Effective Educational Leadership Training for Transformative Leadership

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Abstract: *In the required course work of many programs in Educational Leadership, doctoral candidates typically engage in various forms of analysis and synthesis about transformative leadership. Coursework in ethical education; transformational learning; creativity, inquiry, and innovative leadership; quantitative research methods; qualitative research methods, and leading organizational change form the basis of many courses of study. Evidence in the literature overwhelmingly support the position that educational leaders are highly effective, when engaging in both transformational and organizational development practices. Their effectiveness can also benefit student-learning outcomes. This paper draws from the main points of all of the aforementioned to illustrate how the effective educational leadership training can benefit student transformative educational leaders. The paper concludes that investment in educational leadership training is a pathway for large-scale education improvement.*

Keywords: education, leadership, transformative, learning, students

Educational leaders and researchers often set goals to demonstrate the influence school leaders have on student achievement. Here, school leadership is an all-inclusive term comprised of teacher leaders, principals, and district administrators. In fact, researchers believe that the total direct and indirect effects of leadership on student learning account for about twenty-five percent of school effects (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). As a result, engaging educational leaders through reflection on the dynamics of diverse school communities towards development and change will benefit student achievement.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

There is agreement in the literature (Leithwood et al., 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Printy, Marks, and Bowers, 2003) that educational leaders are transformative learners and leaders. In fact, Printy et al. (2003) acknowledge that while the effect of leadership on student gains may vary in some quantitative and qualitative research inquiries, the distinction has more to do with the type of data collected and research question asked.

In reality, the evidence overwhelmingly suggest that the school leader is most effective when engaging in both transformational and organizational development practices that create conditions where teachers and students are empowered and motivated. This is also attainable when leadership display genuine concern and commitment to the growth of the whole person, whether student or staff (Printy et al., 2003).

Within the field of education, transformative learning can occur for the school leader, teacher and student. As Kumi-Yeboah (2012) found out, for some leaders the process of transformative teaching and learning can be a long journey. "It takes time, dedication, hard work, and learning for new teachers to be able to reflect on personal experiences" (Kumi-Yeboah & James, 2012, p. 170). Mezirow viewed transformative learning as "an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one's beliefs and feelings, a critique of one's assumptions, and particularly premises, and an assessment of alternative perspectives" (1991, p. 161).

The path of transformative learning necessitates the development of critical reflection, which involves challenging one's assumptions and understandings in the effort to find new meaning. Mezirow (1991)

advances critical reflection as a major objective of transformative learning. Transformational leadership draws attention to a broader array of school and classroom conditions that may need to be changed (challenging the status quo) if learning is to improve.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ACQUIRE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Learning and leadership respectively, speak to how people learn and how people lead (Brown & Posner, 2001) and are more often than not, called upon to work in concert with each other. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning involves appropriating new meaning to previously held beliefs and ideas. Brown and Posner (2001) assert that "…transformative learning centers squarely on the cognitive process of learning" (p. 2). Most importantly, leadership demands cognitive processes to move people and organizations. When leadership involves transformative learning processes, leaders are more effective (Mezirow, 1991).

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERS ARE REFLECTIVE LEARNERS

Furthermore, Cranton (2006) emphasizes that educators can be transformative through active reflection. Reflection involves actively thinking about how culture and tone of the school can help to challenge students thinking and learning. Furthermore, Cranton (2006) advises that transformative learning is helped by critical discussions, not just between students and teachers but also between teachers and administration as they examine ideas and approaches to helping students develop.

In a research inquiry designed to study the effectiveness of transformational leadership and student satisfaction, Noland & Richards, (2014) discovered a positive correlation between teacher's transformational leadership and students' level of satisfaction with their instructor. This is to say that transformative leaders were more highly favored by students. In addition, students' reports of instructor performance, and students' respect for the instructor were at high levels when the instructor was received as being transformative. In fact,

transformative learners will begin to increase their desire to learn and begin to develop positive attitudes towards work (Noland & Richards, 2014).

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Educational leaders demonstrate ethical and moral leadership. The function of teaching is amongst the most important in our world today (Markie, 1994). Consequently, effective educational training involves coursework in ethical leadership. Part of this involves high degrees of professional ethics, which place students' needs first. This includes just decision-making and protecting them while they are in the teacher's care without intentionally exposing them to personal biases, prejudices, and harm.

For the educational leaders, a life focused on real ethics is where genuine liberty and prosperity can reside (Borgmann, 2006). Educational leaders who place students' needs first also make an indirect contribution to student learning through their influence on the student's parents (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013).

According to Bonhoeffer (1995), "the man with a conscience fights a lonely battle against the overwhelming forces of inescapable situations which demand decisions". According to Ciulla (2004) good is "morally good and technically good or effective" (p. 305). Ethics is the heart of leadership and a good leader is ethical and effective (Ciulla, 2004).

EDUCATIONAL LEADERS DEVELOP PEOPLE AND FORSTER COLLABORATION

Educational leaders who are teacher leaders, principals, and administrators are also managers of people. Hallowell (2011) emphasizes that best managers have the wherewithal to bring the best out of their employees and Nass and Yen (2012) emphasize the magnitude of the task by establishing that individual employees are different. They think and feel differently, so managers must take time to get to know each employee. Along these lines, Hallowell (2011) repeatedly asserts that people perform better when they are in happy situations, when they are motivated and they believe that their contributions are valued. Not surprisingly,

disengaged employees often appear to lack commitment, drive, and dedication.

While most educational leaders have the best of intentions, it is undoubtedly true that at times leaders may appear detached from their staff or vice versa. Hallowell (2011) advances ideas that can help bridge the divide. Noticing people, paying attention to them and their contributions, giving some time during the day to listen to their concerns, being open to listening to advice and being able to put yourself in others' shoes are important ways whereby the roadblocks of interpersonal disconnectedness can be overcome. Hallowell (2011) believed that "Disconnection and overload pose particularly modern obstacles to peak performance" (p. 26). Not only do effective educational leaders support and develop staff, but they also understand the importance of nurturing staff and fostering a positive growth atmosphere. By developing people, leaders are providing teachers and others in the system with the necessary support and training to succeed. School leaders, teachers and parents need to not only project creativity and productivity but are able to harness these from their students (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2013; Stewart, 2004).

Educational leaders help develop staff productivity by encouraging collaboration. In particular, educational leaders help people think differently at work, collaborate with others, and lead by example. These leaders help build and actively promote a shared vision at the school (Leithwood et al., 2004). This may involve sharing an instructional activity, getting help with differentiating, developing or implementing a discussion protocol or receiving translation help during a parent conference. It is often overlooked but assuredly, when searching for help on an issue at school, it is always best to collaborate with peers first before seeking outside help, because there may be someone on staff who is very verse with the issue.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Instructional leaders keep teaching and learning at the forefront of their minds and promote scholarship. Educational leaders manage the educational program charting a clear course that everyone understands, establishing high expectations and using data to track progress and performance. Some compelling evidence of this can be found in the Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) informative study designed to measure which leadership patterns promote good instruction. Their results indicate that leadership can be measured in two ways: first, as teachers' trust of their principal (highly indicative of transformational leadership) and second, as instructional influence shared among teachers. These promote good instructional outcomes.

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION

The need for Organizational Development (OD) is born out the reality that invariably, educational environments will have issues or problems, which can hinder the organization from reaching its stated purpose. While this is no truer in the business sector than the public sector, much of this discussion focuses on facilitation of organizational development in schools. "Successful educational leaders develop their districts and schools as effective organizations that support and sustain the performance of administrators and teachers, as well as students" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 9)

Engaging individuals in the process of change rests on the concept of transformational leadership. Transformative learning influences the effectiveness of OD. Mezirow (1991) stressed the implication of the realization that one is holding a distorted view. Thus, transformation begins when one ponders alternative points of view. In OD, one seeks to change the status quo or this distorted view and elevate productivity or some part of the work environment.

While there are many factors, which relate to dynamics involved in successful OD, real change can only take place when one has internalized the need for it. This is similar to the internal realization needed to make transformative learning work. As a change leader, (Fullan, 2011) the OD leader in the educational setting can engage staff in team building, improving school culture and norms, and using teacher teams to improve school-wide performance assessments, to name a few.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERS WORK TOWARDS ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Hallowell (2011) emphasizes that the best managers have the wherewithal to bring the best out of their employees. In a case where a school is not functioning properly, an educational leader must be able to make the organization work by ensuring that the entire range of conditions and incentives are present to make this happen. Leithwood et.al, (2004) explain that in certain cases "…organizational conditions sometimes blunt or wear down educators' good intentions and actually prevent the use of effective practices" (p. 13). Problems may arise between staff members, which can also be toxic in the learning environment.

Simply put, for effective educational leaders to benefit student achievement they must always put students first, which means that when problems arise they must do more than simply know what to do; alternatively, it means knowing when, why to do it and how it should be done (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). Deaner's (1994) principle of participation states that all people affected by the OD change should have the opportunity to be involved in the change, promoting the concept of shared power — developing a sense of belonging by encouraging employees to be part of the decision-making process.

CONCLUSION

Studies in ethical education; transformational learning; creativity, inquiry, and innovation; quantitative research methods; qualitative research methods, and leading organizational change contribute to the development of transformative leaders. Educational leaders need to know how to foster an environment where teachers know what instructional methods work best for every student. This means knowing what to do, how to do it and when to do it.

One might argue that this discussion on the effectiveness of educational leadership does not differentiate among educational leaders of elementary, middle, or high schools. It is certainly true that the challenges faced by leaders across grades K – 12 are not all the same. However, I adopt this position because there is little in the literature to suggest that leadership differences based on grade level contribute in a meaningful way to fostering student-learning outcomes. With this in mind, it is important that the educational leader develop an inventory of critical behaviors that can serve as markers for success. Some of which are: fostering a sense of community; protecting teachers and students from issues that would distract from teaching and learning; becoming visible (engaging in high quality contact with teachers and students); and developing and sustaining strong lines of communication with teachers, staff, students, parents and the community. Effective educational leaders are flexible, transformative, ethical and adaptable on order to adjust leadership behavior to ever changing organizational needs.

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