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# THE INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP ON LITERATE PRACTICES AND INSTRUCTION IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL

Article by Travis W. Duncan

## Abstract

This case study uses Nicholls's (1987) meta, macro, and micro levels of leadership merged with Dowell, Bickmore, and Hoewing (2012) and other literacy leadership research (Conley, 1989; Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011; Irvin, Meltzer, & Duke, 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003) to analyze the influence of a principal's leadership on literacy instruction. The findings are similar to the integrated leadership approach emphasized in Marks and Printy (2003) but add additional evidence of cultural and human resource leadership. Strategies and structures that built culture around literate practices were evident. Teacher empowerment and building trust in school culture were important components.

## Introduction

There is abundant research into principals' literacy leadership in elementary settings, but less exists regarding the influence of principals' leadership for literacy instruction in middle schools. Yet, studies indicate that reading and literacy instruction often decline when students reach the middle school setting (Snow, 2002). Often the instructional focus becomes centered on a content area and not on how to *interpret* text(s). This study specifically examines a middle school principal, Mr. Stone, who focuses on literacy instruction and literate practices.

This study provides relevant case-based data that schools of educational leadership can use in training future or current principals. While this may be just one case, at one time, at one particular middle school, it provides valuable insight on the influence of principal leadership while providing a literacy leadership framework and lens. It provides information in three vital areas: [1] gaps that exist in the available research between elementary and middle school, [2] perspective on how principal leadership influences literacy instruction, and [3] suggestions for how schools of education or other leadership

programs can train or coach practicing and aspiring principals to build school culture around literacy instruction and literate practices.

## Review of Literature

Research indicates that principals do not have a direct impact on student achievement; however, principals do have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the instruction that teachers deliver (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). A principal and her or his leadership is second only to the teacher's instruction where student learning and achievement are concerned (Leithwood et al, 2004, p. 5). Robinson (2011) established that "leading teacher learning and development" and "establishing goals and expectations" had a larger effect size on student outcomes than any other factor (p. 9).

Nicholls's (1987) meta, macro, and micro levels of leadership are used in this study as a lens to frame the research around educational leadership. These levels of leadership are used to narrow a large body of literature around educational leadership to investigate how the principal influences literacy instruction. Using Nicholls's definitions of meta, macro, and micro leadership provides a lens for analyzing principal leadership. This is not a very common use of these leadership principles, but it allows a practical, yet theoretical lens, into leadership employed by principals that encompasses the variety of things that principals must focus on every day.

Nicholls (1987) examined leadership from two perspectives. One is that leadership is more of an influence process, directed at individuals, that does not include the use of power or authority. The other is that leadership is seen as the ideas driving an organization's success. Within those two perspectives, Nicholls suggested there are three levels of leadership: meta, macro, and micro. Meta level leadership "exerts influence on individuals by linking them to environment through visioning which creates the psychological ground for common action" (p. 18). Macro leadership is concerned with the executive action that creates organizational success. Micro level leadership "focuses on the choice of leadership style to create an efficient working atmosphere and obtain willing cooperation in getting the job done" (p. 20).

Conley (1989) described "content reading" related to reading in the different content areas in middle schools as "helping students comprehend and apply the materials they are required to read in their school subjects" (p. 83). Middle school teachers are not expected necessarily to teach reading or reading comprehension, but they are expected to use literacy strategies and literate practices as they relate to text(s) or writing in their respective content areas (Conley, 1989). For example, they are expected to teach how to maneuver a science textbook through the use of frontloading vocabulary, collaborative pairs, or graphic organizers based on the text structure to interpret meaning from the texts. Literate practices are similar to content area literacy strategies in that they focus on how to read, particularly nonfiction texts, in different content areas. Literate practices include but are not limited to: making predictions on a text when reading, comparing and evaluating information in a text, writing and talking about a text

in a small group or pair, linking a reading to other texts, and explaining or arguing about a text and using textual evidence to support claims (Heath & Magnolia, 1991).

Literacy instruction in middle school teaches students how to access information by purposefully and explicitly teaching specific text features and/or strategies for understanding passages aligned to content area (Conley, 1989; Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing, 2012; Hall, Burns & Edwards, 2011; Irvin, Meltzer, & Duke, 2007). Evaluation and state standards often expect teachers to deliver a wide variety of literacy strategies regardless of their content area. Content area literacy is vital to any middle school literacy instruction because middle schools are structured into content areas such as math, social studies, and science. Literacy instruction is as much about learning how to decipher a text's structure as it is about reading fluency.

Marks and Printy (2003) described their integrated leadership model in a study performed in mostly urban schools in the southeastern United States. The integrated leadership model, as described by Marks and Printy, combines instructional and shared distributive leadership. Their evidence showed that schools with strong principal leadership, and particularly schools where principals used the integrated leadership model, had the strongest literacy programs.

Dowell et al. (2012) described a framework for literacy leadership building upon Marks and Printy (2003) integrated leadership model. Their empirical study asked experts and leaders how a literacy program would work in a school setting. They found that five themes emerged to create a framework for guiding effective literacy leadership:

- content knowledge
- knowledge of best practices spanning developmental age ranges and content areas
- school structure to support literacy
- literacy environment and management systems, and
- clear literacy mission and monitor and evaluation of literacy instruction (Dowell et al., 2012, p. 12).

They found that a principal's knowledge of literacy instruction, measurement, and achievement was just as important as the principal's understanding of school culture, structure, and community. A notable key to the success of literacy programs was the principal's relationship to staff members in the building: stronger relationships with teachers and other staff members were more effective in capacity and literacy leadership (Dowell et al., 2012).

Irvin, Meltzer, and Dukes (2007) described literacy leadership as playing two roles necessary to the effective function of a literacy program: to create a vision stakeholders

can support and getting everyone on board. In addition, they must have effective data on students' reading and writing, measurable literacy goals, and specific action steps. They establish that one of the most important things in a literacy plan is setting the vision and establishing a literacy team at the school to oversee the instruction, training, and data collection that correlate to the literacy vision (Irvin et al., 2007).

Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) described aspects of reading and literacy classrooms and programs that improve performance. They stated that by regularly practicing and reinforcing elementary structures with increasing interest and appreciation, struggling readers can become fluent. Teachers must provide them opportunities to experience and discuss texts in relevant and rigorous ways. They also express the importance of using culturally relevant texts with which students can identify.

Principals as literacy leaders should diagnose teachers' strengths and weaknesses, model effective classroom instruction, build support from parents and community, work with specialists in and outside the building, provide immediate and detailed instructional feedback, create policy change, and provide all the resources needed to implement sound literacy and reading practices in the building (Wepner, 1989). Principals must monitor and improve teacher instruction in literacy skills for all students (Irvin et al., 2007). To improve instruction, literacy practices and strategies should be infused at every area of the school.

## Methods

This qualitative case study uses interviews, observations, and document analysis collected and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. After an initial interview with Mr. Stone, a Likert-style survey was sent to the entire staff in order to select four teachers based on how they rated the principal overall. The two teachers who rated the principal the lowest and the two that rated him the highest were chosen to be interviewed and observed in order to represent the entire staff. Teacher observations were conducted along with interviews at the beginning, middle, and end of year interview for each of the four teachers and the principal. The principal was observed conducting meetings, staff development, and walkthroughs. Teachers were observed during literacy block and content area instruction. Document analysis was conducted on the school improvement plan, the walkthrough tool, and curriculum units. After collection, all data was sorted and analyzed using NVivo. Subsequent member checks and reviews were completed and all participants signed a participation waiver. Pseudonyms were used for the names of participants and the school to protect the identities and maintain confidentiality.

In the initial interview, Mr. Stone, the principal, indicated twelve focus items in the literacy plan at Red Laurel Middle School: content area literacy strategies, small group instruction, *Units of Study* strategies, grade level alignment, vertical alignment, writing process, informational text usage, anchor charts, skill sets/development, consistency, and either indirect or direct evidence of literacy focus. Other research suggests that the strategies Mr. Stone discussed are effective not only for literacy instruction, but also for

instructional delivery altogether (Conley, 1989; Hall et al., 2011; Irvin et al., 2007). These strategies were used as focus areas during the teacher and principal observations.

This case study merges Nicholls's (1987) organization of meta, macro, and micro levels of leadership and the literary leadership theories of Conley (1989); Marks and Printy (2003); Irvin et al. (2007); Hall et al. (2011); and Dowell et al. (2012). Based on the findings from this study, an emerging framework and lens were created similar to and building upon prior research in literacy leadership. Grounded methodology is derived from the data collected in this study. This approach is based on social constructivist notions that all meaning is situated within the context of that social and cultural system (Clarke, 2005; Fletcher, Grimley, & Parkhill, 2011). For this study, grounded theory is used as "a methodology for developing theory that is 'grounded' within the data" (Glesne, 2011, p. 21). Analysis was conducted to find patterns as they aligned to the micro, macro, and meta levels of leadership and literacy frameworks for leadership. Micro, macro, and meta levels of leadership were selected with the purposeful intent to house a large body of educational leadership research in such a way that it was not only encompassing of the research, but also relatable and practical to principals.

## The Site and Its Leadership

The middle school selected for the study, Red Laurel Middle School, is located in North Carolina. The school was chosen based on the principal's work with literacy and the school's improvement in their proficiency scores over the past four years on the North Carolina End of Grade (EOG) reading scores.

### ABOUT RED LAUREL MIDDLE SCHOOL

Red Laurel Middle School is considered an urban school, follows a traditional calendar, and is not designated as a magnet school. According to North Carolina School Report Cards, the overall school student population was 702 students in 2017-2018 and 785 students in the year of the study, 2018-2019. The school population is approximately 52% minority (40% Latino/Hispanic and 12% Black/African-American) and 48% White/Caucasian. Over half of the school, 57%, receive free and reduced lunch or are considered Economically Disadvantaged (ED). English Language Learner (ELL) students at Red Laurel Middle School make up 46% of the total student population. This is a higher ELL percentage than the district average of 7.7% and state average of 14.3% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019).

In North Carolina, school districts decide, within federal parameters, how the districts will use the Title I funding. Red Laurel Middle School is not considered a federal Title I school, because the school's district has set a required rate of 75% or higher free and reduced lunch to be considered Title I. Red Laurel qualifies as a Title I school by most federal standards and nearby school districts (Troppe et al., 2017).

Data from the North Carolina School Report Cards (2019) indicated that the school has a higher than average number of books per pupil in each classroom, higher than both district and state averages. According to the NC School Report Card (2019), the teacher turnover rate was 19.2% in 2016-2017, which is higher than the district average of 13.2% and the state average of 14.7% that year. Interviews indicated that teachers felt this turnover rate was related to the new initiatives Mr. Stone implemented upon arrival at Red Laurel Middle School. According to the NC School Report Card (2019), in 2017-2018 the teacher turnover rate was only 7.9%, which was very close to the district average of 7.5%, and much lower than the state average of 14.5%. In the same year, 2017-2018, the North Carolina Teacher Working Condition's (TWC) survey results indicated that 98% of teachers and staff at Red Laurel either agreed or strongly agreed that it was a good place to work (2018).

Red Laurel Middle School, as measured by the state of North Carolina EOG tests, has shown a 12% increase over five years from 55% proficient in 2013-2014 to 67% proficient in 2017-2018 (North Carolina School Report Card, 2018). In 2017-2018, Red Laurel exceeded growth in all EOG tested areas. Overall, they increased three percentage points from the prior year to 67% proficient (North Carolina School Report Card, 2018). Red Laurel was among the top 15% of schools in the state of North Carolina that showed the largest growth in 2017-2018 (North Carolina School Report Card, 2018). The EOG reading scores at Red Laurel have improved over time and are comparatively higher than their EOG math scores. This data provides a picture of the school site; however, this study does not attempt to make causal relationships or suggestions about the impact of the leadership from the data.

#### MR. STONE: THE PRINCIPAL OF RED LAUREL MIDDLE SCHOOL

During the first interview, Mr. Stone talked about himself and his school as well as other experiences. Mr. Stone was a middle school language arts teacher before becoming Assistant Principal and then Principal. He was born and raised in Hawaii and then moved to North Carolina. He has been principal at Red Laurel for five years.

During interviews, Mr. Stone described his leadership style as “not a micromanager,” and focused on relationships. He also felt he needed to work on a “level of accountability” to “gradually release responsibility” to teachers and staff. He viewed himself as an instructional coach and put instruction and students first. Mr. Stone spoke of his vision for Red Laurel and its students and indicated that “the hardest fight he has is mediocrity.” He added that he has to work hard to keep teachers pushing students and focusing on student growth and relationships. He stated that one of the hardest things about leadership is “how do you keep the big picture, but also focus on the nuts and bolts of the issues?” He stated that “literacy is a focus” and “literacy instruction in core classes is an expectation;” however, he did not have a formal, written vision statement.

Mr. Stone described an instructional leadership team he created that meets at the school several times over the summer to plan and bi-weekly during the school year to

discuss literacy and other instructional focuses. The instructional leadership team consists of the three administrators (including Mr. Stone), a literacy coach, an AIG (Academically and Intellectually Gifted) coach, a digital learning and technology coach, a media specialist, and a guidance counselor that the team added this year. In past years, Mr. Stone indicated that there was an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) coach on the team, but this year they opted out and the funding for the position was in question. Each member of the team has a focus area they directly support and coach. This team makes decisions in their specialty area and for the direction of the school.

In terms of literacy instruction, Mr. Stone indicated that “teaching literacy was not just an ELA teacher’s job, but all teachers’ job.” He stressed the importance of the school being consistent and using the same language and terminology when teaching. He indicated that he uses the literacy coach, a teacher/curriculum coach position at the school, to specifically tailor instruction to students who are one or more grades behind. This coach goes into classrooms to observe teachers and provide feedback. Mr. Stone also indicated that he regularly goes in to observe teachers and provide feedback.

Mr. Stone described his strategic planning for the literacy block. The literacy block is the first class period in the school schedule, and all students have it. Reading Lexile’s and NC EOG reading scores are used to determine these literacy block groupings. All teachers have a literacy block and focus on different areas as they relate to the needs of their particular group of students. Teachers work with students across their grade level. These groups can and do change based on students’ needs and their own, individual growth. Students can exit a group or move up to a higher-level group based on their performance, their Lexile improvement, or, at times, their stagnant performance. During the initial interview, Mr. Stone talked several times about being consistent and “in leaving flexibility for teacher to be part of the planning process.”

Mr. Stone described how in the prior year, the school collectively focused on small group instruction. In the year of the study, the language arts department focused on Lucy Calkins’s *Units of Study* curriculum; this curriculum focuses on small group instruction and independent reading. He stated that he started with small group instruction as whole because: [1] he knew that *Units of Study* was heavy in the small group instruction; [2] he knew it would be a struggle for the staff; and [3] it is an effective literacy strategy that can be used in every classroom with every content. Lucy Calkins is a writer for the K-8 curriculum called *Units of Study*, which is developed for teaching reading and writing in English language arts classes. The series focuses heavily on anchor charts, visualizing reading, phonics, and writing strategies in different content areas. The focus that he described and how he described it shows thought and careful planning and school alignment towards a longer-range goal. He discussed building up strategies instead of introducing all new things at one time.

Mr. Stone expressed a need to shift how teachers approach the students at Red Laurel during the initial interview. He indicated that the school had only 40 Hispanic/Latino students 10 years ago, but now Hispanic/Latino students make up over 40% of the



school population and most of the staff when he became the principal had been there for many years. The percentage of ELL students increased from 8% to 46%. Mr. Stone stated that the culture at the school was focused on change, particularly in how teachers and staff approach teaching for *all* students and continuing to push students, no matter where they come from. Mr. Stone stated that “we, as teachers and a school, have to keep pushing students, and not fall into ‘the bless your heart’ mentality.” His overall approach, beliefs, and vision were focused on instruction and literacy strategies – in particular, on pushing all students to their full potential. Along with this focus on literacy instruction, he emphasized relationship building is foundational. Mr. Stone indicated that the staff started to use restorative practices and restorative circles this school year to build strong student relationships. He indicated that he felt the focus on student relationships and the change in teaching methods were integral to the successful use of literacy strategies and delivery of instruction.

#### THE FOUR SELECTED TEACHERS: MS. APRIL, MS. MAY, MS. PINK, AND MS. GREY

The survey revealed 55% of the school was composed of teachers with more than 15 years of experience. About 10% of teachers had 10 to 15 years of experience, about 15% had 6 to 10 years of experience, and 20% had one to five years of teaching experience. Of the total population of teachers surveyed, 50% had been at the school for more than six years, while 10% had been at Red Laurel for four to six years, 20% had worked at this school for less than a year, and 20% of the teachers surveyed had been working at this school between one to three years.

From the survey, four teachers were selected based on their overall Likert scale scores. The scale was used to narrow the selection of teachers, assuming the four selected teachers were a representation of teachers who rated him on the higher as well as the lower end of spectrum. Ms. April, an eighth-grade science teacher, and Ms. May, an eighth-grade math teacher, were selected as the two teachers who rated Mr. Stone the highest. The other two teachers selected – Ms. Grey, an eighth-grade social studies teacher, and Ms. Pink, a literacy coach who works with all teachers and teaches English language arts – scored Mr. Stone on the lower end. As designed in the methods, the grade level was consistent, while they all taught different content areas. These four teachers were selected to provide a portrait of how the principal’s leadership influences literacy instruction that is less biased than only choosing the top, middle, or lower scoring teachers (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2011; Irvin et al., 2007).

#### PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

A literacy leadership matrix (Table 1.0) was created to display the synthesized data. The matrix compiles all of the data from the NVivo codes and how they are interpreted and synthesized from the research on both educational and literacy leadership. The matrix shows synthesized examples from the data collected and where that data is classified in educational leadership (Nicholls, 1987) and literacy leadership research (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2011; Irvin et al., 2007; Marks & Printy,

2003). These were interpreted using the grounded theory approach within the context of how Mr. Stone influences literary instruction at Red Laurel. The number of references from the themes in NVivo are in parentheses. The findings suggest that there is more evidence of instructional, distributive, cultural, and human resource leadership, which all fall within the macro level. Instructional leadership is referenced most often.

Implementing a literacy focus at Red Laurel provided some common themes to prior research. The most common theme aligned with the research is a focus on content area knowledge or content area literacy strategies (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2011; Irvin et al., 2007). Content knowledge was based on the use of different language skills in content area classes such as science, math, and social studies. Knowledge of best practices focused on the use of literacy strategies or literate practices, and the use of other best practices. Providing school structure to support literacy included things such as making sure all classrooms were equipped with the materials needed to teach literacy strategies, while literacy environment and management systems included things like school building expectations. Developing a literacy mission and monitoring and evaluation dealt with not only writing an actual literacy vision or mission, but also the monitoring, feedback, and evaluation of literacy strategies and literate practices.

- Table 1.0. Principal Influence on Literacy Instruction Matrix. See attached.

Within the 223 references to instructional leadership, content area knowledge or strategies were referenced 151 times. Existing research on middle school literacy leadership suggests that teaching literacy strategies through content area knowledge is vital (Conley, 1989; Irvin et al., 2007). The same evidence can be seen at Red Laurel, where there is clear evidence of a focus on content area reading and informational reading texts as they relate to these content areas. Content area reading strategies and skills were noted in observations, discussed in interviews, and given as a focus area from Mr. Stone. In observations of Ms. May, informational reading passages and word problems were observed as they related to math instruction. The same was observed with Ms. April during science instruction. Content area reading strategies were observed during the literacy block from Ms. Grey, Ms. April, and Ms. May. Two other common themes in the macro level of instructional leadership were skills development (including informational text usage) (56), and small group instruction (16).

Another common theme in research on literacy leadership found at Red Laurel was a focus on literacy environment and structure systems (Dowell et al., 2012). There were 203 references to literacy environment and structure systems across macro and micro levels of leadership. The literature on literacy leadership discusses the importance of environments such as classroom libraries or other specialized areas, like reading tables or areas (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012), and focuses on small group instruction, anchor charts, writing, graphic organizers, and informational text usage (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012; Irvin et al., 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003). Common instructional practices observed at Red Laurel were the use of small group instruction, anchor charts, writing, and informational text(s). These were also communicated by teachers during

interviews as an important literacy instruction practices. Research suggested that these should be observed often and become practices in schools focusing literacy instruction; they are also general best practices for instruction (Dowell et al., 2012; Irvin et al., 2007).

All teachers described Mr. Stone's leadership style as instructionally focused, prioritizing students, and trusting his teachers to make decisions. Ms. May described him as being "trusting and open" and said that when he gives a job to a leadership team member or other teacher leader, he "...tells them that this is *your* domain ... and I want you to lead it." Ms. Pink described a similar, distributive approach from Mr. Stone when she stated: "...he puts a lot of trust in us. And, he tells us it's our area. And he tells us to take risks." She shared how Mr. Stone let different teachers, as well as herself, fill leadership roles throughout the building:

...he has like coaches and other people that have their own roles and he lets them do that. So, he goes to the tech person and says this is your area, so see what is going on and get back to me and if it's not too far out, we'll do it. He does the same with my position and with the AIG position.

Here Ms. Pink referred to her own role as literacy coach and the other members of the instructional leadership team. She stated that he let her make the decisions ahead of time about future professional development or some other literacy areas.

Ms. Pink stated that Mr. Stone told teachers they should "take risks" in planning with students in mind first: "he tells us to take risks. And, if we fail, we fail, then we change things and figure it out." She talked about his ability to let teachers and the instructional leadership team plan and work on it using a collaborative approach. It is interesting to note that all four teachers indicated that he uses this distributive approach in some way with full trust; however, Mr. Stone described his approach to releasing responsibility as follows:

I think I do well at making feel people feel good, but I need to work on a level of accountability with it and working on how quickly I'm releasing responsibility. So, if I'm teaching you how to do something, then I need to back it out to where you're doing it independently as an educator. And, not just saying oh it's getting done... but it is getting done and it's getting done throughout the building.

Mr. Stone here addressed his internal struggle with how he perceives his leadership. He felt that he did not give enough responsibility to teachers and then wondered how to hold them accountable.

This study found that Mr. Stone used macro level leadership through instructional, distributive, and cultural leadership. Marks and Printy (2003) suggested the need for teacher leadership to be cultivated in their research on schools similar to Red Laurel in the urban south. Another key component of that research's data showed the strongest correlation between integrated leadership—a combination of instructional,

transformational, and distributive leadership—and schools that successfully implemented programs in literacy.

Other areas found in the research on literacy leadership were completely absent at Red Laurel, including a clear literacy vision or mission statement or literacy plan in writing, use of external development leadership or parent or community members, and the use of transactional leadership. Research suggests that schools should have a clearly written literacy vision or statement (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012; Irvin et al., 2007). Despite an absence of such a vision, teachers restated some of the same expectations that Mr. Stone stated as his focus on literacy instruction throughout the building.

Research in literacy leadership and educational leadership also indicated that community members and other external members should be part of the literacy focus at the school; however, there was no evidence of the use of community members or parents at Red Laurel. Irvin et al. (2007) suggested that community organizations, clubs, and other local businesses can have a key role in contributing to school literacy success. For example, Dowell et al. (2012) as well as Conley (1989) and Marks and Printy (2003) did not address community or parent involvement in any explicit way.

There was also no evidence of transactional leadership. Some research suggested that it may be beneficial for the use in building a literacy culture, but most of the research from educational leadership does not suggest that it is the most effective educational leadership approach (Irvin et al., 2007).

Mr. Stone spoke of the need to change how teachers at Red Laurel Middle School taught due to the change in demographics. He tried to instill in teachers a need to push students and to have high expectations regardless of where they come from. When asked about the school culture and where he wanted the school to be in terms of school culture and literacy, he stated:

... so part of it is realizing that the kids may not have the skill set... and how we provide that skill set for them without falling into the bless your heart mentality of that's just who they are, that's the best they can—and it's not! It's just where they're at [now]. So we have to shift a little bit in terms of how we teach. We do a good job of offering and trying things out, but really putting in the time to adjust what we are doing and to get down to the brass tacks of what we are doing to solve some of these problems... it's still more of a general sense on that area and we need to do a better job of supporting kids on the whole.

It is apparent that his focus was on getting every student to succeed not only in literacy instruction, but also overall, his missioning and visioning comes across in his speech and his actions in observations. This is an indicator of cultural leadership on the meta and macro level, due to how Mr. Stone established a culture focused on student growth and teacher-student relationships.

Teachers described Mr. Stone as someone with a lot of drive and push to do more for students in interviews. Ms. May said “he wants to make you work harder. He has us set goals and has students and teachers work toward them. So he pushes us continuously for those goals.” This aligns with meta level leadership as he is pushing and driving teachers to get results for students regardless of where they came from. This is also an example of cultural leadership, and for the purposes of the synthesis, this falls under both meta and macro levels.

Literacy leadership research indicates the importance of using culturally relevant pedagogy and texts (Hall et al., 2011). Since Red Laurel is predominantly a minority school with a higher than average ELL population, culturally relevant texts are important, because they help students relate to characters or other features within a text. Research shows that if a student can identify with the text, they are more likely to feel connected to it and to read more often (Hall et al., 2011). Mr. Stone stated that he “wants more culturally relevant texts” for students and is searching for such books for the classroom libraries, but the other four teachers did not address culturally relevant texts at all. He stated that if he could ask for one thing from central office it would be “more culturally relevant books.”

## Discussion

The findings in this study show that Mr. Stone has an influence on literacy instruction at Red Laurel Middle School, which aligns to other research on a principal’s impact on teacher instruction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). This study provides five major findings that support the research on educational and literacy leadership: [1] the principal has a direct impact on literacy instruction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005); [2] Mr. Stone operates often in the macro levels of leadership – specifically in regards to instructional, distributive, cultural, and human resource leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003); [3] there are components of a literacy framework in place at Red Laurel that are similar, but not the same as other research in literacy leadership (Dowell et al., 2012); [4] there is evidence and acknowledgement of trust from the principal among staff (Brown, 2018); and [5] there is evidence of shared, collaborative leadership where teachers have empowerment in a decision-making processes (Marks & Printy, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2006).

Liethwood and Jantzi (2005) indicated that the principal has an indirect influence on student achievement, but a direct impact on teacher instruction. This study supports research that a principal has a direct impact on teacher instruction. Mr. Stone’s impact on teacher instruction was seen to have the largest influence in the areas of structural support, systems, and coaching around literacy instruction. He created structures in the building support and influence literacy instruction. He created a literacy block in the schedule, convened an instructional leadership team, called for the creation of classroom libraries, and provided other resources such as u-shaped tables for small group instruction and large paper to create anchor charts.

The common language of strategies was clear as they were communicated by Mr. Stone, observed in action in the classrooms, and observed during professional development. He uses other people such as coaches to deliver the message throughout the building, but has “a system of inspection to see if compliance occurs, and...makes sure that feedback is designed to improve compliance” (Weick, 1976, p. 674). Weick (1976) showed that “schools make extensive use of specialists; every time a specialist is inserted between an administrator and a student, the control over the student is loosened” (p. 674) Mr. Stone is not directly connected to students, but he is indirectly connected to them through specialists and other teachers.

Within the macro levels of leadership, Mr. Stone used instructional, distributive, and human resource leadership to build a school culture – he created an instructional leadership team that not only focuses on instruction, but that also creates leaders in the building who deliver pieces of the overall school focus. The findings in this study show that the interaction of the instructional leadership team is a component of leadership that Mr. Stone uses to distribute the message around literacy instruction throughout Red Laurel. This team is an example of instructional, distributive, and human resource leadership. This is similar to Marks and Printy’s (2003) integrated leadership, which combined distributive and instructional leadership.

Mr. Stone delivered professional development to teachers around literacy instruction as an example of instructional leadership. There were many references to direct instructional focus from each of the four teachers interviewed as well as from Mr. Stone. In line with other research in this area (Dowell et al., 2012), Mr. Stone used structures and management systems, knowledge of best practices, and content knowledge from the literacy leadership framework. He created structures that allowed for literacy instruction to be a focus and for teachers to build their knowledge of literacy. Examples include the literacy block, the instructional leadership team, professional development with a focus on small group instruction, and books and other resource materials that teachers need to deliver instruction. This focus on instructional leadership aligns with former research in the area of literacy leadership (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2011; Irvin et al., 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003).

In other research on instructional leadership, Grissom et al. (2013) found a positive correlation between “time spent directly coaching teachers,” and “student achievement” (p. 440). They also found that results were positive in schools where walkthroughs were seen as feedback and professional development, but results were negative in schools where walkthroughs were not connected to professional development or were seen as punitive. While this case study does not examine the impact of the principal’s leadership on student achievement, there is evidence from interviews and observations that Mr. Stone uses the walkthroughs for direct feedback and he delivers coaching and professional development to teachers himself. As Ms. May indicated, she felt that Mr. Stone “shows them *and* delivers what he expects instead of just telling teachers and expecting them to know what to do.” Sergiovanni (1987) stated that principals who emphasize learning and instructional practices will increase student achievement as a result, and likewise, a principal who is an instructional leader uses professional

development, coaching, and modeling to monitor instruction within a school (pp. 269-275).

Other research around instructional leadership showed that the principal needs to be knowledgeable of best practices and also to use other people in the building to deliver strategies and professional development in areas in which they are not proficient. Mr. Stone used both of these strategies. His background as a former middle school English language arts teacher and his discussion of literacy strategies shows that he knows the literacy content and works with all his staff so that they can be leaders in their respective areas (Dowell et al., 2012; Irvin et al., 2007).

A proposed literacy framework and lens for creating a literary focus in a middle school was created from this case study and from former research in both educational leadership and literacy leadership. Based upon the findings at Red Laurel, the following is suggested as a framework for middle schools to focus on school-wide literacy instruction and literate practices:

- Focus on content area literacy instruction with the use of informational based texts.
- Use research-supported best practices around instruction such as anchor charts, small group instruction, interactive notebooks, word walls, and culturally relevant texts.
- Create school structures, procedures, and common language around literacy strategies and literate practices.
- Coach teachers using professional development and ongoing feedback, evaluation, and implementation.
- Create an instructional leadership team that makes decisions around instruction and literacy strategies.
- Deliver a distributive, instructional leadership focus that uses teacher leadership to create collaborative decision-making processes within the school.

One of the most influential findings of this research is the evidence around building teacher leadership, empowerment, and a trusting environment. All of this is evidence of cultural and human resource leadership. It was evident that Mr. Stone has trust in his teachers when he tells them to “take risks” and to lead in their area of expertise. Teachers indicated that he “trusts them” to lead in their respective areas. As one teachers noted, he “wants us to take risks and tells us go out and find an idea, we’ll run with it and see if it works...if not we will change it and try something else.”

In her years of research on organizations and some of the largest school districts across the nation, Brown (2018) discussed the importance of trust and listening. She stated

that “companies with high levels of trust beat the average annualized returns of the S&P 500 by a factor of three” (p. 223). She states that if there is “no trust, [there is] no connection” and “trust is the glue that hold teams and organizations together. We ignore trust issues at the expense of our own performance, and the expense of our team’s and organization’s success” (p. 222). Trust becomes vitally important for a solid school culture. Based on the interviews and observations, there was a clear indication that Mr. Stone builds trust in his teachers.

Mr. Stone not only highlighted the role of trust in leadership but also accountability. In the initial and subsequent interviews, he shared his struggle with when to release accountability while also being sure to check on what he expects. He described this as the release of “control” and the “push and pull of control” and “accountability.” He describes here what research suggests as the struggle between giving teachers leadership and having accountability in what principals expect to take place instructionally in the classrooms (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2006). Mr. Stone is addressing the tension he feels in leadership between control and accountability, or the control and release factor.

Teacher leadership and empowerment are important and effective in former research studies. Marks and Printy (2003) showed that instructional leadership, when used in an integrated approach, can itself create teacher empowerment and teacher leadership. The findings at Red Laurel suggest the use of this type of leadership. As Marks and Printy (2003) shared from their research, “when teachers perceive principals instructional leadership behaviors as appropriate, they grow in commitment and professional involvement” (393). Former research suggests that combining teacher leadership with a focus on instructional leadership is important in building a focus on literacy in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003). Teacher empowerment and leadership intersect in both research on educational leadership and literacy leadership (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2007). This combination has lasting impacts in cultural leadership and using human capital to build and sustain a school culture.

The checklist of the 12 literacy strategies and focus items derived from Mr. Stone’s focus on literacy was used during observations to note their frequency of use in the classroom. The findings show that the teachers use literary strategies often – particularly small group instruction, anchor charts, and informational text usage. The findings also show a high use of literacy strategies during content area instruction as well as during the literacy block. While the findings do not suggest new strategies, the findings are backed by research in literacy and educational leadership (Conley, 1989; Dowell et al., 2012; Irvin et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2011).

In the complex job of the principal today, he or she has to learn to share the multitude of responsibilities and learn to follow through on all aspects of instruction. Principals do not always deliver their own professional development on instruction or become as hands-on as Mr. Stone. This may be because of a lack of knowledge around the area, or it could be because of a lack of time. In my own personal experience as an administrator,



this type of leadership is rarer than it is common. The findings show that Mr. Stone may not be the typical principal, but he has effectively built a school culture around literacy strategies and literate practices using instructional, cultural, and distributive leadership. He is walking the walk instead of just talking about his expectations.

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Table 1.0. *Principal Influence on Literacy Instruction Matrix*

<b>Nicholls (1987)</b>	<b>Educational Leadership from the Literature</b>	<b>Conley (1989)</b>	<b>Marks and Printy (2003)</b>	<b>Irvin et al., (2007)</b>	<b>Hall et al., (2011)</b>	<b>Dowell et al., (2012)</b>
<b>Meta</b>	External Development Leadership (0)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Ethical and Moral Leadership (26)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Social Justice Leadership (7)	-----	-----	Culturally relevant text	Culturally relevant text	-----
<b>Macro</b>	Transformational Leadership (32)	-----	Raising awareness of and change for new population of students	-----	Focus on change instruction for struggling readers	-----
	Transactional Leadership (0)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Distributive Leadership (68)	Involving literacy coach/ Instructional Leadership Team	Use of integrated leadership model and instructional leadership team	Incorporating teachers and district personnel	Use of teacher involvement in planning	Relationships within the building
	Cultural Leadership (61)	Planning for long periods of time	Incorporating and evidence of focusing on student growth school wide	Literacy culture across the school	Focus on how to help struggling readers (growth)	Beginning of building a school culture, literacy environment and management systems
	Instructional Leadership (223)	Content area reading (151) /	Use of integrated, instructional	Culturally relevant text and	Culturally relevant	Content area reading,

		integrated small group instruction and reading / use materials that focus on content area reading	leadership that focuses on student growth and instructional strategies	pedagogy, use of many content area reading practices, small group instruction (16), anchor charts, vocabulary, informational text (56), and focus on writing instruction	pedagogy and text, content area reading strategies, informational text, small group instruction (think, pair, share and others)	knowledge of best practices, and informational text
	Human Resource Leadership (55)	Use of personnel for the right positions	Cultivating teacher leadership, having teachers take risks and lead their area	Clear professional development, personnel to allocate resources in instructional leadership team	-----	Professional development and coaching
<b>Micro</b>	Strategic Leadership (41)	Planning for long periods of time and periods before this	-----	Building of curriculum with small group instruction and Lucy Calkins <i>Units of Study</i> readers	-----	School structure for literacy, reading tables, libraries, building school processes for literacy instruction
	Managerial Leadership (35)	District involved walkthrough tool for feedback	-----	Evidence of continuous modeling	-----	Acquiring school tables and libraries for every classroom