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ABSTRACT

This study examined possible relationships between teachers' perceived levels of empowerment in the workplace, teachers' perceived levels of responsibility for student learning, and levels of student success as measured by standardized achievement tests. Participants were a group of elementary classroom teachers from the southwest Missouri area who completed the Responsibility for Student Achievement Scale and the School Participant Empowerment Scale. Data analysis indicated that teachers were willing to accept credit for students' success, but they were reluctant to accept blame for students' failure to achieve. The results suggest that the construct of teacher empowerment and sense of responsibility for student outcomes are important to a positive school climate and increased teacher efficacy. However, the effect on student achievement appears to be secondary, if it exists at all. There was no direct correlation between teacher empowerment and student achievement or teachers' sense of responsibility and student achievement. (Contains 47 references.) (SM)

Is there a connection: Teacher Empowerment, Teachers' Sense of Responsibility, and Student Success?

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Is there a connection: Teacher Empowerment, Teachers' Sense of Responsibility and Student Success?

Meyers and VanHoose (1981) and Fiedler (1979) found that most leaders are not able to perceive their actions and styles as teachers perceive those actions and styles. Terry (1998) reminded us that one's perceptions influence the way one reacts to situations. As Covey (1989) noted, "Where we stand depends on where we sit" (p. 22). Consequently, teachers' perceptions of their own level of empowerment and degree of responsibility for student achievement, or lack thereof, become reality for that school. Teachers' perceptions of their own levels of empowerment and responsibility for student outcomes provided the primary focus of this study. The research questions critical to this study focused on possible relationships between teachers' perceived levels of empowerment in the workplace, teachers' perceived levels of responsibility for student learning, and the level of students' success as measured by standardized achievement test instruments.

Question 1. Is there a relationship between teachers' perceived level of empowerment and perceived degree of teachers' sense of responsibility for positive student outcomes?

Question 2. Is there a relationship between teachers' perceived level of empowerment and perceived degree of teachers' sense of responsibility for negative student outcomes?

Question 3. Is there a relationship between perceived degree of teachers' sense of responsibility for student outcomes and student achievement?

Question 4. Is there a relationship between teachers' perceived level of empowerment and student achievement?

Conceptual Organizers

Leadership. Lieberman and Miller (1984) contend that principals, especially at the elementary school level, "make it known what is important, what will not be tolerated, and in a strange way, set the tone for tension, worth, openness, and fear" (p. 28). Blasé (1990) conducted studies on the effects of different types of leadership in schools. These studies found that controlling or manipulative political behaviors on the part of the school principals seriously jeopardized both academic and social standards in the school. Controlling tactics on the part of school principals had negative effects on morale, involvement, communication, and relationships (Blasé, 1990). Gonzales and Short (1996), Glickman (1991), and Aronstein, Marlow and Desilets (1990) suggested that principals of effective schools facilitate teachers as instructional leaders. Principals must shift from solitary decision-makers to facilitators:

For schools that are restructuring, moving closer to the facilitative end of the power continuum will usually solve the problem" (cited in Liontos, 1993, p. 35). When the governance structure in educational settings becomes more participatory, the result is the empowerment of teachers, students, administrators, and parents (Short & Greer, 1989; Lightfoot, 1986). Terry (1998) reminded us that empowerment is essential to school reform. Terry further contended that successful schools are those in which leaders are able to focus the creative energies of teachers on continuous improvement. Many researchers have indicated that teacher empowerment is positively linked to increased job satisfaction and improved sense of teachers' efficacy (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995;

Bacharach, Barnberger, Conley & Bauer, 1990; McCormack-Larkin, 1985; Conway, 1984; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978; Alutto & Belasco, 1972b).

Teacher Efficacy. Teacher efficacy is defined as a teacher's belief that he or she has the ability to positively affect student performance (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). According to O'Connor and Korr (1996):

> Self-efficacy involves a generative capability in which cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes. Success is often attained only after generating and testing alternative forms of behavior and strategies. (p. 49)

With these definitions in mind, it is evident that an environment which encourages risk-taking, personal commitment and involvement, decision-making and professional growth will enhance teachers' sense of self-efficacy (O'Connor & Korr, 1996; Ashton, et al., 1983).

Empowerment. Marks and Louis (1997) described empowerment in terms of participatory decision-making. They contended that participatory decision-making enhances workers' knowledge, reduces worker isolation, and increases workers' sense of the whole picture. Empowerment, according to Marks and Louis (1997) transforms the workplace.

Short and Rinehart (1992a) noted that empowerment consists of "enabling experiences, provided within an organization that fosters autonomy, choice, control, and responsibility..." (p. 952). Wellins, Byham, and Wilson (1991) contended that empowerment is present when power is vested in employees, who then exhibit a sense of

ownership and control over their jobs. Byham and Cox (1992) contended that empowerment helps employees take a personal interest in improving the organization. The construct of teacher empowerment is viewed by researchers as holding promise for improving the educational setting for both teachers and students. Maeroff (1988a) believes that the term empowerment is synonymous with professionalization. Short (1994a) has defined empowerment as "the process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems" (p. 488). Melenyzer (1990) adds that "teacher empowerment is the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession" (p. 4). While research on empowerment emphasizes teacher involvement in decision-making, Short and Rinehart (1992a) contended that empowerment includes other dimensions such as teacher perceptions of status, self-efficacy, autonomy, teacher impact, and opportunities for professional growth.

In essence, empowerment suggest an overall school philosophy of teamwork, collegiality, participation in decision-making, and problem-solving without the constraints of a bureaucratic organization (Short, Greer & Melvin, 1994).

Reform literature has advocated the empowerment of school staff (Maeroff, 1988b; Frymier, 1987; Lightfoot, 1986). The assumption in the literature is that a positive work environment, created by school participants who are able to initiate new ideas, results in better learning opportunities for students (Short, 1994b). Research supports the assumptions that teacher empowerment is related to greater organizational effectiveness (Lawler, 1986). Frymier (1987) stated that, "In any attempt to improve education, teachers are central" (p. 9).

Dimensions of Empowerment. Short and Rinehart (1992a) delineated six distinct dimensions of teacher empowerment. Those dimensions include: 1) teacher status; 2) autonomy; 3) teacher impact; 4) opportunities for professional development; 5) teacher self-efficacy; and 6) teacher involvement in decision-making.

Short and Rinehart (1992a) defined status as the teachers' sense of esteem and professional respect accorded the teacher by students, parents, supervisors, colleagues, and community members. Ashton and Webb (1986) contended that teachers' self-esteem is enhanced when they are recognized for their abilities and accomplishments. Maeroff (1988a) described elements of teacher status as those our culture uses to signal respect: autonomy, money, and recognition.

Autonomy as part of an empowerment model refers to the teachers' beliefs that they control important aspects of their work life. Autonomy is often referred to as internal locus of control (Short & Rinehart, 1992a). McBride and Skau (1995) noted that autonomy is enhanced through teacher empowerment efforts.

Teacher impact is defined as the teachers' perceptions that they have influence over their work life (Short & Rinehart, 1992a). Teachers in a study conducted by Lightfoot (1986) experienced significant professional growth through the respect they received from community and parents for their ideas.

Professional development includes both the opportunities and encouragement of others to participate in continuous learning experiences or professional growth (Short & Rinehart, 1992a). It is essential that teachers model life-long learning for their students' benefit, as well as an antidote to teacher burnout.

Self-efficacy is defined as teachers' perceptions that they have the ability to positively effect student learning (Short & Rinehart, 1992a). Blasé (1982) defined the construct of teachers' sense of efficacy as teachers' situation-specific expectations that they can help students learn. Teachers' sense of efficacy is further defined as "the extent to which the teacher believed he or she had the capacity to affect student performance" (Armor et al., 1976, p. 137).

Blasé (1982) contended that self-efficacy increases as teachers acquire self-knowledge and believe themselves to be personally competent to affect learning outcomes of their students. This definition of self-efficacy coincides with Guskey's (1987) definition of teachers' perceived sense of responsibility for student learning.

Teachers' sense of efficacy actually consists of two independent dimensions: sense of teaching efficacy and sense of personal teaching efficacy. The first dimension, sense of teaching efficacy, refers to the attitude that teaching can influence student learning. The second, sense of personal teaching efficacy, refers to the belief that one's own teaching can influence student learning (Blasé, 1990).

Decision-making has been defined by Short and Rinehart (1992a) as the participation of teachers in important decisions that directly affect their work life. Such participation is essential if teachers are to increase control over their work environment, increase their internal locus of control, and decrease feelings of alienation at the work place.

Garmston and Pahre (1988) contended that the creation of an emotionally safe environment that encourages teacher decision-making and risk-taking is fundamental to an empowered organization. Individuals who are risk-takers must understand that they

control some dimensions of context and process and that they are expected to take responsibility for their actions (Byrd & Byrd, 1989). Kouzes and Posner (1987) added to this concept of empowerment when they stated that "choice is the cement that binds one's actions to the person, motivating individuals to accept the implications of their acts" (p. 27).

Methods

Participants. The population for this study consisted of classroom teachers in southwest Missouri elementary schools. The representative sample for this study was selected from small (up to 1000 students) and mid-sized (1001-2500 students) school districts. Larger, metropolitan school districts were not included due to the reduced likelihood that such schools would have the autonomy to implement site-based management. A voluntary sample of classroom teachers was solicited at each target school. Subjects were selected at each grade level with the intention of obtaining representation of those teachers at varying levels of their careers (non-tenured, tenured, and veteran). A total of 271 utilized a quantitative data collection design.

Data collection. Participating classroom teachers were administered the Responsibility for Student Achievement Scale (RSA) by Guskey (1981) and the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES) by Short and Rinehart (1992a). Teachers' perceptions as measured by the RSA and SPES provided the primary data for this study.

Data analysis. This study utilized a quantitative data collection design. Participating classroom teachers were administered the Responsibility for Student Achievement Scale (RSA) by Guskey (1981) and the School Participant Empowerment

Scale (SPES) by Short and Rinehart (1992a). Teachers' perceptions as measured by the RSA and SPES provided the primary data for this study.

Findings

The research questions central to the study focused on relationships between teachers' perceived empowerment in the workplace (SPES); teachers' perceived levels of responsibility for student learning (RSA), and the students learning as measured by standardized test instrument.

Analysis of RSA+ scores revealed a mean RSA+ score of 61.4 percent. This indicates that on the average, participants credited themselves for 61.4 percent of the successes of their students.

{Insert Figure 1}

Analysis of RSA- scores revealed a mean RSA- score of 46.5 percent. This indicated that on the average, participants accepted 46.5 percent of the responsibility for their student's failures. The correlation between the RSA= and RSA- scales was determined to be r= 0.126, with a level of significance at 0.037. correlation between the RSA= and RSA- scales was statistically significant at the 0.037 level of confidence.

{Insert Figure 2}

Analysis of correlation between teachers' perceived levels of empowerment, self-perceived responsibility for students' successes and failures, and student achievement revealed a statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceived level of empowerment in the workplace and the degree of responsibility teachers accept for the successes of their students ($r = 0.18$; significance = 0.003). There was also a statistically significant relationship between the RSA+ and RSA- factors ($r = 0.126$; significance =

0.037). There was a statistically significant relationship between reading and mathematics scores with a correlation of r = 0.631 and significance level of 0.000. All other correlations, however, were not statistically significant. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level of confidence.

The correlation between teachers' perceived level of empowerment (SPES) and self-perceived responsibility for positive student outcomes (RSA+) indicated that teachers who perceived that they had higher levels of decision-making, professional growth, status, efficacy, autonomy, and impact

The correlation coefficient between teachers' perceived level of empowerment and teachers' tended to accept more responsibility for the success of their students. perceived sense of responsibility for negative student outcomes was analyzed next. Resulting in a correlation coefficient of –0.076 with a significance of 0.210. This relationship was not statistically significant

The correlation between teachers' sense of empowerment and teachers' sense of responsibility for students' failures was -0.075. Consequently, there was no significant relationship between perceived degree of teachers' level of empowerment and perceived degree of teachers' sense of responsibility for negative student outcomes

{Insert Table 1}

The third question dealt with the correlation between teachers' perceived sense of responsibility for student outcomes and student achievement. Thee correlation coefficient between teachers' perceived sense of responsibility for student outcomes and student achievement was -0.059 with a significance level of 0.481 Also no significant relationship between teachers' perceived responsibility for student outcomes and student

achievement was revealed. The correlation between teachers' sense of responsibility for student outcomes and student achievement was 0.059 for reading and -0.08 for mathematics. Table 2 reveals numbers, means, and standard deviations for RSA+ scores at each reading stanine. No pattern was revealed by this table of means based on teachers' perceived responsibility for positive student outcomes and reading achievement scores.

{Insert Table 2}

Further analysis revealed no significant relationship between students' achievement and the level of teachers' perceived empowerment in the workplace. Figure 3 reveals no significant relationship between students' achievement and the level of teachers' perceived empowerment in the workplace. Once again, it appears that student achievement is a complex construct that is not significantly influenced by a teachers' level of empowerment.

{Insert figure 3}

The exception to this finding was for schools involved in the Accelerated Schools Project, there was a tendency for those Accelerated Schools to have significantly higher achievement scores than the traditional schools. Table 3 reveals numbers, means, and standard deviations for SPES empowerment scores at each reading stanine. Again no pattern was revealed

(Insert Table 3}

Additionally, in table 4 the mean scores of both Accelerated and traditional studies were analyzed. Although the sample size was small (47 subjects) for schools involved in the Accelerated Schools Project, there was a tendency for those Accelerated Schools to have significantly higher achievement scores than the traditional schools.

However the teacher's in those schools did not indicated a significant difference in their perceptions of their own empowerment and sense of responsibility.

{Insert Table 4}

Conclusions/Implications for the Study

The findings from this study indicate that teachers are willing to accept credit for students' success, but are reluctant to accept blame for students' failure to achieve. The data indicates that the construct of teacher empowerment and a sense of responsibility for student outcomes are important to a positive school climate and increased teacher efficacy. However, the effect on student achievement appears to be secondary, if at all. A direct and significant correlation was not established between empowerment and student achievement or between teachers' sense of responsibility and student achievement. Nevertheless, creating a positive work environment for teachers enhances the likelihood that teachers will persist in the profession. As teachers gain in experience, logic dictates that they will increase in effectiveness with their students.

The findings in this study suggest several tangents that may prove interesting for further research. It appears likely that the voluntary nature of the research design resulted in a halo effect. A research design that eliminates the self-selection by schools and/or participants may result in different findings. Also this research study was conducted in a rural area of the Midwest. It is likely that teachers in rural areas tend to perceive themselves with increased status and impact. Conducting this study in an urban environment may result in different perceptions. Mid-sized schools showed slightly higher empowerment scores than small-sized schools. A possible explanation may be that administrators in mid-sized schools might have less time for micro-management than

administrators in small-sized schools. A study involving large schools could prove interesting. A qualitative design based on case studies of Accelerated Schools may help to identify causes for higher achievement scores in those schools. Student achievement is of utmost concern to school professionals. Although student achievement is apparently a complex construct, additional variables are worthy of examination.

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Tables

Table 1

Correlation of Empowerment, Responsibility, Achievement

		SPES	RSA+	RSA-	Reading	Math
SPES	r	1.00	.180	-.076	-.002	.122
	P	-	.003	.210	.985	.135
RSA+	r	.180	1.00	.126	-.059	-.080
	P	.003	-	.037	.481	.330
RSA-	r	-.076	.126	1.00	-.075	-.046
	P	.210	.037	-	.369	.570
Read	r	-.002	-.059	-.075	1.00	.631
	P	.985	.481	.369	-	.000
Math	r	.122	-.080	-.046	.631	1.00
	P	.135	.330	.570	.000	-

Note. n=271 teachers.
P< .05

Table 2

Mean Scores - RSA Positive Scale and Student Achievement

Reading Stanine	Mean RSA+	N	SD
4.00	58.11	3	11.01
5.00	63.43	48	9.48
6.00	60.02	78	8.13
7.00	62.80	18	8.05
Total	61.43	147	8.71

Table 3

Mean Scores-SPES Empowerment Scale and Student Achievement

Reading Stanine	Mean SPES	N	SD
4.00	4.44	3	0.28
5.00	4.07	48	0.50
6.00	4.07	78	0.56
7.00	4.16	18	0.38
Total	4.09	147	0.52

Table 4

Means for Accelerated and Traditional Elementary Schools

	Reading	Math	SPES	RSA+	RSA-
Accelerated (N=47)					
Mean	6.04	6.30	4.20	62.02	45.89
SD	.74	.87	.52	8.40	14.52
Traditional (N=224)					
Mean	5.70	5.82	4.05	61.22	46.64
SD	.67	.84	.50	9.38	11.97

Figure 1

Responsibility for Positive Student Achievement

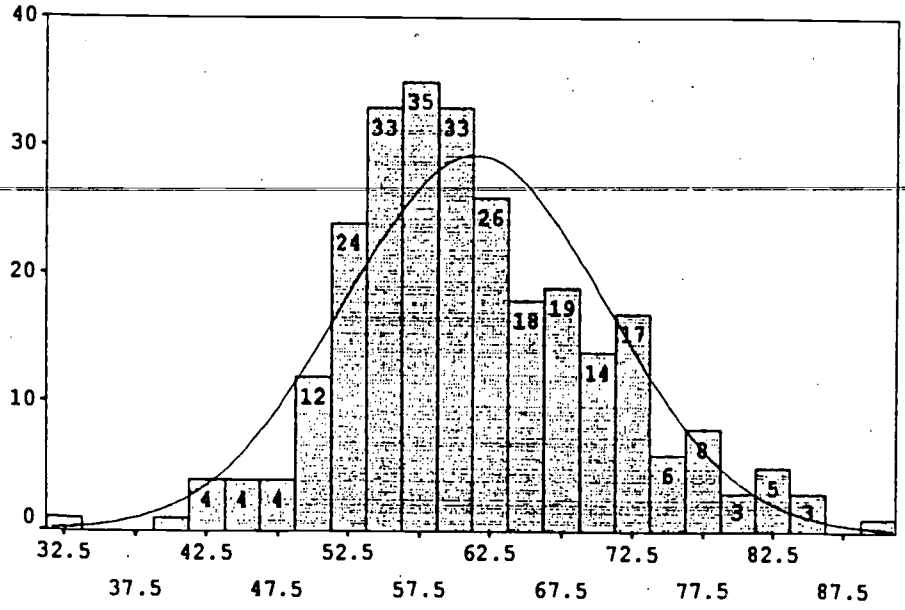


Figure 2

Responsibility for Negative Student Achievement

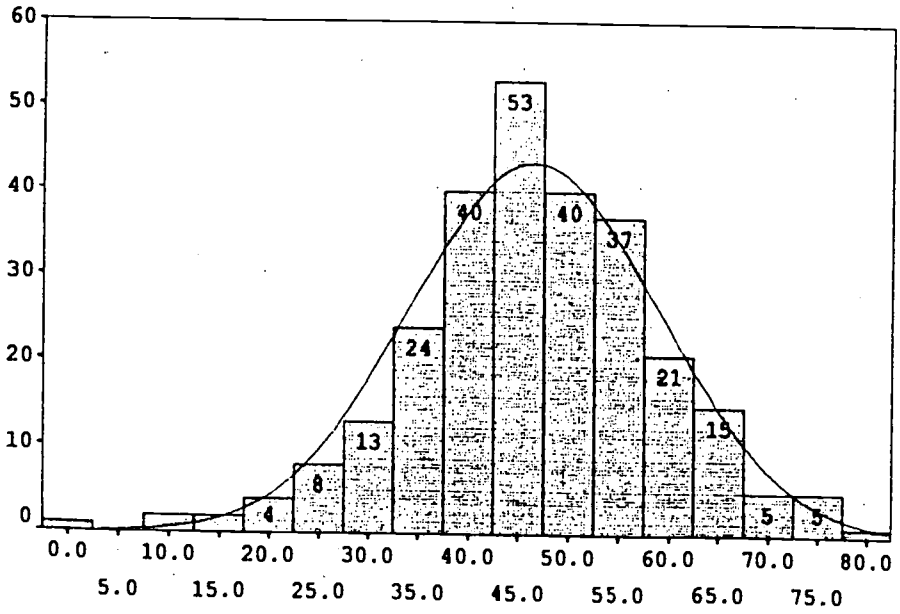
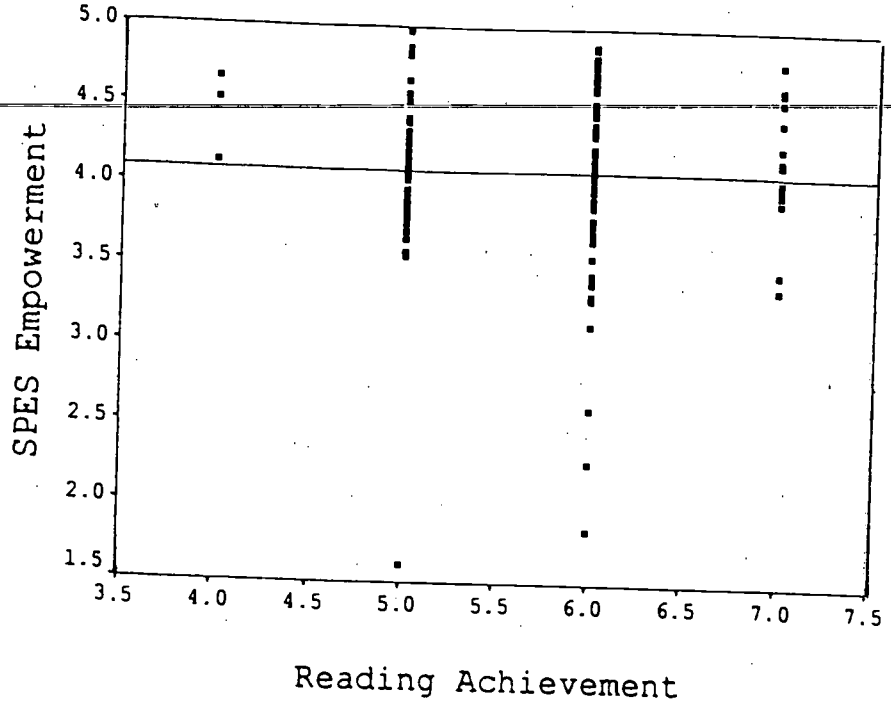


Figure 3

Teacher empowerment and Student Achievement



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