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An Interview with Anita Woolfolk Hoy and Wayne K. Hoy: About Instructional Leadership

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Anita Woolfolk Hoy received her BA in Psychology in 1969 and her PhD in Educational Psychology both from the University of Texas at Austin. She worked briefly as a school psychologist in Texas, and then joined the faculty in Department of Educational Psychology of the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University in 1979. She remained there until 1993 and served as Chair of the department from 1990 to 1993. Presently she is a Professor in the College of Education at The Ohio State University. Her professional offices include Vice-President for Division K (Teaching and Teacher Education) of the American Educational Research Association and President of Division 15 (Educational Psychology) of the American Psychological Association.

She has published research in the areas of student perceptions of teachers, teachers' beliefs, student motivation, and the application of educational psychology to teaching. Her text, Educational Psychology (Allyn and Bacon) is in its 9th edition and is the most widely read introduction to educational psychology in the field (Woolfolk, 2004). She is married to Wayne K. Hoy, the Novice Fawcett Chair in Educational Administration at The Ohio State University. Together they conduct research on teachers' sense of efficacy and school efficacy. In this interview, Woolfolk Hoy comments on her primary research area, teachers’ self-efficacy, discusses educational psychology and teaching, and reflects on trends and issues in educational psychology.

Wayne K. Hoy received his Master’s and Doctorate in educational administration at The Pennsylvania State University. He has served on the faculties of Oklahoma State University and Rutgers University, where he was a Distinguished Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. In 1994, Wayne was appointed the Novice Fawcett Chair of Educational Administration, an endowed professorship at the Ohio State University. Anita joined the faculty as well. Their three children, now grown and living in San Francisco and Columbus, continue to keep them informed about technology and the modern world. Professor Hoy’s primary professional interests are theory and research in administration and leadership, the sociology of organizations, and the social psychology of administration. He is the co-editor with Michael DiPaola of a book series, Theory and Research in Educational Administration.

With students and colleagues, he has published over 120 book chapters and research articles in journals such as Educational Administration Quarterly, The Journal of Educational Administration, Journal of School Leadership, Sociology of Education, Journal of Educational Psychology, American Educational Research Journal, Review of Educational Research, Teaching and Teacher Education, Educational Researcher, the Journal of Experimental Education, and the Elementary School Journal among others. He also has served as President of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and Secretary-treasurer of the National Conference for Educational Administration. He has received the Lindback Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching from Rutgers University; the Alumni Award for Professional Research from the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education; the Excellence in Education Award from The Pennsylvania...
State University; and in 1996 he became an Alumni Fellow of The Pennsylvania State University. In 2003 he was awarded the Roald Campbell Lifetime Achievement Award in Educational Administration. Wayne has coauthored 11 books on educational administration and leadership; his text with Cecil Miskel is in its 8th edition.

1. In Chapter 1 (p. 3) of your book, “Instructional Leadership: A research-based guide to learning in schools” you have listed six elements of instructional leadership which apply to principals and teachers. How does an administrator become an “instructional leader” rather than a “manager” of the school?

   Let us reframe the question because instructional leadership is not an either or situation. The more pertinent question is how can administrators manage efficiently as they fulfill their role as instructional leader. Although leadership should be easier to initiate for principals than teachers because of the principal’s formal authority, instructional leadership should emerge freely from both teachers and administrators; it is a cooperative endeavor. Ultimately, the teachers determine the success of instructional improvement. The principal creates a collegial environment in which teachers are expected to lead, learn from mistakes, and improve instruction. It is the principal’s responsibility to craft such a climate and model behaviors that highlight a focus on academics, high expectations for students, intellectual curiosity, continuous improvement, persistence, and resilience. Instructional leadership is a shared activity in which administrators not only supply new ideas but also run interference for innovations from teachers. In the process, administrators develop efficient structures and procedures that help rather than hinder teachers. Instructional leadership is not a one-person job; rather it is a collegial obligation for both teachers and principals.

2. Richard Lavoie speaks of “motivation” being linked to past experiences and exposure to information. How specifically might instructional leaders encourage linking past experiences/information with introduction of new concepts/materials in the classroom?

   You could ask this question both for students and for teachers, that is, how can teachers make experience/information links for their students and how can administrators make experience/information links for their teachers. For either students or teachers, a first step would be to learn about their past experiences. How can you link to something you don’t know? To help teachers know their students’ past experiences, we can consider how administrators could create situations and structures that encourage the teachers to learn about the families, neighborhoods, goals, interests, values, histories, cultures, languages, heroes, and concerns of their students. In what contexts could teachers and students step outside their usual roles and rituals to learn about the lived experiences of the other? The second side of the link is the information/concepts side. How can administrators help teachers gain sophisticated understanding of the concepts they are teaching so experience/concept links are deep, not superficial? One way is to explore how these concepts might be evident in art, literature, films, popular culture, history, or current events.

   To link new information with the teachers’ past experiences, administrators could follow a similar process—creating situations that allow the administrator to learn about the teachers’ experiences and also insuring that the administrators have a deep understanding of the concepts they are asking the teachers to learn and apply. Administrators need to know both
the experiences of their teachers and the meaning of the concepts in order to make experience/concept links.

3. Instructional leaders rely too frequently upon “external” motivators to encourage student performance. Are there strategies about which principals and teachers should be aware which promote students acquiring “intrinsic” motivation?

The question of thoughtful student engagement is at the heart of teaching. A good resource on this for secondary schools is:


For every grade level, in order to develop intrinsic motivation, students must have a sense of autonomy and choice. It is difficult to be interested in the learning itself if you feel “forced” to learn. Choice and curiosity are sources of intrinsic motivation. A third source is a supportive relationship with a teacher who is interested in the material. Books have been written about encouraging engagement. Here are just a few ideas:

· Tie class activities to student interests in sports, music, current events, pets, common problems or conflicts with family and friends, fads, television and cinema personalities, or other significant features of their lives. When possible, give students choices of research paper or reading topics so they can follow their own interests. Design several different ways to meet a learning objective (e.g., a paper, a compilation of interviews, a test, a news broadcast) and let students choose one. Encourage them to explain the reasons for their choice.

· Arouse curiosity. Point out puzzling discrepancies anomalies between students’ beliefs and the facts.

· Make use of novelty and familiarity. Don’t overuse a few teaching approaches or motivational strategies. We all need some variety. When the material being covered in class is abstract or unfamiliar to students, try to connect it to something they know and understand. For example, talk about the size of a large area, such as the Acropolis in Athens, in terms of football fields. Our daughter, a 5th grade teacher in California has her students read diaries of slaves to personalize the unit on the American Civil War.

4. Often teachers as instructional leaders in their classrooms become bogged down with the status quo of instruction. New techniques/strategies or varying ways of instruction of new concepts for those who are struggling are not provided. In what ways might a principal support and/or encourage faculty to learn and then apply new instructional strategies?

One of the best sources for credible new approaches to teaching is other teachers who to face similar challenges. Teachers who seem stuck in their ways probably believe what they are doing works well and/or they are a bit fearful of change. If those teachers observe others succeeding using alternative approaches, they might be willing to branch out a bit, but initial steps should be small. Only by having a sense of mastery in a new approach will teachers
5. In Chapter 2 the concept of “Self-Agency” is presented. In what ways is this similar or different than supporting students in “Self-Determination”?

In social cognitive theory, to be an agent is to intentionally influence your actions and shape your own life circumstances. Agency has four core features: intentions, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflection. Self-determination theory is Deci and Ryan’s explanation of motivation that posits humans have a basic need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. So you could say that self-agency is larger than self-determination, but self-determination certainly could be a motivating factor in the whole process of agency—setting goals, thinking through options and planning, monitoring and evaluating actions, and reflecting on what happened. It would be difficult to be an active agent in your own life if you felt controlled by others or saw yourself as having no choices.

6. It is known that teachers often instruct using their own personal learning style as this might be the most comfortable to them. Would it be important for the principal to assign students to classrooms that match the student’s learning style with their teacher’s as an additional consideration?

The research on learning styles so far is pretty weak and does not provide good guidance for teaching, much less assigning students to teachers. Factors of personality might be more important—who works well with shy students or with aggressive students? Who enjoys more assertive students or those who are creative but nonconforming or confrontational? Who reaches students whose first language is not English? Who is unthreatened by very capable, high achieving students? Who is supportive and yet academically challenging for students who have fallen behind? In truth, the larger the school, the less information principals are likely to have about these characteristics of their students—or their teachers for that matter.

7. Your book includes information regarding disabilities and the legislation that outlines the educational responsibilities of the school and its’ staff. Do you feel that higher education programs in administration adequately prepare future principals in recognizing that they will be responsible for the education of ALL children?

In truth, most programs in educational administration spend very little time on the core technology of education—teaching and learning. One of the reasons that we wrote this book was our belief and experience that mission statements and standards proclaiming that every child can learn are insufficient. What are needed are tools and strategies to act on these goals and objectives, which are inextricably linked to teaching and learning.

8. Positive behavior supports are critical in creating a productive learning environment for all students. If instructional leaders are not exposed to this type of strategy, how might that negatively affect the school climate?

The dysfunctional consequences of not being exposed to strategies that reinforce positive
behavior supports are many, varied, and often quite serious. Positive supports enable teachers to be open, persistent, resilient, optimistic, and to take risks in attempting novel approaches to teaching. They focus teachers on student strengths and on supporting progress rather than punishing failure. Without such administrator encouragement for the consistent application of positive behavior supports throughout the whole school, the school climate can degenerate to an “every person for himself mentality” in which teachers are closed, non-cooperative, fearful of making mistakes, untrusting, and skeptical, if not cynical. But remember, positive behavior supports follow a functional behavioral assessment of student problem behaviors. The functional assessment asks, “What are students getting out of their problem behaviors—what functions do these behaviors serve?” The focus is on the why of the behavior, not on the what. The reasons for problem behaviors generally fall into four categories (Barnhill, 2005). Students act out to:

1. Receive attention from others—teachers, parents, or peers.
2. Escape from some unpleasant situation—an academic or social demand.
3. Get a desired item or activity.
4. Meet sensory needs, such as stimulation from rocking or flapping arms for some children with autism.

If the reason for the behavior is known, then the teacher can devise ways of supporting positive behaviors that will serve the same “why” function. For example, we once worked with a middle-school principal who was concerned about a boy who had lost his father a few years earlier and was having trouble in a number of subjects, especially math. The student disrupted the math at least twice a week and ended up in the principal’s office. When he arrived, the boy got the principal’s undivided attention. After a scolding, they talked about sports because the principal liked the student and was concerned that he had no male role models. It is easy to spot the function of the classroom disruptions—they always led to (1) escape from math class (negative reinforcement) and (2) one-on-one time with the principal (positive reinforcement after a little bit of reprimanding). With the principal and teacher, we developed a way to support the student’s positive behaviors in math by getting him some extra tutoring and by giving him time with the principal when he completed math problems instead of when he acted up in class. The new positive behaviors served many of the same functions as the old problem behaviors.

9. Each grade level/content area has adopted specific curricular programs that are followed across classrooms. Teachers therefore may not always have an in-depth understanding of the objectives and/or the reasoning behind what is presented (i.e., sequential nature of lessons, necessity of learning concepts, supplemental material which might support or improve learning, etc.). How might teachers obtain a more thorough understanding of the objectives behind their daily/weekly lessons?

This sounds like an opportunity for professional development where teachers work together on a problem-based learning project about “Why we teach what we teach.” Just as students research a topic, teachers might search the standards, interview curriculum developers, ask curriculum specialists from the state to speak to their team, and publish/share their findings for
other teachers in the district. This is a kind of “lesson study” where the focus is not how to teach but why to teach.

10. If learning is known to be “active and personal,” how might both principals and teachers support flexible instructional practices?

This is a very big question. But if we understand you correctly, the question is not about selecting the “best” teaching approaches, but more about creating an environment where experimentation and flexibility are encouraged. At least two forces are working against such environments—high stakes testing and budget concerns. In schools under pressure to lower expenses and raise test scores, it will be difficult for principals to resist the temptation to get more rigid and controlling. But rigidity and control will undercut attempts to support teachers as they apply and assess strategies to meet the needs of students. One thing administrators can do to help teachers personalize instruction is to provide teachers with useful data about what the students currently know and what they are ready to learn. If the testing data are used in this way, the focus is on data for students, not data against teachers.

11. How might higher education instill/embed a stronger professional and ethical disposition in instructional leaders (preservice, in-service, and administration)?

Programs in educational leadership and administration can take advantage of the natural service-orientation that motivates many individuals to enter education in the first place. There is a strong altruistic tendency in many if not most teachers. Further, the notion of jurisdiction (McMahon & Hoy, 2009), that is the ability of professionals to win public confidence, seems central to professional activity. Relevant courses and programs need to develop both the emotional, affective commitment of altruism and the cognitive expertise that supports jurisdiction.

12. School culture and climate is a noteworthy chapter of your book. After working in the schools for over 32 years, the culture and climate of each school is relatively transparent and might be assessed on the surface rather quickly when entering any school. Obviously a school’s culture and climate are tantamount in creating an inviting learning environment for students, their families, the teachers, staff, and principal. Who should be responsible, how might this be achieved, and what amount of effort/commitment is required?

The single most important person in developing the climate and culture of the school is the principal, but it is not only the formal leader of the school but also the informal teacher leaders who are key actors. A single individual typically cannot change the culture or climate of the school. A good start for improving the school’s work environment, however, is the cooperative effort of the formal administrative leaders and the informal teacher leaders; together they have a chance to change both norms and behaviors in schools. Change is a complex process and success depends not only on leadership and new ideas that work but also on the relative health and openness of the existing climate. Plans for change need to encompass both short- and long-term strategies that promote commitment, openness, support, trust, efficacy, and a sense of academic optimism—all of which promote an environment that facilitates student achievement.
13. What issues does all of the newest and latest technology present to instructional leaders?

*With most technology, the challenge is to put learning first and use the technology as a tool in the service of learning. For example, we read a study recently by Deanna Kuhn, a cognitive developmental psychologist who investigates how children learn to reason (Kuhn, Goh, Jordanou, & Shaenfield, 2008). In a 6th grade class, students were presented with a debatable dilemma about whether an immigrant student should go to the local school or be taught at home. Based on their initial position on the dilemma, the students were divided into two groups—“Nick should go to school” or “Nick should be taught at home.” These two groups were divided again into same-gender pairs and all the—“Nick should go to school” pairs moved to a room next door to their class. For about 25 minutes, each pair from one side “debated” a pair in the other room using instant messaging (IM). Over the next weeks the process was repeated with different pairs debating until every “go to school” pair debated every “stay home” pair. Because are the arguments were “texted,” students could revisit their arguments and try to improve them, with some adult coaching. These reflective sessions were repeated three times. Next there was a “showdown” debate—the entire “go to school” team debated the entire “stay home” team via one computer per team and a smart board. For this debate, half of each team prepared as experts on their position and half as experts on the opponent’s arguments. After winter break and again after spring break, the whole process was repeated with new dilemmas. Students learned to make more powerful arguments and the technology played an important role in helping students think about and improve their own thinking.*

14. Many schools are going to on-line web based learning, where the students are taking classes online and may not be on the school grounds a good deal of the time. What challenges does this present for principals as instructional leaders?

*Again we see this as a potential problem for principals and teachers alike. The challenge is to make teachers and administrators aware of the advantages and disadvantages of on-line web based learning. The principal has a special obligation to design school structures that are open to on-line learning and other disruptive innovations. Schools for the most part use the web and instructional software in limited ways that usually maintain programs rather than transform instructional practices. Clayton Christensen and his colleagues (2008) in their insightful book on disruptive innovation point to the potential for on-line web based instruction; in fact, they see it as the wave of the future in which “student-centric” technology will be not only affordable and convenient but also the means for many more students to learn in ways that best fit their learning abilities and preferences. As intellectual leaders, principals have a responsibility to challenge teachers with new and disruptive ideas.*

15. The number of children with exceptionalities has seemed to be increasing. How do instructional leaders need to respond?

*As teachers become more competent and comfortable with differentiating instruction, it will be easier to respond to all kinds of students needs—from disabilities to gifts and talents. What teachers need to develop these competencies is time, models, social support, and recognition for their efforts.*
16. Safety remains a big concern for principals and administrators. Although most say, “Columbine cannot happen here,” there are risks for all children in all schools. How do principals address safety and security issues?

*Prudence and balance are the keys. There is no simple set of rules that will guarantee complete safety in any of our institutions. We advocate a kind of soft vigilance in which principals and teachers are continuously aware and mindful of student and adult activity in schools. Most schools have relevant sets of rules to promote safety and security jointly determined by teachers and administrators. They also have procedures that monitor who is in the school and why. For example, the first thing most visitors confront is a sign admonishing them to report to the principal’s office. There is no way, however, to “rule out” violence and ensure safety. Mindful principals and teachers who know their students and who diligently watch for telltale signs of problems are an essential complement to a set of prudent rules for the safety of all.*

*On a more long-term basis, administrators and teachers can work together to create classroom communities where compassion and respect are commonplace. A great reference on this is a book from the inventor of the Jigsaw classroom: Nobody Left to Hate: Teaching Compassion after Columbine by Elliot Aronson*

17. What is the role of the principal in terms of hiring teachers, and providing in-service training for them?

*The role of the principal in hiring teachers is pivotal; most often it is the principal who recommends hiring teachers in his or her school to the superintendent and board of education. That said, wise principals involve their faculty in the selection process for which the teachers have both expertise and interest. Evaluation, supervision, and professional development are the three most important functions of principal’s instructional leadership. Once teachers are hired, principals have an obligation to do everything possible to enable teachers to develop, grow, and succeed as professionals.*

18. For the typical principal- is No Child Left Behind a good thing or a bad thing?

*In many ways, No Child Left Behind was the product of frustration with administrators and teachers. Educators have known for years about achievements gaps and the poor test performance of student in poverty, yet, according to policy makers in Washington, no one was taking responsibility to make things better.*

*We summarize the debate about NCLB in the first chapter of our book (Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 2009). No Child Left Behind is both a good thing and a bad thing for principals and teachers. The law provides for accountability for both, which in general is a good thing. On the positive side, at least some students are learning more of the basics that are tested. The scores of the lowest achieving students are coming up (Lewis, 2007). Scores are up in reading and math for about 75% of states and districts—achievement gaps are generally narrowing (Jennings & Rentler, 2006).*

*But on the negative side, the growing expectations and increasing higher performance goals*
for all students are unrealistic. The law as it stands will be modified or eliminated because some of the goals are unattainable by our very best schools. In the meantime, a narrow strategy of teaching to the tests is ultimately dysfunctional. Few educators question that what gets measured gets done, but that, say many, is the problem. More and more, the tests determine the curriculum—if it is not on the test, then there is no time or money for teaching it. That means social studies, art, music, physical education, languages, drama, and literature are not high priorities Other critics of NCLB have complained that the required focus on basic skills for everyone has taken money and attention away from the advanced STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) that are the foundation for innovation. The ability of any country to compete in the global economy rests on knowledge and skills in these subjects (Hess & Rotherham, 2007).

Another problem, rather than getting better at helping student learn, some schools have gotten better at getting around the rules by lowering standards, excluding students who do not test well, teaching directly to the test, or encouraging low scoring students to be absent on testing day. In fact, the extraordinary pressure to achieve in all areas increases the likelihood of cheating by teachers, administrators, and students. This temptation to “get around the rules” should not be surprising to anyone who knows the unintended consequences of systems that rely on punishment to control children or adults—humans are clever and often find a way to avoid the punishment—including cheating and manipulating the system. Any undergraduate psychology major knows that punishment is a bad way to change behaviors.

In some schools, administrators and teachers are targeting the “bubble kids,” students who are almost at mastery level and just ignoring the lower achieving students who are far from mastery. This makes the school’s numbers look better as more “bubble” students pass, but leaves the lowest achieving students even farther behind. In addition, there is evidence that the higher achieving students of all income levels and racial groups are regressing back to the mean as attention and resources are directed to lower-performing students (Lewis, 2007).

Finally, there are critics who claim that students spend only part of their time in schools and much more time in homes, neighborhoods, and in front or televisions. Schools cannot overcome all these other influences without massive changes in social policies such as health care and employment opportunities.

Guilfoyle (2006) sums up many peoples’ thinking about the complex puzzle of NCLB “The transparency that NCLB has brought is a welcome change, but we can put this transparency to better use by gathering more data to paint a more accurate picture of both students and schools” (p. 13). One suggestion has been to replace the AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) goals with a growth measurement model that looks at each individual child’s progress to give useful information about both school success and how to help the child move ahead (Lewis, 2007).

19. What question have we neglected to ask you about your book and the current issues in Instructional Leadership?

No, we have said enough.
References


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