Transformational Leadership in Education: A Review of Existing Literature

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Cover Page Footnote

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Transformational Leadership in Education:

A Review of Existing Literature

School systems face unprecedented local, state, and federal accountability for school performance and student achievement. School systems and schools themselves have begun to function like business organizations with management complexities and the requirement of bottom-line results. School leadership is a critical component for strong performance and student achievement. There is concern over whether school leaders have the proper management skills, leadership styles, and approaches necessary to ensure effective operational performance of schools. Education leaders may benefit from training and development in transformational leadership styles proven to enhance performance in business organizations and educational settings.

With these concerns in mind, the purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss relevant research insights about the changing environments of schools and school systems, performance and achievement accountability, and the need for exceptional school leadership to facilitate needed school change. This analysis of current research will allow readers to understand what is already known about the topic and what facets require continued study. As the quality of leadership styles is proven to facilitate change, enhance employment commitment and performance, and improve overall organizational performance and approaches in most fields, concerns over the leadership ability of education personnel has grown in importance within education research. Transformational leadership is the leadership style most researchers feel is appropriate for today's schools. Transformational leadership is characterized by a leader who works with subordinates to identify needed change, create a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and execute the change in unison with committed members of a group.[1]

Methodology

As the literature review is the key component of this research, identifying relevant studies had to be a systematic process. To capture as many relevant published articles as possible, this study consulted the Ebscohost and Proquest search engines, defining its parameters with the keywords *Transformational leadership style, Transformational leadership behavior, Teacher perceptions of leadership,* and *Transformational leadership in schools.* "Transformational leadership" and "transformational leadership in schools" were the main keywords and phrases that generated vast amounts of pioneering peer-reviewed studies. A review of articles published between 1990 and 2003 reveal that there have been more research studies done on transformational leadership than on all of other leadership theories combined.[2] This study's analysis of transformational leadership began by examining the early and pioneering research of the leadership style within business organizations the proceeded to explore research of transformational leadership style in educational settings. The aim of this paper is to synthesis existing research, highlighting key studies, and to offer suggestions for additional areas of research.

Education Leaders and the Demand for New Leadership Approaches

Is school leadership adequate? Effective school leadership is critical to overall school success, yet a 2014 report conducted by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute analyzing the recruitment, selection, and placement of school principals, suggested far too many principals lack the capacity to lead effectively.[3] A decade of research suggested training and preparation programs for principals failed to instill them with the skills sets needed for pivotal leadership which is necessary for producing meaningful school change while being held more accountable for student growth, achievement, and outcomes.[4] Principals are held accountable for leadership tasks such as hiring, developing, and evaluating teachers, supporting struggling students,

community outreach, managing budgets, and managing infrastructure.[5] In addition, education leaders are now faced with the same tasks managers face in the business and private sector, such as setting strategic planning goals and developing staff .[6]

Education has become business and schools have become social organizations conducting daily business. The business nature and complexity of tasks and responsibilities prompt even more concern over whether or not principals and educational leaders are taught the fundamentals of management and practicing good leadership skills.[7] As schools face an environment that has become business oriented and managerially complex, school leaders may benefit from training and development in leadership styles proven to enhance the success of both business organizations and educational settings. Enter the transformational leadership style.

Transformational Leadership

James MacGregor Burns coined the term transformational leadership in his book, *Leadership,* to define a process where leaders and followers work together to advance motivation and morale.[8] According to Burns, transformational leadership is a style of leadership that transforms follower attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, to a higher realm of motivation where the leader inspires followers to be motivated to rise above and beyond current levels of achievement and performance to even higher levels of achievement and performance.[9] In business organizations, transformational leadership is proven to have positive effects on employee job performance, commitment, and satisfaction. The success of transformational leadership on teacher commitment is well documented.[10] Based on research highlighting transformational leadership styles' positive impact on teacher commitment, performance, job satisfaction, and other areas that help facilitate overall school success, and based on its established positive correlations to employee performance, motivation, and job satisfaction in business organizations,

transformational leadership style seems to be a viable approach for education leaders to test in transforming schools to meet new stakeholder demands.

<div align="center">Transformational Leadership in Education</div>

Bernard Bass's 1985 work is the cornerstone research on transformational leadership in the classroom, highlighting transformational leadership behaviors. Transformational leadership behaviors refer to particular behaviors/activities engaged in by leaders that improve overall organization performance and outcomes.[11] According to Bernard Bass, transformational leaders exhibit the following transformational leadership behaviors in their daily interactions with the staff or subordinates: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.[12] Inspirational motivation entails leaders communicating high performance expectations in an encouraging and enthusiastic fashion.[13] Individualized consideration involves leaders coaching, mentoring, and providing feedback in a manner consistent with each individual's needs and intellectual stimulation calls upon leadership to challenge followers to embrace new ways of thinking and doing, and to reassess values and beliefs.[14] The leader solicits new ideas from followers and shows tolerance for mistakes. Idealized influence is leadership providing vision and a sense of mission while displaying total commitment to the vision and mission.[15] Evidence demonstrates that the aforementioned transformational leadership behaviors have significant and progressive influence over subordinates/followers within organizations.[16]

Kenneth Leithwood provides the early pioneering empirical research on Transformational leadership styles in school settings.[17] He suggests that transformational leadership positively influences schools' leadership's ability to facilitate change in school restructuring initiatives, and is best suited for coping with the demands of schools in twenty-first century.[18] Leithwood

postulates that transformational leadership styles promise to enhance school leadership's ability to make the necessary school transformations that facilitate meeting stakeholder accountability and performance improvement demands. Leithwood recommends transformational leadership approaches be practiced and featured as components of principal preparation programs.[19] The notion of transformational leadership being applied in schools in the last decade grew out of the proven success of transformational leadership style in business organizations; and research studies in education reporting positive correlations between follower/subordinate learning in educational settings, and follower/ subordinate learning and performance in business organizations.[20] As previously stated, schools face ever-increasing scrutiny and accountability relative to student outcomes and school improvement, Hence, transformational leadership is appropriate for school settings because of its emphasis on preparing employees to learn new things, building and strengthening new organizational norms, establishing new meaning and ways of thinking, and its effectiveness as a tool in helping leaders break established norms and establish new norms that transform school culture.[21]

<div align="center">Education Leaders and Transformational Leadership</div>

Principals are the leadership heads responsible for transforming school culture to meet the increased demands of local, state, and federal stakeholders. Transformational leadership is a style of leadership centered on leaders establishing new norms, changing employee attitudes, creating a new vision of reality, and making fundamental changes to the culture of the organization.[22] Jerry Valentine and Mike Prater's 2011 research provides an illustration of principals exhibiting the transformational leadership behaviors outlined above by Bernard Bass from his 1985 research. The authors summarize Bass's description of these leadership behaviors. Providing an appropriate model is behavior that sets an example for school leadership team

members to follow consistent with the values the principal espouses. Fostering the acceptance of group goals is leadership behavior aimed at promoting cooperation among school leadership team members and assisting them to work together toward common goals. Providing individualized support is defined as leadership behavior that centered on respect for school leadership team members and concern about their personal feelings and needs. Providing intellectual stimulation is described as behavior that challenges school leadership team members to re-examine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed. Holding high performance expectations is behavior that demonstrates the principal's expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of the school leadership team.[23]

Valentine and Prater indicate that the above behaviors positively impacted student achievement, yet were dependent on social interactions and relationships among and between principals, teachers, and other staff in the school community.[24] "Providing a model," "identifying a vision," and "fostering group goals," sets examples for staff members to follow while also contributing to staff confidence that school operations will be smooth. Schools able to meet stakeholder demands have educational leaders exhibiting transformational leadership behavior and there is a need to gain an understanding of these practices to better prepare principals to positively transform schools.[25] Transformational leadership exhibited by principals plays a key role in school improvement initiatives and is evident when principals engage in building a shared vision. Changing employee's ways of thinking and doing things is centered in the transformational establishment of a "shared vision" and being the core of the principal's role as transformational leaders. Transformational leadership centered in forming ideas and building a shared vision is a key to school improvement, hence making principal's development of transformational leadership skills paramount.[26]

Transformational Leadership in Schools and Teacher Perceptions

Implementing transformational leadership as part of classroom instruction was first suggested by James Stuart Pounder. His research finds positive outcomes associated with teachers using the system during class, including the development of student capability to use ideas and information, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.[27] Moreover, transformational leadership is shown to have positive correlations to enhanced student performance in reading, as well as being successful in energizing students, getting them to transcend self-interest, and embrace change.[28]

Teachers appreciate transformational leadership styles from principals, and view principals with transformational leadership styles as role models who inspire trust in school staff.[29] Teachers feel more positive about their school environments when principals exhibit transformational leadership, particularly when it takes the form of individualized consideration, which allows teachers and principals to have a cooperative and trusting relationship.[30] Teachers highly rate principals utilizing transformational leadership behaviors as they provide regular teacher support and encouraged reflection, and are seen to be polite, highly motivational, and effective student disciplinarians focused on producing responsible students.[31] Teacher commitment is enhanced when principals exemplify transformational leadership, particularly the transformational leadership behaviors intellectual stimulation and vision building.[32] The researchers suggest leadership development and training of school leaders in transformational leadership can lead to teacher internalization of the practice.[33] Student achievement is indirectly, yet positively correlated to teacher commitment to school visions when leaders engage in setting direction, providing support, and developing staff. Transformational leadership encourages

leaders to do so, while providing psychological empowerment to teachers who feel their contributions are valued.[34]

Transformational leadership approaches have positive impacts on teacher internal states, and positively impact student achievement in reading and math. An improved internal state in teachers leads to improved school performance including student achievement.[35]Some transformational leadership approaches, such as individualized support, stimulate student achievement more than others. Individualized support of teachers positively and significantly impacts teacher commitment, satisfaction, and teacher efficacy, which in turn indirectly impacts on student achievement.[36] Teacher willingness to work towards improving teaching approaches and efficacy in managing classrooms has been found to be positively affected by transformational leadership behaviors.[37]

Discussion

The literature reviewed effectively highlights the evolution of the school system and the concerns over the qualifications of principals and teachers to lead and manage schools in the midst of increased demand for accountability and performance. The benefits of transformational leadership styles and approaches proven successful in improving performance of business organizations are also shown to succeed in school settings.[38] Transformational leadership style is a viable choice for educational leaders seeking to transform schools to systems capable of meeting stakeholder demands (i.e. the students, local community, state, and federal). The viability of the leadership style as an effective tool conducive to positively changing schools and staff development has been established by research during the past two decades, and supported by pioneering research of the leadership style being effective in business organizations.[39] The applicability of the leadership style to school settings centered on school settings being viewed as

quasi-social-business organizations requiring leaders to handle duties and responsibilities as managers do in business organizations.[40]

Transformational leadership's success in business organizations is well documented. The research literature clearly establishes such, yet the literature presented does not include any negatives associated with the leadership style. The negative aspects of transformational leadership should be studied to provide an even more thorough understanding of the efficacy of the leadership style, and its limitations to application in both business organizations and school settings. Insight into the pros and cons of transformational leadership style is needed to support the training and development of educational leaders in transformational leadership approaches.

The literature reviewed successfully highlights the specific approaches of the leadership style found in research to contribute to enhanced teacher commitment and satisfaction.[41] Enhanced teacher commitment and satisfaction were found to indirectly, yet positively influence teacher efficacy leading to improved student achievement and school performance. The research studies lack thorough descriptions of what learning activities took place to generate the data. A potential area of further research would be to explore what these specific learning activities were and the methods employed to better inform the audience of what is successful in the classroom relative to transformational leadership.

Teacher perception of principal leadership had great significance to teacher commitment and job satisfaction, and in turn indirectly yet positively influenced student achievement and performance.[42] None of the studies put forth meaningful analysis on approaches in Transformational leadership style having a direct impact on student achievement and performance. Math and reading were subject areas where transformational leadership had a more direct impact and influence, yet there was a lack of clarity as to what specifically in the

leadership approach was responsible for the positive correlation. "High achieving schools" were described in the literature review as schools meeting and exceeding performance expectations stemming from principals using transformational leadership approaches. These schools should be the focus of further research into approaches having positive impacts on student performance. A sizeable portion of the literature reviewed analyzed, synthesized, and integrated research findings on transformational leadership's applicability to elementary, secondary, college and university settings. These different school settings should be examined alone and the results specific to these settings presented allowing a clear picture of the efficacy of transformational leadership style to each individual setting. More knowledge could be obtained by education leaders by exploring research studies in other countries on transformational leadership used in schools, to gain even more understanding of applying transformational leadership style in school settings.

Limitations in the literature centered on studies utilizing small sample sizes. The studies on transformational leadership in education used surveys, questionnaires, personal interviews, and self-reporting to generate data. Small sample sizes are quite common with the qualitative research methods employed, yet may still bring scrutiny as to the reliability and legitimacy of data and findings. Despite the possible scrutiny invited by small sample sizes used in much of the research done on transformational leadership in education, there have been meta-analytic research studies verifying the efficacy of transformational leadership style in education settings.

Conclusion

Transformational leadership style has proven to be an effective approach to enhancing the performance and morale of business organizations since 1978. Research for the past twenty years has supported the used and efficacy of Transformational leadership in school settings. Schools have entered an era of unprecedented accountability for teacher and school performance, and

student achievement. Leadership and management responsibilities have expanded relative to

school management of personnel, budgets, in addition meeting the performance and achievement

benchmarks set by local, state, and federal stakeholders. Exploring leadership styles and

approaches that will strengthen education leader ability to manage and lead schools in this new

era is logical and necessary. The transformational leadership style, though not a cure all for

school leadership, is supported by decades of research on the considerable positive impact of the

leadership style in enhancing the performance of business organizations, and the last ten years in

school settings. Education leader training and development programs should educate and train in

the application of the leadership style, as well as look to integrate the approach with traditional

school leadership practices that will continue to be applicable to managing and leading schools in

an era of change.

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