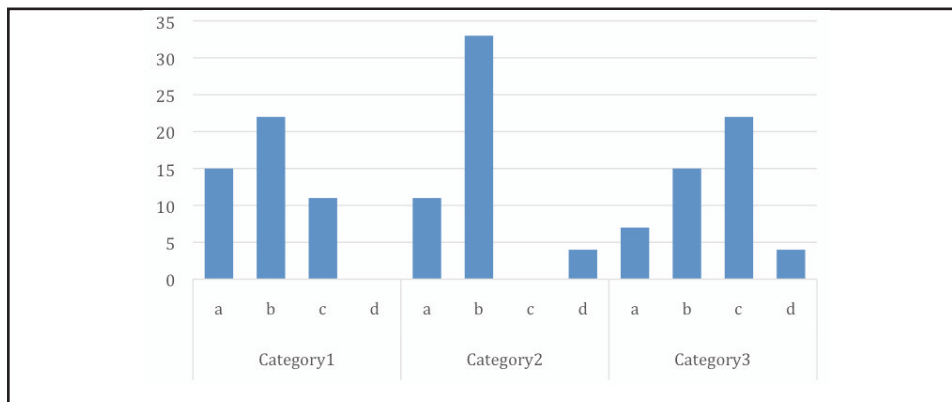
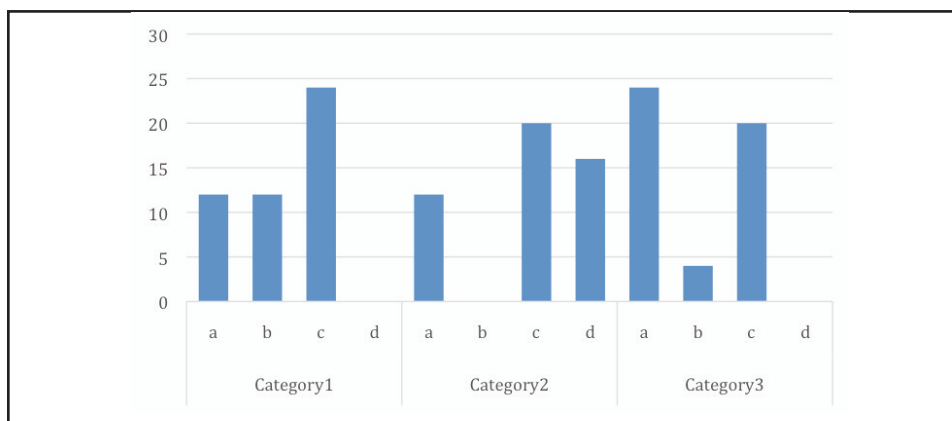


Figure 2b. Lowest impact on practice



Category 1: Professional growth

As a result of your experiences with the ILP, in which areas do you feel that you have experienced the greatest growth?

- a. Modelling working collaboratively with staff in communities of practice
- b. Creating learning opportunities for teachers to serve as instructional leaders in the school and across networked learning communities
- c. Clarifying and developing agreement around the underlying beliefs and assumptions that affect teaching and learning
- d. Other

Category 2: Improved instructional leadership

As a result of your experiences with the ILP, in which areas do you feel that you have experienced the greatest growth?

- a. Collaboratively developing and acting upon a shared vision of effective instruction
- b. Maintaining high visibility and engaging in ongoing teacher conversations and coaching to monitor instructional practices and to gather data about student learning
- c. Challenging under-performance at all levels and ensuring effective corrective action and follow-up
- d. Ensuring that instructional and assessment practices and resources are equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive

Category 3: Progress in administrative effectiveness

As a result of your experiences with the ILP, in which areas do you feel that you have experienced the greatest growth?

- a. Using data and evidence to answer the question: why change?
- b. Examining student achievement data as the foundation for teacher conversations about teaching and learning
- c. Believing and communicating that high-quality instruction will close the achievement gap
- d. Other

Reflections

While administrators have received the ILP as a most impactful program, an action research model invokes a consideration of how to use feedback to move forward. Many perceive the strength of the program as an ability to afford research-based practical instructional strategies for administrators. A certain portion of the sample participants was decidedly less concerned with extended responsibilities of assisting students with challenges associated with the learning context. Given the inextricable link between school performance and both the socioeconomic background and socioemotional place of students, it is recommended that the ILP further develop an emphasis that squarely associates instructional leadership with the well-being of the student and, further, quality relationships with parents and community. The analysis of this unique program provides a further case study of leadership programs, their design and concomitant impact. This work adds to the literature in suggesting that administrators, in order to address the complex social systems (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starr, 2015) inherent in schools, must undertake professional development that goes beyond instructional and management strategies. The program is now in its seventh iteration, and it is duly recognized that many changes have been implemented that respond to the research findings established here.

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Appendix A: Course content of the ILP

JEPL 14(1) 2019

MacKinnon, Young,
Paish, & LeBel

Preparing
Instructional
Leaders

| ILP curriculum | Critical content | Three-year course schedule |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| <p>ILP 1 Best practices in instruction and assessment, Part I</p> | <p>Course content will include: developing an understanding of how the brain processes information; theories and principles of learning; learning styles and preferences; motivation; multiple intelligences; barriers to learning and their implications for teaching and learning; student engagement concepts and strategies; vocabulary development and concept attainment; skills and approaches for constructing understanding; literacy development across content areas; research-based instructional strategies; and how these methods connect to current learning theory.</p> | <p>Year 1: September–December</p> |
| <p>ILP 2 Best practices in instruction and assessment, Part II</p> | <p>Building on ILP 1, course content will include: formative (assessment for) and summative (assessment of) learning; assessment research and strategies related to effective grading practices and evaluation; how to develop a balanced assessment system; and staying focused on the learner and the learning.</p> | <p>Year 1: January–April</p> |
| <p>ILP 3 Coaching for instructional improvement</p> | <p>ILP 3 is a blended learning experience that includes coursework, laboratories/workshops, and practicums. A distinctive element of the Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Program is the Skillful Observational Coaching Laboratory™ workshops and the Artisan Teacher™ institute intended to help instructional leaders learn to use descriptive and specific feedback for teachers focused on their teaching talents. Participants will learn and become proficient at four coaching techniques practiced in a school setting. Practicums include practice using coaching tools, the completion of learning logs, and reflections on the coaching process. The curriculum focuses on best practice, theory, and research. ILP 3 is introduced in the two-day Artisan Teacher™ institute, scheduled for August (Year 2). This institute is held in the Halifax-Dartmouth area.</p> | <p>Year 2: September–January</p> |
| <p>ILP 4 Instructional design: culturally responsive teaching and leadership</p> | <p>Course content includes a focus on culturally responsive instructional design, teaching strategies, and leadership practices. The course will examine the big ideas, essential questions, and unifying concepts in instructional design from the perspective of the culturally proficient instructional leader and teacher. It will also include an examination of effective practices for community building in the classroom and the school, lesson and unit planning through a culturally responsive and inclusive lens, and positive classroom management strategies.</p> | <p>Year 2: January–April</p> |
| <p>ILP 5 Using data for instructional and school improvement</p> | <p>Building on the first four courses, participants will learn how to collect different kinds of data using multiple data sources, how to organize and disaggregate data, how to analyze data for instructional themes and patterns. They will present and communicate data findings, use data to influence instructional changes, and lead data-driven discussions for improving instruction.</p> | <p>Year 3: September–December</p> |

Appendix A: (continued)

IJEPL 14(1) 2019

MacKinnon, Young,
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Preparing
Instructional
Leaders

| ILP curriculum | Critical content | Three-year course schedule |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| ILP 6 Developing a community of practice | Course content will focus on understanding the characteristics and components of professional learning communities (PLCs) and collaborative learning teams (CLTs); developing strategies for initiating, moving, and sustaining PLCs and CLTs; developing strategies for teacher learning (study groups, peer visitation, coaching, action research, networks); and developing learning plans for the school. The course will also include knowledge and skill building related to culture shaping and leadership factors that help to build professional learning communities. | Year 3: January–April |
| Final culminating assessment | Participants will be expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired from the six courses, their practicum experiences, coaching experiences, and their action research. | Year 3: April–May |

Source: The Leadership Academy: Instructional Leadership Program, Education Leadership Consortium of Nova Scotia Ltd., 2018

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many years have you been an administrator? Years as a principal? Years as a vice principal?
3. Where is most of your administration experience, in urban schools or rural schools?
4. The ILP survey results suggest that two-thirds of participants would like to see reduced time spent on managerial tasks in schools. What components of the ILP helped you to better manage your time as an administrator so you could attend to things such as community building, school improvement, and a progressive curriculum?
5. The survey data suggested that the ILP was weak in its consideration of relationships with parents. Was this your perception? If so, what would you recommend that ILP leaders include in the program in order to directly deal with this weakness?
6. The survey data suggested that the ILP was weak in its consideration of mental-health issues in schools. Was this your perception? If so, what would you recommend that ILP leaders include in the program in order to directly deal with this weakness?
7. The survey data suggested that the ILP program was weak in its consideration of poverty and its impact on schooling. Was this your perception? If so, what would you recommend that ILP leaders include in the program in order to directly deal with this weakness?
8. The survey data suggested that the ILP program was weak in its consideration of community building within the school. Was this your perception? If so, what would you recommend that ILP leaders include in the program in order to directly deal with this weakness?
9. The survey data suggested that the ILP was weak in its consideration of the disparate nature of urban versus rural schools and how an administrator might prepare for this. Was this your perception? If so, what would you recommend that ILP leaders include in the program in order to directly deal with this weakness?
10. The survey seemed to suggest that the ILP content was more weighted toward instructional techniques and assessment in comparison to school improvement and building school community. I would be interested in your opinion of the balance of these components within the program.
11. In what ways did you improve in your professional work as a direct result of the ILP?
12. As a follow-up, identify the most pressing issues that the ILP could do a better job to cover in these four areas (i.e., instructional techniques, assessment, school improvement, and building school community).
13. In the ILP survey, the least frequently noted indicators of school achievement were a) engagement with parents and b) engagement with community. How did the ILP prepare you to improve in those areas? What would you suggest they include in the program to address this?

14. With regard to empowering the public school program, survey respondents suggested the ILP was weak in providing preparation for leaders to promote culturally sensitive pedagogies in their respective schools. How could the ILP improve in this area?
15. With regard to empowering the public school program, survey respondents suggested the ILP was weak in providing preparation for leaders to promote socioemotional learning in their respective schools. How could the ILP improve in this area?
16. You are at a particular point in your career where you thought the ILP would be useful. Do you think the program is more helpful for early career administrators than late career principals? Explain your rationale.
17. At least a third of the ILP participants had less than ten years of teaching experience. Would you suggest that had a bearing on the impact the ILP might have? Why or why not?
18. If you had to choose, would you suggest the ILP is more apt to prepare you as an effective manager or as an instructional leader? Give the rationale for your choice.
19. Within the ILP, it may be argued that the early career leaders are more preoccupied with getting practical leadership training versus late career administrators, who would like to tease out more philosophical questions/theory around leadership. Do you think this is true about yourself? Why do you think there might be a difference?
20. Discuss whether you think the ILP is well designed to assist leaders who themselves are of diverse backgrounds, for example, the case of ILP participants of Indigenous or African Nova Scotian heritage. How could the ILA program be improved to take this into consideration?

Participants have perceived the ILP to be primarily about coaching teachers to invoke research-based instructional strategies.

While appreciating the importance of considering the issues of poverty, mental health, and parental communication, ILP participants did not see these topics as central to their study of instructional leadership.

Participants of the ILP have suggested that community building within the school is a natural extension of building up relationships with teachers through the effective instructional coaching process they have learned.

While managerial strategies are not central content to the ILP, participants have suggested that the program has helped them to prioritize how their time is applied as principal in a school. This has, in turn, helped them define more clearly their role as principal.

Exposure to the differences in the leadership contexts of rural and urban schools was primarily through informal conversations within the cohort.

In earlier cohort offerings, the instructional faculty and delivery of the ILP was from a perspective that did not specifically include or address diversity. The culturally sensitive pedagogy course has responded to this weakness, but a range of instructors of diverse backgrounds would be a helpful addition to the ILP.

In later years, ILP participants appreciated the emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy although they suggested it should be embedded across the program and not in a single course. Some felt the content was not only an add-on but also at times repetitive.

Participants in the ILP saw issues of socioemotional and mental health as the purview of health professionals and not strictly within their scope or expertise as instructional leaders. They were content to “direct” concerned individuals to the appropriate supports.

Interviewees felt that those considering the ILP should have significant teaching experience (at least five to ten years in the classroom) so that they had context in which to situate the instructional leadership training. Furthermore, ILP graduates suggested that for maximum impact, the participant had to be self-reflective regardless of their experiential base.

Principals with a range of career experience (young vs. veteran) were united in feeling the ILP offered useful practical advice and approaches.