



What are we learning about S.O. learning?

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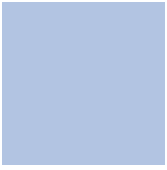
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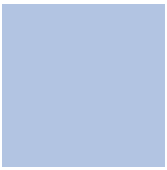
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Background

- The Ontario Leadership framework articulates Instructional Leadership (IL) as a key capacity for both system and school leaders.
- IL is defined as leadership functions that support teaching and learning.

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- Recent research (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013) finds that IL as a broad concept is relatively meaningless, unless it is distilled into which behaviours count as IL and which do not.
 - Moreover, this research also concludes that time spent broadly on instructional functions does not predict student achievement growth. Aggregating across leadership behaviours masks the fact that some specific IL behaviours are more impactful than others.

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- There is a dearth of direct research on the IL role of the Supervisory Officer (SO) in terms of supporting the IL capacity of school leaders
 - In many instances, structure seems to precede function, rather than follow it!


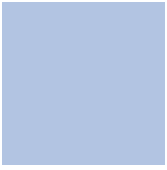


- School visits are frequently highlighted as a core SO tool (structure) for supporting school improvement and IL capacity for administrators (along with other functions), with some districts mandating the proportion of time that SOs with school responsibilities spend in schools.

Functions/Purposes in your Context?



- The question remains as to what exactly such visits entail, since we know from the research mentioned earlier that where the principal analog is concerned, informal “visits” to classrooms are not only ineffective, but actually detrimental to the learning agenda.

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- That research found that intentional, deliberate, and sustained teacher coaching by a school leader has positive benefits for student learning, while time spent on informal classroom walkthroughs (by principals) negatively predicts student growth, despite the popularity of the latter as an espoused IL behaviour.



The adaptive challenge

- Leaders who believe their major role is to evaluate their impact are amongst the most effective.
- How does the SO school visit contribute to the IL capacity of school leaders?
- A “learning on behalf of” learning network to take up this inquiry question:
- How do I learn which things I do as an SO (in relation to my school visits) make a difference on the instructional leadership capacity of principals?

Network membership

- Joy Badder (LKDSB)
- Peggy Blair (AMDSB)
- Michelle Deman (TVDSB)
- Sylvia Peterson (DDSB)
- Michael Prendergast (HWDSB)
- Joey Plaunt (DSB Ontario Northeast)

Key support from:

- Our team (Lisa Dack, Sue Greer, Steven Katz)
- Ontario Ministry of Education (Bruce Shaw)
- OPSOA (Members of the Current and Past Executive)

The process

- The requisite stance: A mastery (not a performance) orientation and intentional interruption of the “imposter syndrome”
- The method: You do the work by learning the work! (note the sequence; the learning is the intent, not the by-product)
- The practice: Planning, Acting, Assessing, and Reflecting on incremental “next best learning moves”

Taking up the adaptive challenge

- Although all 6 SOs focused their inquiries on the school visit, each chose to focus on the piece of the “problem” that was most meaningful to them in their context.
- Examples: learning how to differentiate the school visit; learning how to build capacity in administrators with a particular learning profile; learning how to support newly appointed administrators; learning how to model for administrators what they might do with their teachers; learning how to influence administrators to learn together; learning how to involve school teams in the school visit

Research-based Definition

- The power of the idea of a LC is that members of the group... **engage together in challenges of practice** so that their **understanding of those challenges grows deeper** and is more unified. Through their **investigations, proposed solutions emerge that are then tested to see if they help...** Through such a **repeated process, practice grows more sophisticated and powerful** and the group develops a tighter sense of camaraderie and common purpose. As a result, they can construct common understanding, share knowledge and experience, and develop common goals.

The framework

<i>PLAN</i>	<i>PLAN</i>	<i>PLAN</i>	<i>ASSESS</i>	<i>REFLECT</i>
My Next Best Learning Move (What will I do next to learn?) "If I... by..."	Success Criteria (What will success for this "move" look like? What do I hope to learn from this move?) "...Then I will learn..."	Evidence (Where will I look and what will I look for to evaluate the success of my move?)	What happened? What did I find out?	What did I learn FROM this move? "I learned from this move that..." What did I learn ABOUT this move as a transferable leadership practice (in OLF terms)? "I learned that..."

Using a “learning case”

- Each SO selected a learning case for the purpose of this project
- One or two schools/administrators that they believed they could learn from (where they would add value in terms of building instructional leadership capacity and also where the learning would be transferable)

The process for the network meetings: A Learning Conversations Protocol

- The purpose of the network meetings was for participants to share where they were with their inquiry and to gain critical feedback from the group
- From “great discussions” to focused learning conversations through “intentional interruption”
- The purpose of the protocol is for the group to understand the problem more deeply and do a joint analysis of the “presenter’s” work

The LC Protocol Forces:

- Minimal “story swapping”
- A focus on the presenter’s practice
- Active listening (without replying) of the presenter in places where s/he might be inclined to defend/ignore
- Pulling apart and sequencing: a) clarification
b) interpretation, and c) suggestion

Where Supervisory Officers were with school visits prior to beginning this project: Significant variability

- Number of times per year schools were visited, and whether this was mandated
- Whether agendas/questions were sent to administrators in advance of the visit
- Whether the content/structure of the visit varied based on the time of year
- Who they met with (school administrators only, or school administrators and groups of teachers, such as the School Improvement Team)
- Whether they reviewed student achievement data related to the school’s articulated needs
- Whether they discussed the most recent version of the School Improvement Plan with the school administrator(s)
- Whether they discussed the school administrator(s)’ agenda for upcoming teacher professional learning opportunities, such as PLC meetings

Where Supervisory Officers were with school visits prior to beginning this project: Significant variability (Continued)

- Whether they visited classrooms at every visit, and how many classrooms
- The purpose of visiting classrooms (to observe teaching versus for a social/"political" purpose)
- Who they talked to when visiting classrooms (teachers, students, both)
- Whether they debriefed their walkthroughs in detail with the school administrator(s)
- Whether school administrator concerns (about teachers, students, etc.) were discussed during the visits
- Whether managerial/operational items were discussed at the visits
- Whether they talked with the school administrator(s) about the problems of practice they were currently working though in their Principal Learning Network

Where are you with visits?



SO learning from the project

- Learning about the process: Supervisory Officers working together in a learning network
- Learning about the content: Promising practices related to the Supervisory Officer school visit

Learning about the process: Supervisory Officers working together in a learning network

The power of a learning network is in each person working on his/her own slice of the problem, with the network aggregating the learning

- Each SO chose to work on the piece of the problem that was most meaningful in his/her own context
- The value of the network was that it provided the venue to aggregate the learning (learning on behalf of)
- The whole is significantly greater than the sum of its parts

The template is a vital tool/scaffold to plan, capture, and label the learning

- Having to track and monitor learning moves on the particular template used ensures:
 - That you are accountable to the learning process
 - That you focus on “learning” rather than “doing”
 - That you articulate your “gut instincts” and learn whether they’re right or wrong, by determining whether each move “worked” or “didn’t work”
 - That you are precise in planning exactly what the move will look like
 - That you follow through all the steps of plan, act, assess, reflect for each move

The template is a vital tool (continued)

- Having to track and monitor learning moves on the particular template used ensures:
 - That you go deeper with each move that you do
 - That you don't forget about certain moves that you've done
 - That you are able to transfer what you've learned to other situations
 - That you see exactly what it is you're doing and how this sometimes contradicts what you think you're doing

Learning moves need to be small

- Big moves are too difficult to monitor, because you end up not knowing which part of the move worked or didn't work. It's better to have many tiny, discrete moves because they're easier to learn from.
- Example: Break down "If I meet with the SIT team during my visit..." into multiple smaller moves that relate to preparing for the meeting, what happens at the meeting, and follow up from the meeting

You need to follow through each row on the template

- If you plan a move really well and then do it, but don't monitor whether it's worked or hasn't worked and what you learned from it, then you've lost all the power of tracking the move
- Break the cycle of Plan/Act, Plan/Act... and close the loop!

Reflecting on both what you've learned FROM a move and ABOUT a move is critical

- What you've learned FROM the move provides you with information pertinent to the specific problem of practice you are working on and how to move forward with it (what to do for your next move).
- What you've learned ABOUT the move provides you with information on whether the move itself was a good one and worth replicating; it labels the leadership learning.

Using a learning conversation protocol ensures that the group adds value to the work of each individual; it makes together better!

- The protocol ensures that “sharing” isn’t just about “story swapping”. It ensures that the critical friends providing feedback truly understand the problem before making suggestions, as well as that the presenter listens to everything being said without just responding with a gut reaction. It pushes everyone’s thinking.

Hearing about others’ inquiries makes you consider new ideas both for yourself and your board

- When you listen to what your SO colleagues’ moves have been, you make connections to your own work. Taking the “parking lot” in the protocol seriously is an important piece.
- The participants have been sharing resources from their boards and then pulling out pieces that might work for their own system/needs and bringing it back. That’s what “learning on behalf of the system” really means.

Documenting your own learning with a template helps you understand what this process is like for administrators

- Many school administrators are going through an inquiry process that asks them to work in (and document) small learning moves. Going through the process themselves helps SOs understand and relate to the administrators, and creates more buy-in when they talk about the process. It makes them a more authentic co-learner when they are working through the same process that the school administrators are struggling with.

It's essential to establish group norms early on, review them frequently, and take them seriously

- The norms established by the group were crucial to prevent people from judging others or simply story swapping.
- Everyone came to the table ready to learn together and challenge and support one another, and always left with next steps.
- There was a group interdependence, where everyone was responsible for coming prepared and learning on behalf of one another.

Relationships don't need to come before the work begins; they can develop as you do the work

- Despite many members of the group not knowing one another, they bonded very quickly. Perhaps because each of them came with an open-to-learning stance.
- This created an easy culture of trust and willingness to take a risk, and all SOs reported that they felt comfortable and safe either immediately or within a couple of meetings.

Think about who you choose to work with when you are learning to hone your skills around the school visit. In other words, select your “learning spaces” intentionally.

- If you are trying a new way of operating your school visits, with the goal of monitoring your moves and learning from and about them, don't try it with the most challenging administrators. The coalition of the willing (those who you will learn with and from) will give you small wins, and you will learn things that are more generalizable.
- Also remember to start small. Don't try out moves with all your administrators at once. Wait until you know they work!

Learning with an “outside” critical friend can be an important part of the learning experience

- SOs found that they benefitted not only from the varied experiences in the room but also from the varied contexts that others come from
- They also found it comforting to know that challenges were often similar in significantly different contexts
- SOs reported that it was helpful that their SO critical friends did not know their administrators personally, allowing a fresh perspective and more objectivity
- They also found it helpful to learn about structures and procedures in place in other boards, and bring relevant pieces back to their own board.
- One key difference here from what SOs might experience in their own boards is that there was no comparison or competition, allowing for more transparency and vulnerability

The “process” of SO learning in your context?



Learning about the content: Promising practices

- All participants in the project reported that, through engaging in their own inquiry, they learned a number of things about how to operate a school visit that supports building school administrator IL capacity.
- Importantly, they also reported that their inquiry provided them with evidence to support some of the strategies they were already using to support P & VP growth, so that in the future they won't be using those strategies simply based on a "feeling" that they work, but instead based on evidence.



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Be intentional and deliberate about how the various support structures fit together; the school visit does not stand alone

- You can't talk about the school visit in isolation of the other work that Supervisory Officers do with Principals
 - The school visit is part of the work that a SO does to support the Instructional Leadership capacity of Principals, but only one part
 - Some SOs are differentiating what they do at school visits based on what they learn elsewhere (e.g., at a Principal Learning Network meeting). These connections are intentional. It's important to see how what they're talking about at the network meeting translates on the school visit.



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Think about school visits as an opportunity to learn about school administrators both collectively *and* individually

- Collectively- Looking for trends among administrators that you can use to plan your collective time with them.
- Individually- What you need to do to help that individual move forward in IL.

Look at school visits as differentiated opportunities

- Differentiation is required, based on what you learn about each individual.
- There's no such thing as what a visit is "supposed" to look like. "A template for what you do at Visit 1, Visit 2, Visit 3, etc. probably isn't possible. You could never know what Visit 2 would look like before doing Visit 1, and there is no expectation that a particular visit would be the same for different schools."
- You can't always plan for the differentiation in advance, so you need to think about what it means to be responsive and be able to change direction.
- Differentiation isn't just about differentiating the content of the visit. It can also include differentiating the level of support you give each school based on what is required. For example, you don't need to give each school the same amount of time.

Think about who's in your "class" and focus your work there

- A Supervisory Officer's "class" is made up of administrators. Determining what you need to learn as a SO starts with looking at the learning needs of Principals and Vice Principals.
- For example, if a SO participates in a PLC meeting with a school administrator and group of teachers, this would be for the purpose of trying to build the capacity of the Principal or Vice Principal (for example, by learning about his/her needs in leading a PLC or by modeling a particular practice for him/her to observe), rather than for the purpose of the SO simply leading the PLC meeting him/herself to work directly with the teachers on their needs.

Be intentional about the purpose of visiting classrooms during a school visit

- Don't visit classrooms "just because". Only go into classrooms if it's for a specific reason. For example, you might still visit classrooms and talk to teachers and students, but you need to have a clear rationale for doing so.

Think about differentiating your school visits even within an individual school

- On days when you are there for a school improvement visits, don't let other issues sidetrack you. You can have visits where you talk about school issues (e.g., a difficult parent, head lice), but don't allow these issues to take over a school improvement visit.
- You might even differentiate between an instructional leadership visit that's only with the administrator(s) and a school improvement planning visit where you engage with a wider segment of the school.

The frequency and length of visits depends on the purpose

- If the goal is to be more visible or to get a school more comfortable with the idea of a visit, more frequent visits (for a shorter period) might be better. For other purposes a longer visit might be required, but the visits might not be as frequent.
- Start with the function/purpose of the visit and then design a structure that fits that function/purpose.

The kinds of questions that you ask at a school visit are critical

- It is important to learn about the research on effective questioning.
- There is a difference between asking a question that truly has the intent of learning something versus one that is really intended for “telling”.

Think about preparing administrators in advance of your visit

- Share the learning intention behind the visit. Sending out questions or information prior to the visit ensures that administrators know what to expect and are prepared. Administrators want to know in advance what to expect and be prepared.
- This preparation also helps to set the tone for the visit, in terms of what its purpose is.
- Re-capping your last visit (perhaps in an email) also acts as a good reminder and sets you up for continuity across visits, much like a sustained coaching model.

The quality of reflection after a visit can be increased if you have more than your memory to rely on

- Take notes during the visit about specific things the administrator said *and* how you responded, so you can reflect on your practice and think about appropriate follow up.
- It's helpful to sometimes take a critical friend with you on a school visit, as this person can objectively look at your practice and help you think about what you need to work on after the visit for your own learning.

Consider sharing the load and creating sustainable support structures

- Supervisory Officers don't have to be the only people who can support school administrators in their learning. Some of the SOs engaged in learning moves that involved connecting a school administrator with a peer for a particular purpose.
- For example, if there's a school administrator working through an issue and you are aware of another administrator who might be a good source of support or mentorship for him/her, connect the two so that the learning doesn't all rely on you. Having school administrators work with one another between school visits might also help with continuity when there are longer gaps between your visits.

Think about school administrators in an inclusive way

- Be intentional about bringing Vice Principals into the process to build their IL capacity as well.

Be familiar and comfortable with the school's data

- If you aren't comfortable/familiar with the school's data then it's difficult to support the school administrator(s) in finding the tools to go deeper and better understand the data themselves.

Every part of the school should be purposeful and intentional

■ Examples:

- If you're doing a walkthrough, why are you doing this? (If it's for a reason that isn't school improvement (e.g., for optics), be explicit about it)
- If you're meeting with the school improvement team, why are you doing this? (Meeting with the SIT just because it seems like a good thing to do is very different from meeting with them in order to give you a lens into the work you need to do with the Principal, like seeing how the Principal leads the meeting.)
- If you're asking particular questions, why are you asking them? What are you looking to learn? What specifically do you plan to ask to ensure you get what you need?

Connections to your practice?



Mobilize the Knowledge

