



Ten Functions of Literacy Leadership

- Establishing Literacy as a Priority
- Developing an Appropriate Platform of Beliefs
- Ensuring Quality Instruction
- Maximizing Time
- Constructing a Quality Program
- Assessing Performance and Ensuring Accountability
- Creating a Coherent and Aligned Reading System
- Fostering Staff Development and Promoting Communities of Learners
- Forging Links Between Home and School
- Building Capacity

Leadership for Literacy: Policy Leverage Points

By Joseph Murphy

Why Literacy is Important

First, literacy is the most crucial skill for success inside school. Literacy, especially early literacy, is the central portal through which we must pass in our efforts to operationalize the charge that no child be left behind. Second, we know that robust literacy skills are essential for the economic well-being of children grown into adulthood. Third, the success of the nation is inexorably linked to levels of literacy in society. High levels of literacy means high levels of human capital, the engine for the economic health of the country in a post-industrial world.

Concerns About the Current State of Literacy

It would be inaccurate and unfair to claim that schools and school people are failing in the task of helping children learn to read in the United States. Most youngsters learn to read at satisfactory levels. At the same time, it is reasonable to conclude from the available evidence that we must do a better job in helping every youngster develop a more effective set of literacy skills. In particular, there are two problems we should address. First, given what might be labeled as less-than-stellar performance data, the growing gap between extant knowledge and school practice, and the ratcheting up of literacy standards in the post-industrial world there is considerable space for improvement in the area of literacy instruction across the board. Second, for many youngsters—those from families that live in poverty, those from families that depend heavily on schooling to provide literacy skills, and those who are having difficulty with beginning reading—there is a critical need for action.

Information Pool

In undertaking an assignment to provide a scaffolding for action on strengthening literacy in our nation's schools, reviews were undertaken in four broad domains of research: (1) Characteristics of principals as instructional leaders; (2) Characteristics of effective schools; (3) Characteristics of effective reading programs; and (4) characteristics of effective instruction.

Examining What We Know

When one examines research findings from the four areas described above through the prism of leadership, clusters of behaviors, actions, and strategies associated with successful student performance begin to take form. In particular, the following ten functions of leadership stand out:

(1) **Establishing Literacy as a Priority:** Classrooms and schools that are especially successful in nurturing literacy skills maintain an uncommon focus on reading. It is clear in these classrooms and schools that reading is simply the most important activity undertaken.

Reference:

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The P-12 Project is a university-wide partnership developed to strengthen the scope and effectiveness of OSU's commitment to P-12 education, with a special emphasis on the education of underserved children and youth.

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- (2) **Developing an Appropriate Platform of Beliefs:** In many schools that serve students placed at risk, there is a prevailing aura of hopelessness. The tone in schools that are able to help all children meet rigorous standards is quite different. These schools have high expectations for pupil performance, a palpable sense of teacher efficacy and commitment, a collective sense of responsibility for students, a privileging of the needs of children, and a powerful sense of academic press.
- (3) **Ensuring Quality Instruction:** First, it is important to establish an appropriate learning environment. The learning environment has six variables or functions that are under the control of the teacher and are associated with student achievement in reading: teacher centrality, task orientation, positive expectations, student cooperation and accountability, nonnegative affect, and established structure. Second, it is important to promote and implement effective instructional strategies.
- (4) **Maximizing Time:** Effective programs regularly ensure that the reading and language components of the curriculum are concentrated in a large block of time at the start of the day. They also expand time by emphasizing reading in other subjects and constructing safety net programs that expand the opportunity to learn.
- (5) **Constructing a Quality Program:** Effective programs highlight the role of phonics, especially in the primary grades, underscore a rich and balanced program portfolio, provide literacy-rich environments, and maintain safety nets to prevent youngsters from falling behind.
- (6) **Assessing Performance and Ensuring Accountability:** Effective literacy programs are distinguished by carefully developed systems for keeping track of student performance.
- (7) **Creating a Coherent and Aligned Reading System:** Effective reading programs take great pains to ensure that the key components of the core instructional program are bound together.
- (8) **Fostering Staff Development and Promoting Communities of Learners:** Accomplished schools in literacy take adult learning seriously. They understand that the first key to good teaching is good professional development for teachers.
- (9) **Forging Links Between Home and School:** Reading achievement is considerably enhanced when parents create a literate environment at home. Effective literacy programs tend to be more aggressive in promoting parent connections to, support of, and involvement in schools.
- (10) **Building Capacity:** Schools that are effective in bringing all students to high levels of mastery are often especially adept at building capacity. They build intellectual and human capacity through professional development; develop social capacity by creating learning communities, forging partnerships, and creating safe and purposeful school climates.