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Teacher Perceptions of Transformational Leadership Practices in Urban Charter Middle Schools

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Teacher Perceptions of Transformational Leadership Practices

in Urban Charter Middle Schools

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Abstract

Schools today are facing unprecedented demands for school accountability and student achievement. Effective school leadership is recognized as a critical component for overall school success. Consequently, researchers have extensively explored school leadership and identified transformational leadership as an appropriate style for schools (Leithwood, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; and Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation." Transformational leadership is defined as an approach designed to cause change in individuals and social systems. This study explores teacher perceptions of the influence of transformational leadership on teaching practice.

There is currently a lack of research on the impact of transformational leadership practices in urban charter middle schools. The transformational style of leadership has been on the rise and has been studied frequently over the years. However, its outcomes are unknown as to whether or not such a style directly influences teacher performance, as identified from the perspective of teachers themselves.

A qualitative study was conducted. Open-ended interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data from 16 teacher participants on the effectiveness of transformational leader practices on their practice.

Four major findings emerged from this research:

(1)   When teachers described themselves as feeling valued, connected, and committed to the school (through public recognitions, celebrations, being a part of the decision-making process), they felt consistent growth as professionals as defined by the frequency of the collection and the implementation of shared teacher feedback.

(2)   Teachers considered developing and maintaining a positive school culture to be an essential responsibility of leadership.

(3)   Teachers viewed ongoing positive interactions with school leaders as a priority for their continued professional development.

(4)   Teachers who experienced individualized and meaningful professional development felt they grew as professionals.

Conclusion

When school leaders execute their practice with fidelity, teachers interpret that as being valued and results in teacher satisfaction. However, fidelity to practice alone is not enough for teachers to feel they have grown as professionals. Leaders must be able to positively influence teachers by building relationships with them. Teachers thrive in an environment where they feel successful. The same holds true for students. If the ultimate goal of schools is student achievement, it begins with school leader impact and influence over teachers.

Keywords: transformational leadership, urban, charter, middle school principal, teacher perspective.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Schools today are facing unprecedented demands for school accountability and student achievement. Effective school leadership is recognized as a critical component for overall school success. Consequently, researchers have extensively explored school leadership and identify transformational leadership as an appropriate style for schools (Leithwood, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; and Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). Transformational leadership is an approach designed to cause changes in individuals and social systems. This study explores teacher perceptions of the influence of transformational leadership on teaching practice.

In their classic text, *Transformational Leadership*, Bass and Riggio (1978) state, "Transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity." Bass (1985) continued his research on transformational leadership and suggested the psychological components that are a part of transformational leadership. According to Bass, transformational leaders exhibit the following characteristics:

Emphasizing intrinsic motivation and positive development of followers;

Raising awareness of moral standards;

Highlighting important priorities;

Fostering higher moral maturity in followers;

Creating an ethical climate (share values, high ethical standards);

Encouraging followers to look beyond self-interests to the common good;

Promoting cooperation and harmony;

Using authentic, consistent means;

Using persuasive appeals based on reason;

Providing individual coaching and mentoring for followers;

Appealing to the ideals of followers; and

Allowing freedom of choice for followers.

As research on transformational leadership persisted, numerous definitions of transformational leadership and related skills emerged. Transformational leaders have been characterized by four separate components or characteristics denoted as the four I's of transformational leadership (Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991). These four factors include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transformational leaders integrate creative insight, persistence and energy, intuition and sensitivity to the needs of others to "forge the strategy-culture alloy" for their organizations (Bass, 1993). The focus consistently is on providing a basis for change in the organization.

In 1994 Bass & Avilo introduced a transformational leadership model for education. The primary focus of the model was school principal preparation programs. Bass (1998) continued his research and found that transformational leaders are judged by their impact on followers in the areas of trust, admiration, and respect. The notion of transformational leadership being applied in schools over the last decade grew out of the proven success of transformational leadership style in business organizations and in education research studies reporting positive correlations between follower/subordinate learning in educational settings, and follower/ subordinate learning and performance in business organizations (Anderson, 2017).

Kenneth Leithwood (1992, 1999) also provided early pioneering empirical research on transformational leadership styles in school settings. He suggested that transformational

leadership positively influences a school leader's ability to facilitate change in school restructuring initiatives, and is best suited for coping with the demands of schools in the twenty-first century (Anderson, 2017). Leadership refers to the process by which one individual works to influence other group members to work toward the achievement of group goals (Greenberg & Baron, 1997). Since Leithwood's original study, transformational leadership style has frequently been investigated as it is directly associated with school success (Anderson, 2017; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Onorato, 2013). Transformational leadership style emphasizes preparing employees to learn new things, building and strengthening new organizational norms, establishing new meaning and ways of thinking, and effectiveness as a tool in helping leaders break established norms and establish new norms that transform school culture (Anderson, 2017).

Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) developed yet another model of transformational leadership. They identified six dimensions of transformational leadership practice: articulating a vision; working toward common goals; offering individual staff support; providing intellectual stimulation; setting an example for staff; and establishing high performance expectations. In 2000, Leithwood added two additional practices: creating a school culture and fostering participation in school decisions. These leadership practices can be described as a fully developed model of transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership is one of three styles of leadership that often appear in schools. Authoritarian and democratic are the other two dominant styles of leadership in education. A school leader's leadership style determines the way in which she makes decisions. A leader who uses an authoritarian style makes all major decisions and demands compliance from team members. This leadership style is no longer popular in schools today, as many teachers often desire to be a part of change and influence within their school buildings. In

democratic leadership, group members take a more participative role in the decision-making process. According to Boleman and Deal (2017), if an organization such as a school wants to make change, leaders who focus on the human resource frame center on people and are responsive to employee needs.

Federal legislation and grant programs in the 21st century have influenced the growth of transformational leadership in schools as schools seek ways to improve student achievement. Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), the amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and its successor the Every Child Succeeds Act, there has been a consistent increase in school improvement efforts across the United States and a growing recognition of the importance of quality teaching and effective leadership.

The implementation of the Race to the Top (2009) federal grant initiative added an additional level of accountability for schools. Race to the Top helped drive states nationwide to pursue higher standards, improve teacher and principal effectiveness, use data effectively in the classroom, and adopt new strategies to help struggling schools. Schools that received Race to the Top funds often incorporated transformational leadership as part of a strategy to facilitate positive change initiatives.

Transformational is the leadership style utilized in the three charter schools included in this research. The school leaders of the chosen schools for this study have been identified because they demonstrate and employ transformational policies through academic and cultural practices consistently within their schools. This is evidenced not only by the academic model but through their efficacy practices.

The three charter schools in this study initially did not make adequate yearly progress and risked being closed. These schools, using federal funds, invested in the Turnaround model, an

intervention strategy in a low-performing school that a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years; and b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization. This definition holds true for the schools chosen as research participants. Transformational leaders of these schools work with faculty teams to create change designed to improve academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Schools with predominately transformational leadership models are expected to be purposeful and collaborative with a greater number of stakeholders operating from an empowered and leadership role compared to those with a more top-down model of leadership (Bass, 1997). Teachers need to use effective pedagogy to increase student achievement. Leadership plays an important role in teacher growth and professional development. Searching for leadership that encourages and facilitates that growth has been a challenge.

National and local research indicates that school leaders have an overwhelming influence on their school and its overall climate (McDonald, 1999). Prior research has been conducted to study transformational leadership and teacher perceptions in higher education. However, few studies have focused on transformational leadership with respect to teacher and principal perceptions in middle school settings, particularly urban charter schools. There is inconclusive data regarding the effectiveness of a transformational leadership style on teacher effectiveness in urban charter schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness, if any, of transformational leader practices on teacher practice in three urban charter middle schools. There is currently a lack of information on this topic. As the increase of a transformational leadership style has been

on the rise and studied frequently over the years, its outcomes are often unknown as to whether such style directly influences teacher performance, from the perspective of teachers themselves. Many previous studies relied on surveys that do not provide in-depth insights of participants.

Some research has been conducted that investigated the relationship between principals' leadership style and decision-making processes and teacher satisfaction and performance (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992; Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995; Silins, 1992). However, the perceptions of charter school teachers regarding their principal's leadership style on their professional performance has not been investigated. Transformational leaders are expected to facilitate change and encourage the development of personal potential among members, all of which makes organizational learning and innovation possible (Lin, 2005). However, there is limited research as to how transformational leadership contributes to pedagogical quality.

Research Questions

Overarching question: In what ways, if any, do teachers perceive the influence of transformational leadership practices on their teaching practice?

Sub questions:

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers describe their connectedness to the school?

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers describe the influence of school culture on their teaching practice?

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to school leader practices?

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to schoolwide policies and procedures?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is based upon grounded theory. Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 1994). In this methodology, theory may be generated initially from the data or if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them (Corbin & Strauss 1994).

Grounded theory methodology explicitly involves "generating theory and doing social research as two parts of the same process" (Glaser, 1978). The sources of data are the same: interviews and field notes. Researchers use this data and interpret the voices and perspectives of the participants in the study. Researchers interpret what is observed, heard, or read. Grounded theory researchers are interested in patterns of action and interaction between and among various social units (Corbin & Strauss, 1994).

Design and Methodology

The framework for this research was qualitative in order to gain insight into the perceptions of middle school teachers working in three urban charter schools located in New Jersey and New York, exploring the potential impact of transformational leadership practices on their teaching performance. Middle school core content teachers were selected for this study.

The research questions evolved from common themes presented in the literature review. In order to properly address the research questions, 16 teachers, seven from School A, four from School B, and five from School C, were interviewed. The three schools in this study have leaders who employ transformational leadership practices including implementation of efficacy practices (i.e. work harder, get smarter mantra); teacher leadership roles that allow teachers to meet with

senior leadership; and collection of and action planning with teacher feedback. Using a random sampling technique, the researcher gained qualitative data on the influence of transformational leadership practices on teacher performance of middle school teachers.

In order to search for reliable participating subjects, the executive directors and principals of each participating independent charter school with identified transformational leaders were contacted. After receiving approval from the executive directors/superintendents to conduct the research within the selected schools, the researcher gathered information via survey from the principals regarding the specific structural, instructional, and cultural practices they deem to be transformational, as well as teacher contact information that met the criteria of being a middle school core content teacher with at least one year of experience at their school of employment. An email invitation was extended by the researcher to teachers in Grades 6 through 8 to their school issued email addresses. Those who replied with interest in participating were selected based on their teaching content area and area of certification. Uncertified teachers were not included in the study. After the participants officially accepted the invitation, dates and times for the interviews via Zoom were selected at the participants' choosing and convenience. Volunteers who were not selected were notified via email to their school issued email address.

Open-ended interviews were used to collect all qualitative data from teachers. The questions chosen were done so to motivate teachers to speak freely regarding their perspective of how the transformational leadership practices named by their principals influence their instructional performance. Follow-up questions were used to further clarify responses when needed.

A coding system was used upon interview completion to deliver qualitative data based on theory, research, and teacher perceptions (Boyatzis, 1998).

The Significance of the Study

There has been much controversy surrounding the impact of charter school leaders, their practices, and performance compared to their surrounding school districts. Research for this topic is important for several reasons. With the implementation of the Next Generation Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, teachers have been asked to teach to and respond to the shifts of both of these academic requirements. This research explores teacher perception of the effects of their school leader's transformational leadership practices on their growth as a teaching professional.

In this study, the researcher explored whether or not there was empirical evidence to indicate that transformational leadership practices positively influence teacher development by motivating teachers and including them in decision making. This study distinguishes itself from others by focusing on the perceptions of middle charter school teachers. Superintendents, principals, and teachers who are involved in both the hiring process and school culture development may be able to use this study to determine if transformational leadership practices may improve teacher performance in the classroom.

Limitations and Delimitations

Qualitative data were collected from three urban charter middle schools in New York and New Jersey. Each school chosen is led by a school leader who continuously employs transformational leadership practices. This study looked only at the perceptions of 16 teachers across the three middle schools. The findings for this study cannot be assumed for school districts outside the ones selected for research. No findings can be related to any other grade levels other than 6 through 8. The results of this research applied only to similar themes arising from teacher interviews. The data gathered from this research is also a 'snapshot' of time. It is

expected that all participants in this study responded honestly about their perceptions of transformational leadership practices on their performance. The researcher brought her own experiences and perceptions of the research topic she was exploring. Her personal biases and idiosyncrasies may have influenced the result of this qualitative study.

Definition of Terms

The following definition provides clarification for terms used throughout this study: Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research study through the context of teacher perception of transformational leadership practices. The purpose and significance of the study was also revealed. The researcher identified the implications for education stakeholders, specifically, superintendents and principals. The researcher also provided the qualitative methodology that was utilized for the particular research study. Delimitations and limitations were discussed to reveal specific exclusions of the study, as well as the ways in which the methods of this study limit it.

Chapter II provides a review of the existing literature on transformational leadership, specifically addressing the historical context, current practice, and the effect of teacher perception on transformational leadership practices. Chapter III presents a detailed description of the research design of the study, with particular emphasis on the methodology, data collection, and data analysis process conducted for the study. Chapter IV presents the results of the data

collected from the research design. Chapter V presents a discussion of the findings of the study,

conclusions drawn from the study, and implications for future research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of transformational leader practices on teacher practice in three urban charter middle schools. This literature review begins with an overview of how the research was conducted. Next, the researcher examines the historical perspective of transformational leadership. The next area of literature examines transformational leadership in charter schools. The literature review concludes with an analysis of transformational leadership and teacher self-efficacy. The conclusion of this literature review identifies gaps in the research and establishes the necessity of this study.

The literature review was conducted using the search engines Google Scholar, Google, the Seton Hall University online library, and digital resources such as ERIC and EBSCO. The review includes peer reviewed articles, dissertations and journals on educational policy, transformational leadership, and teacher self-efficacy. The following words and terms were used in the search: transformational leadership, leadership styles and teacher performance, school leadership and management, and school leadership styles. Articles and dissertations included in the literature review contained or referenced studies and researchers connected to leadership style, transformational leadership practice, leadership practice and teacher performance, and teacher self-efficacy.

Historical Perspective

James MacGregor Burns (1978) first introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his descriptive research on political leaders. According to Burns, transformational leadership is a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation." Burns researched the differences between management and

leadership. He found that the differences were in characteristics and behaviors. He established two concepts: 'transformational leadership' and 'transactional leadership.' According to Burns, the transformational approach redesigns perceptions and values of people and the organization. A transactional approach is based on a give-and-take relationship.

Another researcher, Bernard M. Bass (1985), extended the work of Burns (1978) by explaining the psychological mechanisms that underlie transformational and transactional leadership. The measure to which a leader is transformational is measured by his influence of others (Bass, 1985). This means a leader uses his or her influence to motivate others and encourage them to develop new ideas to challenge the status quo. Transformational leaders are inspirational.

The search for and identification of those behaviors that increase a leader's effectiveness has been a major concern of practicing managers and leadership researchers alike for the past several decades (cf. Bass, 198–1; House, 1971; 1988; House & Baetz, 1979; Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, 1989a; 1989b). Traditional views of leadership effectiveness have focused primarily, although not exclusively, on what Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) have called transactional leader behaviors (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990).

More recently, however, the focus of leadership research has shifted from one of examining the effects of transactional leadership to the identification and examination of those behaviors exhibited by the leaders who make followers more aware of the importance and values of task outcomes, activate their higher-order needs, and induce them to transcend self-interests for the sake of the organization (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 1989a, 1989b). These transformational or charismatic behaviors are believed to augment the impact of transactional leader behaviors on employee outcome variables, because "followers feel trust and respect toward the leader and they

are motivated to do more than they are expected to do" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). According to Razik and Swanson, leadership is a group phenomenon where the leader views him or herself in relation to followers or subordinates (p. 327) (Dupree, 2005).

Leithwood and his colleagues have been instrumental in bridging the work of Burns and Bass into the field of educational administration. Leithwood's conceptual model has yielded extensive empirical studies and investigation over the past decade. The knowledge base for school leadership has risen exponentially and has contributed significantly to our understanding of how leadership affects the school environment. Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1994) define transformational leadership as follows:

> The term 'transform' implies major changes in the form, nature, function, and/or potential of some phenomenon; applied to leadership, it specifies general ends to be pursued although it is largely mute with respect to means. From this beginning, we consider the central purpose of transformational leadership to be the enhancement of the individual and collective problem-solving capacities of organizational members; such capacities are exercised in the identification of goals to be achieved and practices to be used in their achievement (p. 7).

> The following seven dimensions are used to describe transformational leadership: "building school vision and establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modelling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions" (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 114; Stewart, 2006).

Expanding capacity to create truly desired results (i.e., ensuring that teachers and students have ongoing opportunities to experience success) reflects needed changes in existing school and classroom functioning. Bureaucratic expectations must be transformed from restricting to facilitating shared decision making, and creating a welcoming environment supportive of innovation and experientialism. This involves freeing or relaxing rigid curricular guidelines and facilitating student and teacher exploration of knowledge applications (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). To accomplish this, teachers need assistance in honing interpersonal skills and overcoming communication barriers, allowing them to assume their effective teacher leadership role (Sergiovanni, 1999; Treslan, 2008).

It is also important to remember that effective supervision necessitates knowledge of adult education and the various types of supervisory approaches that can be used when working with teachers directly so as to positively impact students indirectly (Treslan, 2008). Glickman et al. (2005) states that "when supervisors listen to the teacher, clarify what the teacher says, encourage the teacher to speak more of their concern, and reflect by verifying the teachers' perceptions ... the teacher is in control" (p. 99)—a non-directive/collaborative interpersonal approach (Treslan, 2008).

The Eight-Year Study and Charter School Reform

In the Eight-Year Study (1930), 30 secondary schools in the United States were chosen to demonstrate fully the effects of a variety of programs of instruction planned and initiated to emphasize many different avenues of study and experiences that could result in satisfactory achievement at the college level (Ritchie, 1971). Two major principles guided the work of educators that were a part of the teaching and curriculum of the 30 schools. The first was that all methods of teaching should be in support of how we know humans learn and grow. The second

principle that guided the work of the participating schools was that the high school of the United States should rediscover its chief reasons for existence (Ritchie, 1971). The first principle connects to the work of Boleman and Deal's human resource frame, which places emphasis on people's needs. A school leader who operates under this principle would model transformational leadership practices as in this frame the leader would focus on giving teachers the power and opportunity to perform their jobs well.

Charter Schools and the Eight-Year Study (EYS) schools are different in that many charter schools are often elementary schools, while the EYS schools focused on high schools in subject-area departments. Charters also have a much stronger relationship with government (especially accountability mechanisms) (Welch, 2010). However, both the EYS schools and charter schools offer the opportunity for "street level bureaucrats" like teachers and parents to meaningfully engage in reform (Cuban, 2008) and potentially produce schooling that meets demands with less resistance (Welch, 2010).

Both the EYS school and charter schools face(d) similar opportunities and obstacles, but the EYS schools informed charter practice through the concept of institutional isomorphism. This idea hinges on the work of Lubienski (2003) that both the schools in the EYS and charter schools experience isomorphic experiences from government, parents, students, and peer schools. Charter schools gave these stakeholders a voice in developing the type of school that would exhibit and reflect its values, as is the goal of a transformational leader. It is no wonder how this leadership style became increasingly popular in charter schools, especially with the increase of school turnaround efforts. Marzano (2003) states that leadership is the most important aspect of any school reform; "leadership could be considered the single most important aspect of effective school reform" (p. 172).

Since the implementation of Race to the Top under the Obama administration, school turnaround has become an important part of school reform. "Turnaround" refers to intensive short-term interventions undertaken by a state or district with the goal of dramatically improving the way a school operates. Research indicates that principals who turn around failing schools are not 'lone rangers.' They rely on school leadership and work in partnership with the community (Kutash, 2010). The implementation of a transformational leadership style found in many Turnaround schools has been on the rise and observed more frequently in practice over the past decade.

The charter school movement has stimulated a variety of responses and perspectives among all stakeholders. Teachers and administrators of traditional public schools have, for the most part, criticized charter schools for reasons ranging from detracting from existing programs to siphoning funds from programs, thus reducing the quality and effectiveness of the purpose of public schools (Dressler, 2001). School choice and accountability are two areas of focus community members consider regarding charter schools. Parents want more responsive schools. Federal reform initiatives have directly impacted school organizations and the educational options they offer in various communities. Reform advocates assert that various features of the institutional structure of public education hinder excellence and accountability on education (Vergari, 2001). Such features include dysfunctional school boards, excessive turnover, rigorous teacher certification requirements, as well as variations in salary requirements in suburban and urban communities.

Charter schools "have been promoted as a vehicle to restructure urban education" by creating smaller, less bureaucratized schools that better serve the needs of local communities and families (Vergari, 2001). Charter schools are held accountable for having high standards of

performance in a range of areas (i.e., student achievement, governance, finance, parental satisfaction). Community members (parents, students, and teachers) have the right to express their dissatisfaction with the school at any time.

Title I of ESSA emphasizes the importance of state charter school laws. ESSA states: "The accountability provisions under this Act shall be overseen for charter schools in accordance with State charter school law." This language seems to indicate that the implementation of ESSA should not contradict, and perhaps defer to, the accountability that charters are expected to encounter under their state charter law. ESSA statute directs states to use state charter school law to oversee ESSA-driven accountability for charter schools, but provides no additional guidance on what that means in practice. This leaves implementation open to interpretation at the state and authorizer levels (Reddy, 2018).

As a result of the federal and state mandates, schools are continuously searching for ways to improve student learning so they can successfully meet their goals. Schools in the improvement process often examine the various leadership factors that play a substantial role in school effectiveness (Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Sleegers, 2012). Transformational leadership is one style that has been advocated for success in the school improvement process (Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L., 2015). The school leader is considered one of the most influential factors in the development of the quality and character of a school (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Much of the current research demonstrates that a principal's leadership style and skills impact a variety of teacher characteristics, from job satisfaction and efficacy to engagement levels and academic emphasis (Bird et al., 2009; Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L., 2015).

In addition, Sergiovanni (2007) claimed that a transformational leader practices purposing, provides a clear and concise goal focus uniting the organization, and encourages commitment. When a principal provides evidence that he or she understands the need to empower teachers, there is increased motivation and commitment toward campus goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2007; Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L., 2015). Finnigan and Stewart (2009) found that transformational leadership behaviors were most frequently evident in high performing schools, lending credence to the belief that transformational leadership is the most effective form of leadership.

Traditionally, the school principal's role has focused on management responsibilities: building operations, student discipline, and middle-manager for the superintendent and district organization (Dressler, 2001). This could not continue with new reform expectations in place. Large charter networks in particular would revamp their teacher and leadership training and selection to meet the demands of high student achievement. The quality of a school's leadership is one of the most important school characteristics affecting student learning, second only to the quality of a school's teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004). In recent decades, however, the principal's responsibility has expanded to take on a more transformative role with a particular emphasis on instructional leadership (Drake and Roe, 1999).

Transformational Leadership Dimensions

Bass proposed that transformational leadership is composed of four dimensions: idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. Bass believes that every leader displays each of the aforementioned styles to some extent; he calls this the Full Range of Leadership Model (Bass, 1998, p. 7). An optimal leader would practice the transformational components more frequently and the transactional components less

frequently. Bass and Avolio (1988) embrace this 'two-factor theory' of leadership and believe that the two build on one another. The transactional components deal with the basic needs of the organization, whereas the transformational practices encourage commitment and foster change. Although Bass believes that transformational and transactional leadership are at opposite ends of the leadership continuum (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), he maintains that the two can be complementary (Stewart, 2006).

Idealized Influence. The literature identifies the charisma of a leader as that which allows a person to articulate a vision and gain the trust of his or her followers in a way that ignites a desire to emulate the leader (Barnett, McCormick, & Conners, 2001; Conger, 1999). Banerji and Krishnan (2000) identify charisma as the most important dimension in the concept of transformational leadership. "Followers describe their charismatic leaders as those who make everyone enthusiastic about assignment, who command respect from everyone, who have a special gift of seeing what is important, and who have a sense of mission they transmit to followers" (Barnerji & Krishnan, p. 407).

Inspirational Motivation. Transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate others, generate enthusiasm, and challenge people. These leaders clearly communicate expectations and demonstrate a commitment to goals and a shared vision (Stewart, 2006).

Intellectual Stimulation. Transformational leaders actively solicit new ideas and new ways of doing things. They stimulate others to be creative and never publicly correct or criticize others (Stewart, 2006).

Individualized Consideration. Transformational leaders pay attention to the needs and the potential for developing others. These leaders establish a supportive climate where individual differences are respected. Interactions with followers are encouraged and the leaders are aware of

individual concerns (Bass, 1998; Stewart, 2006). Transformational leaders can be very effective ethical leaders (Keeley, 1995). Burns (1978) claimed that transformative leadership is motivating, uplifting, and ultimately "moral, in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspirations of both the leader and the led." Such a leader aligns visions with followers' needs and aspirations, propagates open communication and generates team motivation, is a prudent risk taker, helps and coaches in confidence building, and promotes team building (Banerji& Krishnan, 2000).

Transformational Leadership in Schools

To accomplish the reforms central to school restructuring, scholars of education espoused a model of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on problem finding, problem solving, and collaboration with stakeholders with the goal of improving organizational performance (Hallinger,1992). Marks and Printy (2003) conducted a study examining the potential of active collaboration of teachers and principals around instructional matters to enhance the quality of teaching and student performance. Their analysis was grounded in the transformational and instructional models of leadership. Their study found that transformational leadership is necessary, but insufficient for instructional leadership. When transformational and shared instructional leadership coexist in an integrated form of leadership, the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, was substantial.

According to a study by Moolenaar, Daly, and Sleegers, transformational leadership was positively associated with schools' innovative climate. They also found that the more principals were sought for personal and professional advice, and the more closely connected they were to

their teachers, the more willing teachers were to invest in change and the creation of new knowledge and practices.

Numerous studies on transformational leadership have demonstrated positive relationships between various school and teacher organizational conditions. For example, studies have found increases in teachers' perceptions of leader effectiveness; successful implementation of innovations; boost in teachers' behaviors, emotions, and job satisfaction; increased participation in decision making and commitment to school improvement; and teachers' motivation to implement accountability policies (Geijsel et al., 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2002, as cited by Moolenaar, Dlay, & Sleegers, 2010).

Although there is little research on the possible negative implications of transformational leadership as a chosen leadership style in schools, there is research that indicates its impact on student achievement. Student achievement is indirectly, yet positively correlated to teacher commitment to school visions when leaders engage in setting direction, providing support, and developing staff (Anderson, 2017). Transformational leadership encourages leaders to do so, while providing psychological empowerment to teachers who feel their contributions are valued (Anderson, 2017).

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Self-Efficacy

The link between efficacy, effort, and performance is perhaps one of the best-established relationships in the behavioral and organizational sciences (Walumbwa et al., 2004). Self-efficacy is defined as the sense of individuals' capabilities regarding how well they can perform actions needed in order to handle probable situations. In an educational context, a teacher's self-efficacy is defined as the teacher's belief in the matter that students can acquire desired results even if they are not motivated sufficiently (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006).

Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy have been found to be more willing to take risks, such as employing new strategies, because of a reduced fear of failure, to be less critical of student behavioral issues, and to work harder with academically struggling students (Gibson and Dembo, 1984; Ross and Gray, 2006). School leadership research has found that transformational approaches affect and influence teacher work attitudes and outcomes. For example, teachers in schools characterized by transformational principal behavior are more likely than teachers in other schools to express satisfaction with their principal, report that they exert extra effort, and are more likely to be committed to the organization and to improving it (Clark et al., 2009; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005).

Leithwood et al. (1999) identified 20 studies providing evidence linking leadership to teacher outcomes. Although the results on some measures were mixed, the reviewers found that transformational leadership consistently predicted the willingness of teachers to exert extra effort and to change their classroom practices and/or attitudes. The most consistent findings link transformational leadership to organizational learning, organizational effectiveness, and organizational culture (Ross 2006). Previous research has demonstrated that transformational leadership contributes to valued teacher outcomes.

Hallinger's (1984) widely used survey of instructional leadership, and Bass's (1985) questionnaire for assessing transformational leadership provide quantitative examples in both school and non-school settings; Reitzug and Reeves (1992) provide a qualitative illustration of the same approach. This means that what is known about school leadership practices is mostly knowledge about what teachers' perceptions are of leadership.

A study conducted by the Center for Leadership Development and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education analyzed how teacher perception of transformational school leadership

is formed. This study concluded that some of the most powerful variables in explaining a teacher's perceptions of leaders were the school's mission, vision, culture, policies, and decision-making structure. The second implication of the study explored teacher perceptions of leaders by gender. Were women leaders considered more transformational than men? Did the gender of the teacher also impact their perception? The sample in this study was skewed heavily by women elementary school teachers.

Chapter Summary

Transformational leadership practices are being implemented more frequently as nationwide initiatives such as Race to the Top, and charter school evaluation practices have changed. Extensive research on transformational style practices have not been conducted specifically in urban charter schools in the Northeastern United States. Charter schools have increased in size and popularity over the past 20 years, which contributed to more school choice options for families and teachers. Teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership practices, specifically on charter schools, can add to the current field of research by gathering data from a teacher perspective and comparing it to other educators in similar school environments (size, population, community) across states. This study provides more insight as to which practices of transformational leaders were most impactful to teachers from the teacher perspective.

Chapter III

Methodology

In today's society there has been an increased focus on school reform. Within this focus is an emphasis on teacher and leadership performance. With the addition of charter school choice and new federal, state, and local laws, educational leaders are now faced with leadership mandates that demand enhanced performance of their schools (Onorato, 2013).

According to the research of Sahin (2004), principals state there is a positive relationship between the transformational leadership and the dimensions of cooperative culture, educational development and the social-educational culture aspects of the school culture, the transactional leadership style, and the educational development dimension of the school culture. The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of transformational leader practices on teacher practice in three urban charter schools.

A case study was conducted across three urban charter schools in New York City, New York, and Jersey City, New Jersey. These schools share similar size and minority demographics. They were all selected for the leadership practices implemented and maintained by their school leaders. These are school leaders who employ transformational practices that involve staff in the decision-making process. Using the researcher's professional network, a search was conducted to locate principals who met two or more of the following criteria: trained/certified in school turn-around practices; trained by a charter organization in transformational leadership practices; and/or communicated in a brief interview their leadership style and referenced practices; and a mindset connected to transformational leadership. These practices include, but are not limited to, employing grade level team leader positions, implementing professional learning communities, and initiating various committees to support instruction.

Research Questions

Overarching question:

In what ways, if any, do teachers perceive the influence of transformational leadership practices on their teaching practice?

Sub questions:

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers describe their connectedness to the school?

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers describe the influence of school culture on their teaching practice?

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to school leader practices?

o   In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to schoolwide policies and procedures?

Role of the Researcher

The researcher has a career in urban charter schools and has witnessed the shifts in politics and policy having 18 years of experience in the field of education. The researcher has worked under several transformational leaders, has been inspired by their work, and employs many of the methods learned in her role as a supervisor of the instructional coaches of the school with which she is employed. The researcher has seen the positive impact of practices such as teacher leadership roles and educational committees. From the perspective of the researcher, as both a teacher and leader, being a part of an environment that includes and values professional growth and development has led to more impactful teaching. Since the researcher is a middle and high school Director of Curriculum and Instruction, this topic is of interest to administrators who directly impact teacher learning, growth, and performance.

Permission of Study/Sampling

In order to gather research on middle school teacher perceptions of transformational leadership practices, a convenience-based, criterion sampling approach was implemented. In order to gather strong evidence, middle school teachers from three different middle charter schools were chosen from New Jersey, New York City, and Brooklyn, NY. The researcher utilized her professional network of school administrators in order to gain approval for research in their prospective middle schools. Written permission was received from the principal/ head of each school to conduct the study.

Once approval was received from each school, the school's principal provided a list of email addresses for each core content teacher. Emails were sent by the researcher inviting identified teachers to participate in a phone or video conference interview. Clear descriptions and definitions of transformational leadership practices and the study purpose were provided to all invited participants. The school principals were not involved in the invitation process. Teachers who volunteered but were not selected were thanked and notified. Each participant was assigned a number as an identifier in order to protect their confidentiality. Teachers' years of service within their school, years of total teaching experience, and grade levels taught were identified and recorded prior to confirmation of them being selected as a part of the study. To ensure face validity, all participants were asked these questions at the beginning of the interview to ensure criteria for participation was confirmed.

Purposeful sampling was utilized in this study. Yin (2011) defines purposeful sampling as "The selection of participants or sources of data to be used in a study, based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study's research questions" (p. 311). Patton (2015) provides the following description of purposeful sampling:

"The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry … Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding" (p. 264).

Middle school teachers were selected as the sample for this study. Not only is there a lack of research on this particular population, but middle school is when instruction becomes compartmentalized. One to two teachers tend to provide instruction in each grade level content area. By default, this can leave a teacher feeling isolated. Leadership practices may be even more critical at this stage as students are being prepped for high school. A sample size of 16 was selected as a smaller sample size yields high level relevant information. The researcher included Grade 6 and Grade 5 as in certain charter schools those grades are also considered middle school grades.

All interviews were scheduled to meet the demands of the teacher's availability so that their instructional time went uninterrupted. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The three charter middle schools selected are identified as School A, School B, and School C. Teacher participants are identified as Teacher 1 to Teacher 16. These identifiers were chosen to protect the identities of the schools and the participants.

Interview Sites

The three middle schools selected for this study are in New Jersey, New York, and Brooklyn, NY. The principals at each of the selected schools employ transformational practices such as the implementation and utilization of grade team meetings, a culture of honesty, transparency, and professional learning, as well as methods to increase teacher motivation. Below are the profiles of the three schools:

School A

School A is an independent charter school that serves students in Grades 5–12, located in New York, NY. The charter was founded in 2006. Its population is 97% Hispanic and 90% free and reduced lunch. The principal has served there for four years. The school is founded on the levers of efficacy and the premise of growth mindset. The school's structure includes time built into the daily schedule for Professional Learning Communities. During this time grade team meetings take place, led by the grade team leader; co-teachers meet for planning; and intervention team meetings take place (ELA and math). Teacher-led workshops take place monthly. This is where teachers showcase a skill or strategy in which they have experienced success with the school community. The seven teachers meeting the participation criteria accepted the invitation to be interviewed.

School B

School B is an independent charter school that serves students in Grades K–8, located in Jersey City, NJ. The charter was founded in 2011. Its population is 91% African American and 86% free and reduced lunch. The principal has served there for five years. The school's structure includes time built into the daily schedule for Professional Learning Communities. During this time cluster (team by grade) meetings take place, led by the cluster team leader. Teacher-led workshops take place monthly. Teachers receive weekly recognition in the form of a "shout-out." In this school community *Teach Like a Champion 2.0* instructional techniques and assessment approaches are used. The school is founded in the premise of distributive leadership where staff input is included in the decision-making process. Four teachers meeting the participation criteria accepted the invitation to be interviewed.

School C

School C is a K–8 charter school located in Brooklyn, NY. The major demographic in this school is African American. School C is part of a charter school network. The charter was founded in 2010. Its population is 86 % free and reduced lunch. The principal has served there for nine years. The school's structure includes time built into the daily schedule for monthly charter specific seminars, weekly faculty meetings, co-teacher check-ins, peer observations, grade level team meetings, and integrated co-teaching. Five teachers meeting the participant criteria are employed at this school and accepted the invitation to be interviewed.

Design and Methodology

Patton (1985) explains *qualitative research* is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting: what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting, and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting.

Merriam (2009) states *grounded theory* is particularly useful for addressing questions about process; that is, how something changes over time. Data in grounded theory studies can come from interviews, observations, and a wide variety of documentary materials. As with other types of qualitative research, grounded theory has its own jargon and procedures for conducting a study. In grounded theory the data is collected, coded, and analyzed. Second, data are analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis. Basically, the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and

differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationships to each other in the building of a grounded theory (Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (2017) defines research as involving "the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context). The researcher used a case study design by selecting sixteen middle school core content teachers who have been under the leadership of the current principal for a minimum of one completed school year. According to Creswell (2017),

"First, researchers determine if a case study approach is appropriate to the research problem. A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases."

Given this is a qualitative study based on teacher experience, this design was most appropriate.

In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews. DeMarrais (2004) defines an interview as "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study." The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another (Merriam, 2009). The main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information. The researcher wants to find out what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). As Patton explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. We

cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person' s perspective. (Merriam, 2009, pp. 340–341).

According to Merriam, interviews are structured. They can range from highly structured questionnaire-driven interviews, to unstructured open-ended conversational formats. In highly structured interviews, sometimes called standardized interviews, questions and the order in which they are asked are determined ahead of time. The questions developed for the participant interviews in this study were semi-structured. All questions were flexible, open-ended, and exploratory. The interview questions allowed for a collection of insight and understanding from each participant.

Merriam (2009) further states that the key to getting good data from interviewing is to ask good questions. Different types of questions yield different information. In order to obtain descriptive data, question development concentrated on teacher personal experience was required. Patton (2002) suggests six types of questions: experience and behavior; opinion and values; feeling; knowledge; sensory; and background/demographic questions. The researcher was interested in the actions and activities of the participants' work experience, as well as their opinions on their professional growth and development.

In this study, open-ended questions were administered during an interview to each study participant with opportunities for follow-up questions to emerge. The development of the questions emerged from the literature and were rooted in experience and opinion. Questions were

reviewed by a jury of experts. In order to ensure the interview questions were appropriate and valid, the researcher gathered a jury of experts to evaluate and improve the language to accurately reflect teacher opinion and experience. Three school leaders with five years or more of experience were asked to be a part of a jury of experts in order to determine if the themes of dialogue among teachers related to transformational practices within their school of employment. Each jury participant volunteered and was not employed at one of the three schools being utilized for research. Each jury member was given a survey via email to complete in order to develop the trends from which the questions stem.

Data Collection

Interview Procedures

The participant responses to the interview questions served as the source of all data. This ensured that all research developed from the interpretations of the participant provided information regarding their thoughts and feelings on which factors, if any, contributed to their growth as a teacher. Sixteen core content teachers across three middle schools were interviewed in order to examine trends and themes to generate factual research in a quantitative method.

Teacher participants responded to nine open-ended questions. This provided valid and systematic information that provided the researcher an opportunity to code common themes and attitudes of the teachers regarding their perception of their principal's transformational practices and their effect on their teaching practice. This data were collected through a question and answer dialogue with the researcher. Recordings were made of the interviews and participant responses were transcribed by the researcher. A descriptive manner was used to measure the data since there was no data collection device to quantitatively measure the teachers' interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2000, as cited in Daniello, 2015).

Teachers had an opportunity to speak openly and honestly in a setting of their choice to the effects of their principal's transformational leadership practices on their teaching practice. Individual interviews took place and prevented any participant from being influenced by their colleagues. Predetermined open-ended questions provided a framework for responses related to participant perception of transformational leadership practices of their principals. Open-ended topics included: 1. Personal feelings regarding professional growth; 2. Source of their growth or lack thereof; 3. Opinion of school-related practices that have impacted professional growth. 4. Perception of the principal's role in their development.

A grounded theory approach allowed for responses to identify a phenomena based on a particular situation (Creswell, 2003).

Preliminary questions: How many years have you been a full-time teacher within your school? How many years of service do you have as a full-time core certified teacher? Which grade(s) do you teach?

Table 1

Connecting the research questions with respective interview questions.

Research Questions	Relative Interview Questions
In what ways, if any, do teachers describe their connectedness to the school?	1. Do you feel you are a valued member of the school community? Why or why not? 2. Do you feel connected to the school community? Why or why not? 3. Are you committed to this school? Why or why not?
In what ways, if any, do teachers describe the influence of school culture on their teaching practice?	1. Have you seen improvements in your teaching practice since you have been at the school? Describe them. 2. Which practices, if any, connected to school culture motivate you?
In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to school leader practices?	1. Do you feel you have grown as a teacher in this school? Why or why not? 2. To what do you attribute your professional growth or lack thereof? 3. How do you see your principal's role in those practices?
In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to schoolwide policies and procedures?	Which consistent practices, if any, implemented in the school contributed to your growth as a teacher?

Data Management and Analysis Plan

The data management plan allowed for collection, storage, access, and security back-up of all qualitative data collected during the research process. All interviews were recorded in an audio file on a Samsung S9, downloaded to a computer, and saved on its hard drive. All audio files were transcribed by the researcher and also printed for back-up and validation as to participant responses. The printed documents were checked for accuracy by cross checking them simultaneously with the audio files. Final copies of the printed transcriptions were used to record notes and codes, trend themes, examine depth and clarity of participant responses. All data were read and analyzed twice with a gap of time between each analysis. In addition, all data were stored on a hard drive, to be deleted after three years.

Field Notes and Reflective Memos

Field notes were taken during the interview process in the form of observations of participant audio both in person and recorded. Notes also included reference to coding patterns and the ideas the researcher built upon.

Coding Scheme

In order to conduct an analysis of the interview data, coding patterns were developed. Specific procedures were followed when developing coding patterns. The researcher meticulously read the transcribed interviews. During this process the researcher generated a numerical list of the potential coding categories. The participant response information placed into these categories served as raw data. Responses were then compared in order to identify patterns, assign codes, and prioritize emergent themes. The data were fully interpreted and all conclusions were developed within the scope of this study.

The researcher followed the Creswell (2009) analysis process for interpreting data from interviews as illustrated in Figure 1:
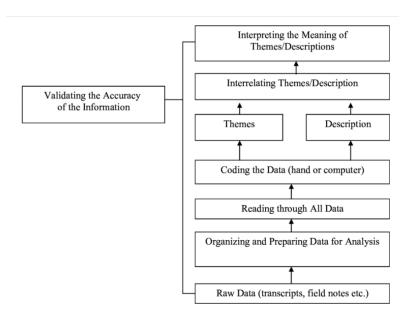

Figure 1. Data analysis in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial (Golafshani, 2003). In order to ensure that the results of this research are reliable, the study has been designed to be replicable. Creswell & Miller (2000) suggest that the validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption (Golafshani, 2003). In order to ensure validity and reliability, the researcher conducted member checks by providing each of the participants with a copy of their transcript for verification of accuracy. The researcher also examined any possible bias and provided them as part of this study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III provided and extensive review of the current study, specifically, an in-depth discussion of the background of the study, sampling methods, profile of the research sites and participants, and data collection and analysis methods. The role of the researcher and potential biases were also identified. This information was described in an effort to illustrate how effectively each research question was addressed.

Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of interviews with 16 teachers. Throughout the interviews, it was common for themes of conversation to cross between topics of whom teachers learned from most (administrators, teachers), as well as what aspects of school policy and procedure connected to their overall professional growth. Themes emerged among participant responses within each research question.

Research Question 1 Themes

Research Question 1: In what ways do teachers describe their connectedness to the school?

The goal of this question was to determine which school based and/or school leader practices lead teachers to feeling connected to their school.

Findings. Findings for research question #1 indicate that teachers describe their connectedness to the school through the following ways: feeling their voice is heard and their opinions are collected and valued by school leadership; by being celebrated by school administration to the larger school community and; connections they have with students and families.

Three interview questions were asked of each teacher to address the topic of connectedness.

*Do you feel you are a valued member of the school community? Why or why not?

Four themes emerged from participant responses to this question. Fourteen participants referenced at least two or more of the following themes: *give back to community; voice is heard/ feel a part of decision making; connection to students and families; feels valued through celebrations/recognition.*

Thirteen of 14 teachers stated they feel valued and/or celebrated.

Respondent # 7 stated, "During my second or third month of being here I received the teacher of the month award and that was the first time I felt accepted and valued."

Respondent #8 stated, "Yes, because my principal refers to me for curriculum development. I have a hand in that. My voice is heard. I am not in leadership but still feel I have a say so to some degree."

Participant responses also included references to opportunities to share ideas with the larger school community as well as with colleagues.

Participant #10 stated, "There are opportunities to share and when they arise, people take my ideas and run with them. Having that feedback means I see you, I hear you, and I am valued."

Participant #15 stated, "My director comes to me to ask me for feedback. It gives me comfort when she asks for my feedback. It could be something small like how the schedule is working. A little bit of feedback makes me feel valued."

Participant #4 stated, "I definitely (feel so) much more so than the previous school I worked at. I feel supported by the leadership team, not like those network schools. Here it's like so what, now what. That's not every school."

Participant #1 stated, "Yes because there is an opportunity for professional growth. I was given multiple professional developments to go to. I was in a new teacher mentor program. By year three, I applied for the chair of the math department so I was able to give back to teachers."

Do you feel connected to the school community? Why or why not?

Six of 14 teachers referenced friendships with colleagues as a reason they are connected to the school community.

Respondent #5 stated, "I have friends at this school, not just colleagues. We shout each other out constantly in meetings."

Nine of 14 teachers referenced the neighborhood community and/or students and families as their connection to the school community.

Respondent #11 stated, "I feel connected because I came from east Harlem. I know a lot of what students go through economically and emotionally."

Participant # 4 stated, "… there are different activities the school does: block parties, community partnerships, assemblies, house days. All the support comes together to feel very familiar and what helps is that people have been here so long. Here we have a bird's eye view—staff retention is a reflection of leadership."

Participant #7 stated, "I feel comfortable asking my directors questions and my grade team leader and I coordinate."

Participant #13 stated, "I feel connected to families and students. I do workshops with the families."

Participant #8 stated, "I have never worked in an establishment where the camaraderie has been so high."

*Are you committed to this school? Why or why not?

Ten of 14 participant responses referenced being invested in students and families in the neighborhood in which they teach.

Respondent #9 stated, "I like this school's approach to helping families. I have never been to a school where helping families is a part of the mission."

Respondent #13 stated, "I feel that I am needed in the community. I add to their growth."

Respondent #2 stated, "I feel like I owe something. I want to pay back (the community). The mission of me, the teacher, and the school are aligned."

Four of 14 teachers referenced opportunities for growth as their reason for being committed to this school.

Respondent # 3 stated," I am deeply committed because I see so many different avenues where I can grow as an educator and learner. I like the effectiveness I get from the SLT (senior leadership team)."

Respondent #14 stated, "This school gave me my first opportunity to be a SPED teacher. I have never learned more anywhere else. I enjoy and understand the methodology of the mission."

Participant #3 stated, "I am deeply committed because I see so many different avenues where I can grow as an educator, learner, designer. I like the effectiveness of the feedback I get from the SLT (senior leadership team)."

Three of 14 teachers specifically referenced their desire to see the school grow as the reason for their commitment to the school.

Participant #2 stated, "The mission of me, the teacher, and the school are aligned. I want to see the school in good health. I want to be a part of making it great."

Participant #10 stated, "Yes I want to see it (the school) grow. I was there in its inaugural year for middle school. It's important to see what the school can do for the school and community. To see it from the beginning to see it grow more and more."

Participant # 6 stated, "I have been here for seven years. I think what else can I do for (school name). I want to do more within (school name). I don't usually feel that way about places."

It is evident that teachers describe their connectedness to the school through practices and administrators, not limited to the principal who allow their voices to be heard, as well as to the service they feel they provide to the community. Examples of these practices are monthly staff celebrations and recognitions (i.e., all three schools had 'shout-outs' to celebrate teachers); a variety of ways to support students and families (family events); and including teachers in decision-making practices. This is done through teacher-leader roles, such as grade team leader and department chair; through weekly and monthly staff meetings where staff receive an opportunity to vote on specific aspects of the school (i.e., protocols that pertain to their safety given the pandemic, specific academic testing proctoring protocols, choice of incentives for staff members of the month).

Research Question 2 Themes

Research Question 2: In what ways, if any, do teachers describe the influence of school culture on their teaching practice?

The goal of this question was to determine if aspects of school culture have an impact on teaching practice.

Findings. Findings for research question #2 indicate that teachers describe the influence of school culture on their teaching practice in the following ways: relevant and/or meaningful professional development; implementation of advisory and character education; as well as the incorporation of family events (i.e., Literacy Night, Block Party, Back-to-School Night, parent workshops).Two interview questions were asked of each teacher to address the topic of the influence of school culture. Three themes emerged from these questions: *Relevant or meaningful professional development; importance of advisory/ character development; and the incorporation of family events.*

Have you seen improvements in your teaching practice since you have been at the school? Describe them.

Ten of 16 participants referenced professional development. Three of those 10 referenced meaningful professional development sought out on their own from external resources. Seven of those 10 participants referenced professional development provided or arranged for them by the school.

Participant #6 stated, "I've had to mentor teachers in the DOE (Department of Education) because we get PD (professional development) constantly. I was able to help them because of all the PDs I get here."

Participant #2 stated, "110%. Before I took this job I was terrible. The job before this, I was in the Bronx and the school was under reform. I just did the power points. I had no management before here. The fundamentals of management weren't apparent before I came to this school."

Participant #3 stated, "I have been given opportunities that in other schools, whether public or private, not too many admin really help envision where I want to take my practice. This is the school that has catered to that. I do not see me leaving."

Participant #14 stated, "Yes, lots of opportunities for PD and to be helped by others that are more knowledgeable. We have a great, cohesive SPED (special education) team."

Participant #1 stated, "Yes, I came in as a first-year teacher. Students are not going to learn unless they are in a proper environment. This job has helped me manage a classroom."

Participant #4 stated, "In just about every way. Planning backwards, delivery of instruction … delivery using data …working with a co-teacher and planning for all is tied to this school."

Which practices connected to school culture motivate you?

Eleven of 16 teachers mentioned their school's character development program (advisory, discovery group) has an influence on their teaching practice.

Participant #9 stated, "We have the school's words and principles. One is if the shoe fits, wear it; if not, throw it away. I have the principles at home on my fridge. Another one deals with purpose over principle."

Participant # 7 stated, "Yes FADAF (Failure And Difficulty Are Feedback). At my mid-year evaluation it was difficult. I identified myself as highly effective but my IA (interim assessment) data wasn't strong. I was asked how could I identify myself as highly effective if my IA data wasn't strong. I had to use FADAF to move forward and tweak. And we saw the next IA was better, and the one after that was even better."

Participant #5 stated, "Advisory—it being in the morning instead of the end of the day. It makes the day start strong. Community meetings helped us a lot last year. Making lessons adaptable to students. Also, the use of restorative practice structures."

Participant #16 stated, "I like when we do discovery group, when we come together for the character ed piece. I feel connected to all students when we do assemblies because I see all students, not just the ones I teach."

Participant #8 stated, "We have 10 principles that we use to prepare us for life. That really attracted me to (this school). The huge emphasis on character. You can tell how kids operate out of that. They put their character first, then do the work."

According to Bass, transformational leaders focus on important priorities. Teachers have attributed improvements in their teaching practice to meaningful and relevant professional development. Schoolwide implementation of programs and practices that build character are also

viewed as important to teachers and specified by them as a contributing factor to their professional growth.

Research Question 3 Themes

Research Question 3: In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to school leader practices?

The goal of this question was to determine what, if any, school leader practices teachers associated with their professional growth. This includes all members of the leadership team, i.e., principals, directors, deans, and instructional coaches.

Findings. Findings for research question #3 indicate that teachers do attribute their growth or lack thereof to school leader practices. The term 'school leader' included all members of the leadership team. Although the members of the leadership team varied between schools, teachers referenced learning from a colleague, from a director or principal, or stated that they learned material from external professional development resources because of the lack of guidance from their principal or director.

Three interview questions were asked of each teacher to address the topic of professional growth.

*Do you feel you have grown as a teacher in this school? Why or why not?

Twelve of 16 teachers mentioned a specific skill they are able to perform better as a result of learning they gained within the school.

Participant #1 stated, "Yes, using our data as feedback to develop new strategies to improve and having a growth mindset. I first heard that when I came to the school."

Participant #4 stated, "Definitely, there are so many things you can put in your toolbox—classroom management, parent outreach, lesson delivery."

Participant #16 stated, "In terms of building character and handling situations, yes (I have grown)."

Participant #14 stated, "Yes, there are lots of opportunities for PD and to be helped by others that are more knowledgeable."

Six of 14 teachers attributed their professional growth to a member of the leadership team.

Participant # 14 stated, "Yes, like a mile, like three miles because there are learning opportunities. The principal and my colleagues … share information and ask for feedback. I've learned so much from my colleagues here."

Participant #11 stated, "Yes, my principal is a fabulous person. He allows you to try things. He allowed me to bring in the iReady reading program. He allows you to be a part of the decision making."

To what do you attribute your professional growth or lack thereof?

When answering this question, nine of 16 teachers directly attributed their professional growth to a member of the leadership team.

Participant #1 stated, "A strong leadership team. One that knows individual teachers; knows their strengths, coaches, and guides them."

Participant #5 stated, "Using my coach's feedback, the principal's feedback, my director's feedback."

Participant #9 stated, "I would attribute it to my principal for believing in me that I could do it."

Participant #3 stated, "My amazing instructional coach. I have learned so much … I would say the coaches and directors."

Participant #7 stated, "My directors and coach … watching how you all move and trying to emulate that."

Four of 16 teachers attributed their professional growth to professional development.

Participant #4 stated, "School culture and efficacy. There is a culture of data used to inform, not indict … having outside providers come and learn about different modalities."

Participant #14 stated, "Professional development. I took a course at Monmouth University this year. I had to take an accelerated program. I wouldn't have had to take it if I wasn't at this school. I learned about other teaching styles. I am learning all the tricks of best practices, and most successful outcomes."

Participant #10 stated, "I really do appreciate all of the PD sessions I've been able to go to when I compare my experience to previous opportunities. External opportunities have helped me, and have helped make my school better because you turnkey what you learn at the PD."

How do you see your principal's role in those practices?

Eleven of 16 teachers mentioned the principal's role as one of support that provides guidance and feedback.

Participant # 14 stated, "He's very hands on. He could be directing traffic in a suit and tie. He is always there. He has an open-door policy. He is very involved and hands on."

Participant #1 stated, "The principal is the one that gives you the observations. He is going to give you the growth and feedback to become a better teacher. The principal sets the tone on how teachers interact with teachers and with students."

Participant #9 stated, "She believed in me. I am so passionate about teaching the kids that sometimes they would be late for the next class. When this happens, she would just give me a gentle reminder."

Participant #3 stated, "{Principal name} is an amazing admin. He wants equity for all students. I like the ways he leads us during interim assessments."

Participant #2 stated, "I think that the principal sets up the staff and delegations to make sure the coaches are selected so people want to teach like the coach. Like in a restaurant, the head chef sets the tone. The principal sets the tone."

Two teachers stated they did not feel the principal contributed to their growth.

Participant #13 stated, "We have a Grade 3–5 director. I do not feel that she has contributed to my growth as a professional. I do not see growth."

Participant #16 stated, "I do not have much contact with the principal, but the director is supposed to be someone to receive knowledge or tips to get resources from, versus what I receive. I want her to come in and give me some feedback and help me."

In two of the three schools where the majority of the instructional support comes from an administrative position other than the principal, i.e., instructional coach or director, (grade range 3–5, student support services, or curriculum and instruction), teachers name those administrative team members in reference to direct instructional support. Therefore, their reference to the role of the principal in their professional growth was referred to in more of a supportive and cultural manner, where there were few to no instructional references regarding the role of the principal.

Research Question 4 Themes

Research Question 4: In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to schoolwide policies and procedures?

The goal of this question was to determine what, if any, schoolwide policies and procedures teachers associated with their professional growth.

Findings. Findings for research question #4 indicate that teachers do attribute their growth or lack thereof to the following schoolwide practices: character development; curriculum/program; professional development (internal and external); and the instructional framework (Gradual Release of Responsibility).

One interview question was asked of each teacher to address the topic of the schoolwide policies and procedures that attributed to their professional growth.

*In what ways, if any, do teachers attribute their professional growth to schoolwide policies and procedures?

When answering this question, six of 16 teachers attributed their professional growth to the implementation of a character development program.

Participant #8 stated, "Incorporating character into instruction. Showing students how to have character while doing their work. How to show compassion when working in collaborative groups. Showing students to have humility, learning to give someone else a chance."

Participant #16 stated, "The character education piece has been consistent my entire time being here. We teach the students the {school's name} principles. I am grateful to get that from the school."

Participant #7 stated, "FADAF (Failure and Difficulty are Feedback mantra), and celebrations. Those practices are encouraging and keep you going."

Participant # 9 stated, "… teachers here model and care for the kids; the tone of the building is also very calm."

Four of 16 teachers attribute their growth to professional development and/or instructional practice.

Participant #14 stated, "We use Teach Like A Champion. We use a lot of those strategies. It has worked for me personally and for the students."

Participant #4 stated, "Coaching cycles with a deliberate focus. The freedom to plan all lessons and incorporate things that are helpful to us that allows us to use the common curriculum to deliver instruction in our own style, which allows us to be our authentic teaching selves, which is good for the school."

Participant #5 stated, "… I get a lot of feedback and get to see my data. Requiring one summative a week helps me with my data. Informal observations when people just drop in to give informal feedback and having weekly coaching meetings."

Participant #2 stated, "GRR (Gradual Release of Responsibility) is very important and essential. With GRR we do not accept teachers just standing reading a power point and giving a worksheet. Observing others' classrooms also helps, especially when we go back in the classroom (this was during remote instruction because of the pandemic).

Participant # 6 stated, "Lots of development in navigating the virtual world (remote instruction because of the pandemic). We are innovative. When the pandemic first hit, we were just doing Google Classroom and assignments. We were good at shifting to live teaching (remotely)."

Other responses from teachers included school culture and meaningful connections.

For example, Participant # 11 stated, "The ability to speak my mind and try new things."

Participant #12 stated, "The ease of coming back (in the school building). The safety measures put in place to ease the anxiety of coming back. The principal was able to speak to the Mayor and get all of us vaccinated."

Participant #15 stated, "Holding each other accountable. I think it's important that we as teachers are checking on the kids and doing what we need to as teachers to meet with each other and give each other feedback."

Teachers attribute their professional growth to schoolwide policies and procedures that connect to school culture through character building in students and meaningful professional development, both internally and externally. Consistent feedback from a member of the leadership team (principal, director, or instructional coach), as well as consistent instructional practice led teachers to feel they have grown professionally.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study investigated teacher perceptions of transformational leadership practices and the impact those practices had on teacher professional growth. To examine this theory, information was gathered on transformational leadership theory and practice through the perspective of urban charter middle school teachers who have worked with their current school leader, identified as transformational, for more than one year. The study analysis was based on interviews of 16 classroom teachers conducted during the 2019–2020 school year.

This was a qualitative study utilizing Creswell's suggested methodology (Creswell, 2003) to determine the influence or lack thereof of school leader actions on teacher performance as measured by their individual criteria/goals. After ensuring confidentiality in name and school, participants volunteered to share opinions related to teachers' influential experiences with their current school leader and leadership team members.

From the research of the literature on transformational leadership, several key elements were extracted. One key element was reflected through the research of Bass (1998) that found transformational leaders are judged by their impact on followers in the areas of trust, admiration, and respect. Several themes emerged from this study connecting the relationship between a leader's personal and professional actions and interactions with teachers, and the impact those interactions had on teachers' self-awareness of their professional growth.

Major Findings

Four major findings emerged from this research:

(5)   When teachers described themselves as feeling valued, connected, and committed to the school (through public recognitions, celebrations, being a part of the decision-making

process) they felt consistent growth as professionals as defined by the frequency of the collection of, and the implementation of, shared teacher feedback.

(6)   Teachers considered developing and maintaining a positive school culture to be an essential responsibility of leadership.

(7)   Teachers viewed ongoing positive interactions with school leaders as a priority for their continued professional development.

(8)   Teachers who experienced individualized and meaningful professional development felt they grew as professionals.

Comparisons to Previous Research

Teachers expressed that leader actions do impact their professional growth. One finding of this study was that the frequency of interactions with administrators, both inside and outside of the classroom, was deemed important to teachers. The type of interaction was also important. Meaningful interactions, such as conversations connected to their personal lives and hobbies, made teachers feel that they were more than just employees and the numerical value of student performance data. They felt "seen and heard." This phrase was used by several participants.

Teachers also felt that being acknowledged on a consistent basis (weekly and/or monthly recognition) not only helped them grow as professionals, but it motivated them to continue to share their best practices. Teachers believed they were making a positive impact on students and the school community, and that they had the ability to build capacity in their colleagues.

According to the research, transformational or charismatic behaviors' are thought to augment the impact of transactional leader behaviors on employee outcome variables, because "followers feel trust and respect toward the leader and they are motivated to do more than they are expected to do" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Transformational

leadership encourages leaders to "engage in setting direction, providing support, and developing staff, while providing psychological empowerment to teachers who feel their contributions are valued" (Anderson, 2017).

Considering the second finding of this study, developing and maintaining a positive school culture was very important to teachers. Teachers felt that being in an environment where accountability systems are in place to encourage and foster mutual respect among students and staff also helped them grow as professionals. Teachers expressed that this aspect of school culture is a part of what attracted them to their schools and school leaders during recruitment. Culture was also directly named as a reason they maintain their employment at their current school. School culture was defined by teachers as not only the components of programs utilized to build student character (i.e., advisory curriculum, assemblies), but also included how committed leaders were to serving students and families. Culture was also defined by teachers as the atmosphere within the school building. Teachers referenced a familial feeling where colleagues have formed friendships outside of the work environment. Culture included positive student to student interactions and teacher to student interactions. Culture also referred to the manner in which conflict is resolved.

Formal and informal interactions with school leaders influenced professional growth of teachers in this study. Frequent positive interactions with their school leader was deemed as a priority for teachers. Teachers not only want consistent feedback on their instructional practice, but also want to know that their school leader cares about their personal interests, family lives, and contributions to the school community. Considering prior research, a study by Moolenaar, Daly, and Sleegers (2010) found that transformational leadership was positively associated with a school's climate. Their study indicated that the more principals were sought for personal and

professional advice, and the more closely connected they were to their teachers, the more willing teachers were to invest in change and the creation of new knowledge and practices.

Meaningful professional development was another major theme and finding of this study. Teachers attributed their professional growth to meaningful and differentiated professional development. This gave teachers a strong sense of self-efficacy. Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy have been found to be more willing to take risks, such as employing new strategies, because of a reduced fear of failure, to be less critical of student behavioral issues, and to work harder with academically struggling students (Gibson and Dembo, 1984; Ross and Gray, 2006). School leadership research has found that transformational approaches affect and influence teacher work attitudes and outcomes. For example, teachers in schools characterized by transformational principal behavior are more likely than teachers in other schools to express satisfaction with their principal, report that they exert extra effort, and are more likely to be committed to the organization and to improving it (Clark et al., 2009; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005).

Findings Connected to Transformational Leadership

There were several major differences in the reflections of the teachers in each participant school. Teachers in all three schools had positive accounts of school culture as it related to students and overall general daily interactions with their school leaders. The difference between the three schools through the perceptions of teachers lay in the consistency and depth of these interactions. Unlike teachers in School A & B, teachers in School C did not feel they grew as professionals because of the lack of meaningful interactions with their school leader. These teachers did not feel they learned any new instructional strategies to become more effective instructional practitioners.

Numerous studies on transformational leadership have demonstrated positive relationships between various school and teacher organizational conditions. For example, studies have found increases in teachers' perceptions of leader effectiveness; successful implementation of innovations; boost in teachers' behaviors, emotions, and job satisfaction; increased participation in decision making and commitment to school improvement; and teachers' motivation to implement accountability policies (Geijsel et al., 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2002, as cited by Mooleanaar, Dlay, & Sleegers 2010).

The following seven dimensions are used to describe transformational leadership: "building school vision and establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modelling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions" (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 114; Stewart, 2006). Each of these dimensions were referenced by many participants in this study. However, they only resulted in teachers feeling a sense of growth when implemented with fidelity and combined with 'the human aspect' of their leader.

The 'human' aspect of leadership refers to the pride and value teachers feel when they feel their leader is invested in them personally and professionally. Personal connections include connections to their interests and hobbies outside of work; interests in their family's events (celebrations and challenges); an interest in, and expression of, what their strengths are as a professional; and how they benefit and contribute to the school community. A study conducted by the Center for Leadership Development and The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (2004) analyzed how teacher perception of transformational school leadership is formed. This

study concluded that some of the most impactful variables in explaining a teacher's perceptions of leaders were the school's mission, vision, culture, policies, and decision-making structure. This study found the same variables to be true.

According to Keeley (1995), transformational leaders can be very effective ethical leaders. Transformational leaders pay attention to the needs and the potential for developing others. These leaders establish a supportive climate where individual differences are respected. Interactions with followers are encouraged and the leaders are aware of individual concerns (Bass, 1998; Stewart, 2006). Expressing a vision and providing opportunities for teacher growth and contribution were the most referenced participant feedback across the three schools.

The school leaders chosen for this study were selected as they met two or more of the following criteria: trained/certified in school turnaround practices; trained by a charter organization in transformational leadership practices; and/or were recommended by their executive director as a transformational leader based on their leadership style, as the selected leaders implement practices and a mindset connected to transformational leadership. These practices included, but are not limited to: employing grade level team leader positions, implementing professional learning communities, and initiating various committees to support instruction. This study found that although these practices were in place in each participant school, the practices alone did not equate to teachers perceiving them as impactful on their professional growth.

Based on the research and criteria of a transformational leader, only one of the three school leaders who participated in this study met the criteria that was supported by participant data. The teachers in the school with the identified transformational leader overwhelmingly spoke highly of their growth and attributed it to school leader practice. It is also important to note

that this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. School A conducted full remote instruction during the 2019–2020 school year. School B & C conducted some form of in-person learning for students (hybrid or regular schedule). Teachers were not only required to meet student academic needs but also manage their students, as well as their own, social-emotional needs. Incorporating a sensitivity to this into school leadership style was also deemed important by teachers.

In School C, the school leader received dissatisfactory remarks because of the inconsistencies in practice. Teacher participants from that school spoke to the inconsistencies in formal observations, the lack of evaluation of instruction, as well as there being little to no informal interactions with the school leader, with the exception of morning and afternoon greetings.

In School B, although the school leader was considered a team player and open to feedback, it was evident through participant responses that the leader did not provide a vision or action steps toward developing teacher leaders with professional development connected to instructional practice. The school leader did have a focus on classroom management strategies and provided texts for teachers to use and incorporate into their classrooms on that topic. Teacher participants from this school did reference having positive interactions with their school leader, but were unable to speak to a school wide or personal vision for professional development.

Recommendations for Policy

Federal legislation and grant programs in the 21st century have influenced the growth of transformational leadership in schools as they seek ways to improve student achievement. Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), the amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and its successor the Every Child Succeeds Act, there has been a

consistent increase in school improvement efforts across the United States and a growing

recognition of the importance of quality teaching and effective leadership. As grants and criteria

for qualification continue to be developed, the federal government should consider creating

specialized grants specifically for charter schools to use on training and programming connected

to school culture. Many charter schools have a high turnover rate for teachers and leaders. These

grants can aid in the success of keeping charter schools open and fully enrolled as teachers,

students, and families will feel connected and committed to the school. The rigorous charter

renewal process takes places every five years. Grants should be awarded specifically to charter

schools to invest in their state and local professional development connected to school leader and

administrator capacity building. While school leaders receive training in administrative tasks,

how to build relationships is lacking.

Another recommendation for future policy would be to consider the impact of increased

Title II funding. Title II provides charter school funding to increase the quality of teachers,

principals, and school leaders. The amount awarded across states, specifically in urban areas,

should be increased so that schools do not need to utilize additional funding from their budget for

this work. This may encourage districts to prioritize capacity building of leaders. The goal of this

recommendation is to influence policy makers to reexamine the types of leaders they want

leading their schools, specifically those with the most disadvantaged populations.

Recommendations for Practice

Charter school boards vary with the type of information collected and used in school

leader evaluations. Evaluation criteria should be normed across charter schools and include a

section for teacher perception of specific school leader practices. Board members should survey

teachers regarding their feelings of value, connectedness, and commitment to the school based on their experiences and interactions with their school leader.

Student standardized testing plays a large part of school leader evaluations. There is an assumption that high achieving assessment scores in English Language Arts and Mathematics suggest that the school leader has created an environment where professional development is purposeful, meaningful, and impactful to teachers and students. Finnigan and Stewart (2009) found that transformational leadership behaviors were most frequently evident in high performing schools, lending credence to the belief that transformational leadership is the most effective form of leadership. It is recommended for districts to invest in training current leaders in these practices, and recruiting new leaders that have experience in and an understanding of the behaviors connected to transformational leadership. Districts could consider adding teacher recommendation letters to the list of required documentation during recruitment.

It is evident from this study that meaningful and consistent teacher recognition is of high importance to teachers and leads them to generate pride in their practice and builds motivation for them to continue improving their craft. This recognition can take place in the form of publicly or individually thanking teachers for their contributions to the school community. Celebrating improvement and effectiveness made by teachers and allowing them time to share their best practices with other staff members would also be a beneficial practice to school communities.

Transformational leaders pay attention to the needs and the potential for developing others. These leaders establish a supportive climate where individual differences are respected. Interactions with followers are encouraged and the leaders are aware of individual concerns

(Bass, 1998; Stewart, 2006). Developing and employing more transformational leaders may have a positive impact on teacher retention and school climate and culture.

The pandemic with COVID-19 reinforced the importance of transformational leaders, as all leaders were challenged to use their leadership skills digitally. The digitization of school culture made it even more difficult for leaders to build relationships with teachers. Again, although each participant school and school leader kept the same schoolwide practices in place as before the pandemic, the ability to connect with teachers and have them feel that they have grown while adjusting to the new reality of digital school and school in the era of a global pandemic is a key quality of a transformational leader.

The educational system has been forever changed and impacted by the pandemic. Not only because of the digitization of school, but because of the social and emotional impact it has had on everyone all over the world. Future leaders should consider the long-lasting impact of the pandemic on their school community. It is recommended to increase training for teachers in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion through a social-emotional lens. Based on this study, teachers and leaders who are better equipped to provide academic and social-emotional supports to students will feel valued and remain committed to supporting the school community.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although there has been significant research on transformational leadership in education, there is still limited research on teacher perspectives of transformational leader practices in urban charter middle schools. This was a small-scale study. Further research should be conducted in charter middle schools across the state in an effort to gather more information on additional, if any, school leader behaviors and/or practices that teachers say contribute to their growth as professionals.

Findings from this research should be incorporated into educational coursework at the collegiate level so that future educators learn more about effective leadership practices in addition to theory. Further research should include subgroups—i.e., teachers with five or more years of experience, elective teachers—and expand the research to urban charter high schools.

Additional research should be conducted on how transformational leaders combine and implement digital and soft skills when building capacity in teachers. The academic landscape has forever changed; therefore, it is important to find out if these skills are transferring to teachers, as these skills are now not only necessary but required.

Concluding Remarks

A schoolwide system, practice, or policy is only as good as a teacher's perception of it. When a school leader executes their practice with fidelity, teachers interpret that as being valued and results in teacher satisfaction. Teachers thrive in an environment where they feel successful. The same holds true for students. If the ultimate goal of schools is student achievement, it begins with school leader impact and influence over teachers.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

SETON HALL ⌖ UNIVERSITY
1 8 5 6

April 6, 2021

Michelle Anderson
Seton Hall University

Re: 2021-195

Dear Ms. Anderson,

At its March meeting, the Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled, "*Teacher Perception of Transformational Leadership Practices in Urban Charter Middle Schools*" as submitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form and recruitment flyer. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mara Podvey

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Phyllis Hansell

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN
Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

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