TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF HOW PRINCIPAL TRANSFORMATIONAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS RELATE TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Gayle Steele, Ed.D
Richard Walter, Ph.D.
Dowling College

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principals' transformational leadership behaviors, as evidenced by their moral and ethical practices, their instructional leadership behaviors, as evidenced by the development of professional learning communities, and their influence on student achievement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

How do teachers' descriptions of the moral and ethical characteristics of their principals' transformational leadership behaviors compare with principals' descriptions of the moral and ethical characteristics of their own transformational leadership behaviors?

How do teachers' descriptions of their principals' instructional leadership behaviors within the dimensions of the development of professional learning communities compare with the principals' descriptions of their own instructional leadership behaviors within the dimensions of professional learning communities?

How do these transformational and instructional leadership behaviors relate to student achievement on the NYS Grade Five ELA Exam?
CONCEPTUAL RATIONALE

- Transformational leaders meet the emotional needs of their followers and may intellectually stimulate them to reach their highest potential (Bass, 1990).
- Educational leaders should lead a community that is committed to student learning, through experiences that enable the learner to encounter meanings within the curriculum about the world they live in (Starratt, 2007).
- Leaders with a moral purpose are concerned about raising student achievement (Fullan, 2002).

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Instructional leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school (Lambert, 2002).
- There is much attention drawn to school leaders use of data but little attention is drawn to how conditions for data feedback can be used for school improvement (Geijsel et al., 2010).
- When teachers perceive principals’ instructional leadership behaviors to be appropriate, teachers become more committed to their professional involvement, making transformative decisions (Sheppard, 1996; Marks & Printy, 2003).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- To give insight on how the transformational and instructional leadership behaviors of principals best influence student achievement.
- To influence the development of school leadership preparation programs.

LIMITATIONS

- This study is limited to the perceptions of teachers and principals identified by the NYS Department of Education as category 17 on the list of similar schools.
- This study is limited to the schools in selected suburban areas of Long Island.
SETTING AND SELECTION OF SUBJECTS

- Principals and teachers from four elementary schools on Long Island were interviewed for this qualitative study.
- The schools chosen were categorized by the NYS Education Dept. as Similar Schools Group 17.
- The schools were identified as high and low achieving based on the three year average of student mastery percentages on the 2007, 2008 and 2009 NYS ELA Exams.

### SELECTION OF SUBJECTS

**Descriptions of schools based on a Three Year Average from the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>% ELA Mastery</th>
<th>% Poverty</th>
<th>% ELL</th>
<th>Student Attendance</th>
<th>% Teaching Attendance</th>
<th>% Student Attendance</th>
<th>% Suspension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- H1 is identified as high performing because the students had a three year mastery average on the 2007, 2008 and 2009 NYS ELA Exams that was two standard deviations above the mean mastery percentage of students in similar schools.
- H2 is identified as high performing because the students had a three year mastery average on the 2007, 2008 and 2009 NYS ELA Exam that was one standard deviation above the mean mastery percentage of students in similar schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>% ELA Mastery</th>
<th>% Poverty</th>
<th>% ELL</th>
<th>Student Attendance</th>
<th>% Teaching Attendance</th>
<th>% Student Attendance</th>
<th>% Suspension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- L1 was identified as low performing because the students had a three year mastery average on the 2007, 2008 and 2009 NYS ELA Exams that was one standard deviation below the mean mastery percentage of students in similar schools.
- L2 was identified as low performing because the students had a three year mastery average on the 2007, 2008 and 2009 NYS ELA Exam that was two standard deviations below the mean mastery percentage of students in similar schools.

### RESEARCH QUESTION ONE DATA ANALYSIS

- What themes, patterns and discrepancies do teachers and principals reveal in their descriptions of transformational leadership behaviors as evidenced by the moral and ethical practices of the school leader in high and low achieving schools?
- A content analysis and synthesis of the participants’ responses to the protocol questions that addressed the moral and ethical behaviors of the principal revealed themes, patterns, and discrepancies associated with transformational leadership behaviors.
RESULTS

- The themes that emerged from this study indicated that the principals in these schools are supportive of teachers’ efforts and engage teachers in conversations about their personal goals and aspirations.
- The conversations between principals and teachers in high achieving schools were more focused on teaching practices and student learning than in the low achieving schools.

RELATED LITERATURE

- Burns (1978) stated that transforming leadership should be viewed as a relationship between the leaders and the followers, not the leaders having power over the followers.
  - The findings of this study indicated that the teachers view their relationship with their principal as being positive.
- Bass (1985) stated transformational leaders intellectually influence followers to do more than originally expected.
  - The findings of this study indicated that the principals in the high achieving schools encourage teachers to work out of their comfort zones.
- Greenfield (1985) stated that the administrator must have an understanding of the objective of school curriculum and the process of teaching and learning.
  - The responses of the principals and teachers in the high achieving schools had a focus on curriculum and instruction.
- Starratt (2007) stated that there should be a connection between the moral agenda of the learner and the moral agenda of the school.
  - The principals in the low achieving schools recognized personal situations of students but made no connection between students’ personal life and school life.
- Starratt (1991) stated educational leaders need to express an understanding of the individuality of human beings.
  - Principals in the high achieving schools expressed an understanding of student individual needs.
- Pipkin (1999) stated that the educational leader has the responsibility to establish the norms that govern the conduct of people within the organization.
  - The findings of this study revealed that the principals in the high achieving schools led with more inquiry and personal engagement in the teaching and learning process.
RESEARCH QUESTION ONE
CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY
• The findings from this study suggest that the leadership in the high achieving schools are more aware of the individual academic needs of students and were proactive in addressing them.
• The findings from this study also suggested that the principals in the high achieving schools have established a culture with a moral and ethical agenda that includes high student achievement.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO
DATA ANALYSIS
• What themes, patterns and discrepancies do teachers and principals reveal in their descriptions of the principals’ instructional leadership behaviors within the dimensions of shared vision and supportive structures for a professional learning community in high and low achieving school?
• A content analysis and synthesis of the participants’ responses to the protocol questions that addressed the instructional leadership behaviors of the principal revealed themes, patterns, and discrepancies associated with transformational leadership behaviors.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO
RESULTS
• The themes that emerged from this study indicated that instructional goals are clearly communicated in the high achieving schools.
• The principals in the high achieving schools have created an environment that fosters professional collaboration with a clear focus on teaching practices and student achievement.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO
RELATED LITERATURE
• Instructional leaders focus on curriculum, instruction and school goals (Stewart, 2006).
  • The principals in the high achieving schools in this study discussed specific skills they would like to see students learn as a result of good teaching practices.
• Principals should trust in and rely on the competence of teachers in supporting efforts for high academic student achievement (Cross & Rice, 2000).
  • The finding in this study indicated the principals in the high achieving schools trusted teacher judgments about students and investigated how their efforts produced results while in low achieving schools principals trusted the teachers’ judgment but failed to follow up on how they were delivering curriculum.
RESEARCH QUESTION TWO
RELATED LITERATURE

- DuFour and Eaker (1998) stated that a shared vision includes shared values and commitment from principals and teachers.
  - The principals in the high achieving schools gave a more detailed description of their vision.
  - The teachers in the high achieving schools related their commitment to time spent with students.
- Robinson et al. (2008) claimed that leaders of high achieving schools actively oversee instructional programs.
  - Principals in these high achieving schools gave teachers useful feedback from classroom and plan book observations.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE DATA ANALYSIS

- How do the transformational and instructional leadership behaviors, as described by teachers and principals, relate to student achievement on the NYS Grade Five ELA exam?
- A content analysis and synthesis of the participants’ responses to all protocol questions revealed the themes, patterns and discrepancies associated with instructional leadership behaviors, transformational leadership behaviors and high and low achieving schools.
RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

RESULTS

- The themes that emerged from this study indicated that principals and teachers felt that there are many factors that contribute to student achievement.

- Teachers revealed that the behavior of the principals influences student achievement.

- Principals and teachers in this study revealed that teaching practices have a more direct effect on student achievement.

RELATED LITERATURE

- All stakeholders play a part in the effectiveness of school leadership (Lambert, 2002).
  - Principals and teachers in this study stated that there are many factors that contribute to student achievement.

- Strategic decisions about staffing and teaching resources influence student achievement (Robinson et al., 2008).
  - The findings in this study revealed that in a high achieving school the quality of people in key positions helps to promote student success.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY

- The behaviors of the principals in the high achieving schools in this study related more aspects of their leadership practices to student achievement.

- The results suggested that both leadership styles are prevalent and important to leaders and staff in the school but the leaders that relate their leadership style to student achievement will result in a greater percentage of student mastery on the NYS Grade Five ELA assessment.
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Principals should have a clear understanding of their role in influencing student achievement.
- Principals should reflect on their effectiveness in motivating teachers, the quality of dialogue with teachers and how that dialogue affects the students.
- Principals should support teachers with curriculum and instructional practices.
- Principals should be proactive in creating an ethical school environment.
- Principals should have a personal vision that focuses on student achievement.
- Principals should be a part of the professional development of the staff.

- Principals need to be aware of how their students perform in comparison to schools outside their own district.
- Collaborative times should have a focus on instructional practices that will positively affect student achievement.
- Dialogue between principals and teachers should include new ideas and ways to solve problems.