Principals' Inviting Leadership Behaviors in a Time of Test-Based Accountability

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Abstract

We queried Florida elementary teachers about how they perceived their principals' professional and personal inviting leadership behaviors during a time when many teachers and principals felt a lot of pressure due to test-based accountability. Despite the pressure, teachers reported that their principals demonstrated fairly high levels of inviting leadership behaviors. Further, we found a positive relationship between elementary teachers' perceptions of their principal's inviting leadership behaviors and their job satisfaction, the climate of their school, and the accountability rating assigned to their school. These findings suggest that there is an association between the way in which principals interact with their faculty and the achievement level of students. While many factors affect student achievement, this study reminds us that factors such as inviting leadership behaviors are an important component of quality schools.

Introduction

Educational leaders are constantly faced with different cultures and different circumstances in which they have the opportunity to lead. They must choose a leadership style that will enable them to lead the organization to new pinnacles of excellence in an era of "in your face accountability." According to Kouzes and Posner (2002), "Leadership is not all about personality; it's about practice" (p. 13). The dynamic process of leadership requires the educational leader to develop common practices into a model of leadership that will provide guidance for others

to follow as they attempt to keep up with the ever-increasing state and national accountability mandates, such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (U.S. Department of Education, no date).

During this time of high-stakes accountability, many teachers and principals have reported feeling pressure to increase students' standardized test scores (George, 2001; Jones & Egley, 2004; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). We wondered how this pressure was affecting principals' leadership behaviors. Because Invitational Education Theory (IET) has been shown to be a viable leadership theory for the educational setting (Asbill, 1994; Egley, 2003), we designed a study to investigate the relationship between professionally and personally inviting behaviors of Florida elementary school principals and teacher job satisfaction, school climate, and school accountability ratings. The purpose of this paper is to discuss teachers' perceptions of their principals' inviting leadership behaviors and how these behaviors are related to teachers' job satisfaction, school climate, and school ratings.

Literature Review

Invitational Leadership

Invitational Leadership differs from the standard theories of leadership that emphasize the process of influencing others through the use of power. Instead, it promotes collaboration and shows compassion and respect for individuals in the educational system. Barth (1991) noted that improving the interactions among and between teachers and principals is a significant factor in the school improvement process.

According to Purkey and Siegel (2003), "Invitational Leadership is a theory of practice that addresses the total environment in which leaders function. As a theory put into practice, it is a powerful process of communicating caring and appropriate messages intended to summon forth the greatest human potential as well as for identifying and changing those forces that defeat and destroy potential" (p. 1). Their model of Invitational Leadership is one that encourages leaders and their associates to pursue more joyful and meaningful professional and personal lives through four guiding principles: respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. Purkey and Novak (1996) noted that Invitational Education Theory (IET) is a theory of practice that offers a systematic approach to the educational process and it provides strategies for making schools more inviting. IET furnishes educators with principles of practicing behaviors that seek to integrate, in creative and ethical ways, research, theory, and practice.

The goal of Invitational Leadership is to create schools with a climate that invites everyone in the school to experience success. Strahan and Purkey (1992) concluded that the school climate should reflect a sense of excitement and a sense of satisfaction for both students and staff. Purkey and Novak (1984) contended that educators should operate from a consistent stance of respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. The

research literature on the role of school climate in improving student achievement is widespread with findings that support school climate as a variable that has an effect on other variables in the educational environment (Anderson, 1982; Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Howe, 1985; Keefe, Kelly, & Miller, 1985; Strong & Jones, 1991).

The findings from effective schools research (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Sergiovanni, 2001) indicated that the educational leader possesses a greater influence on education than any other factor. Other researchers such as Schein (1992) and Cunningham and Gresso (1993) have investigated other variables of leadership that highlighted the movement away from autocratic and bureaucratic styles of leadership. As noted by Cunningham and Gresso (1993), new models of leadership can be developed from the understanding, trust, and expectations that are created and shared by all that work within the organization. In addition, Schein (1992) describes a new way of leadership in which the leader identifies and evaluates the assumptions about "who we are" and "what is important."

Florida's Testing Program

The high-stakes testing program in Florida, known as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), is a top-down administered accountability system that operates within the traditional public school system. Florida's testing program has been consistent with national reform efforts in that students' standardized test scores are used to evaluate schools; thereby, holding teachers and students accountable for teaching and learning. The FCAT was first administered in public schools and used for accountability purposes in the spring of 1999. That was the first year in which schools were assigned a letter grade, ranging from "A" through "F," based on the results of students' test performance. Since then, school grades have been directly linked to accountability rewards and sanctions and schools graded an "A" or that have improved at least one grade level have been eligible for monetary incentives.

As a result of the testing program, Florida teachers and principals have reported that that they feel more pressure and stress (George, 2001; Jones & Egley, 2004). Further, some teachers have reported feeling less respected or valued or that the morale at their school was lower. As one teacher noted, "The morale in our school is the lowest I have ever seen in my 25 years of teaching" (Jones & Egley, 2004, p. 20). Because of these types of comments and concerns, we wondered whether Florida's testing program was also having a negative effect on principals' inviting leadership behaviors.

Method

Participants

Survey respondents were third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers in Florida. These grades were selected because the state's testing program begins in the third grade (third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students take the FCAT reading and mathemat-

ics tests; in addition, fourth graders also take the FCAT writing test). All 67 Florida school districts were invited to participate in this study. Of the 67 districts, 34 districts (50.7% of all districts) agreed to participate in the study. We contacted the principals at all of the elementary schools in the districts agreeing to participate a total of three times: twice by email and once by letter. In the email correspondence, we asked principals to tell their teachers about the survey and to provide them with the website address for the survey. In the letter correspondence, we included 12 copies of a one-page flyer with an explanation of the study and the website address for the survey and asked the principals to distribute the flyers to their third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers. We received completed surveys from 708 teachers from 30 school districts (45% of all districts) in Florida.

Most of the teachers were female (88.5%) and White or Caucasian (91.0%), while 5.3% were Black or African-American, 2.6% were Hispanic, and 1.1% were of another race/ethnicity. Teachers ranged in age from 22 to 68 years old (M = 41.2 years old) and had taught school from one to 45 years (M = 13.4 years). A quarter (25.2%) of the teachers taught third grade, 37.4% taught fourth grade, 28.9% taught fifth grade, and 8.5% taught in a multiage classroom with at least some students in the third, fourth, or fifth grade.

Questionnaire Construction and Statistical Analysis

Teachers rated their principals' professionally and personally inviting behaviors by completing a 12-item questionnaire. Seven of the items assessed principals' professionally inviting behaviors and five items assessed their personally inviting behaviors. Teachers rated their principal on each item using a 5-point Likert-format scale (1 = very seldom or never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often or always). Teachers were asked to select the response that best described his/her own perception of his/her principal's leadership behaviors.

The questionnaire items were randomly selected from a larger set of scale items that have been shown to be reliable (for the entire set, see Asbill, 1994). A complete list of the questionnaire items used in this study is provided in Table 1. The fact that the Chronbach scale alphas were high for both scales (.92 for the Professionally Inviting Behaviors scale and .93 for the Personally Inviting Behaviors scale) indicates that the scale used in this questionnaire was as reliable as the original questionnaire. Correlations between items in the Professionally Inviting Behaviors scale (Professionally IB scale) ranged from .45 to .80 and from .62 to .86 in the Personally Inviting Behaviors scale (Personally IB scale).

Descriptive statistics were computed for each of the questionnaire items. In addition, a scale mean was computed for both scales by averaging the mean values of all of the items in the scale. Both mean scale scores were correlated with several variables and *t*-tests and ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether there were differences in the means for several variables.

Results and Discussion

Professionally Inviting Behaviors

The means and standard deviations for both scales and each questionnaire item are shown in Table 1. Overall, the mean of 4.26 for the Professionally Inviting Behavior scale was larger than that of the mean of 4.16 for the Personally Inviting Behavior scale. In the remainder of this section, we discuss some of the items in the Professionally and Personally IB scales and the relationship between the inviting behaviors and teachers' job satisfaction, school climate, and school accountability ratings.

For the items within the Professionally IB scale, principals were rated highest on their expectation of high levels of performance from co-workers (M = 4.59) and rated lowest on their ability to create a climate for improvement through collaboration and shared decision making (M = 4.00). However, even the lowest-rated item in this scale averaged a value of 4.00 that corresponds to the fact that they "often" exhibit this behavior.

The fact that the highest-rated item (expects high levels of performance from

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Each Questionnaire Item and Scale

	M [a]	SD
Professionally Inviting Behaviors scale (alpha = .92, N = 687)	4.26	0.80
1. Expects high levels of performance from co-workers	4.59	0.70
2. Communicates expectations for high academic performance from students	4.40	0.90
3. Has a sense of mission s/he shares with others	4.37	0.90
4. Provides opportunities for professional growth through meaningful in-service	4.25	0.92
5. Facilitates policies and procedures which benefit staff, students, and teachers	4.13	0.99
6. Offers constructive feedback for improvement in a respectful manner	4.07	1.15
7. Creates a climate for improvement through collaboration and shared decision making	4.00	1.13
Personally Inviting Behaviors scale (alpha = .93, N = 684)	4.16	0.95
1. Is polite to others	4.43	0.89
2. Demonstrates optimism	4.32	0.98
3. Cares about co-workers	4.25	1.06
4. Makes an intentional effort to treat others with trust and respect	4.23	1.11
5. Takes time to talk with faculty and staff about their out-of-school activities	3.58	1.29

[a] Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-format scale that ranged from: 1 = very seldom or never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often or always

co-workers) and the second highest rated item (communicates expectations for high academic performance from students) were rated so highly is consistent with the research on effective schools in which the educational leader focuses on high expectations for students and the staff (Comer, 1999; Stedman, 1988). According to Purkey and Siegel (2003), "Being inviting with others professionally requires that the leader demonstrate intensity of commitment" (p. 106). This commitment to high expectations may be the catalyst principals use to mobilize others to produce superior performance and achieve higher levels of success. Kouzes and Posner (2002) contend that when leaders challenge others and enable them to reach peak achievements, they win respect and produce extraordinary results.

Teachers also rated their principals' Professionally IBs in the areas of sharing a sense of mission with others, providing opportunities for professional growth through meaningful inservice, and facilitating policies and procedures that benefit staff, students, and teachers. These behaviors require leaders to know their constituents and to speak their language. Leadership, in this sense, may be linked to the professional dialogue principals use to enlist, support, and imitate the hopes and aspirations of others seeking to accomplish the same goals and objectives. This type of behavior involves cooperation with others in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Deal and Kennedy (1985) have stressed the need for organizations to have strong values and symbols that bring people together in a manner that unites and gives meaning to their purpose. It is our stance that professional relations are established when leaders seek to find common interest and meet the mutually acceptable needs of the people within the organization. This enables everyone to have a chance to meet the expected outcomes.

It is not necessarily bad news that teachers rated their principals lowest on the items related to offering constructive feedback for improvement in a respectful manner and creating a climate for improvement through collaboration and shared decision making. These ratings indicate that the teachers still perceived these particular Professionally IBs of their principals as occurring "often." It is encouraging that given the pressures of the high-stakes testing program and accountability, that their teachers perceive principals so positively.

Personally Inviting Behaviors

On the Personally IB scale, principals were rated highest on their politeness to others (see Table 1). When individuals are polite to others and behave with consideration and good manners toward others, they are being respectful. Respect is apparent in the way individuals communicate messages to others, both verbally and nonverbally. Respect involves having an appreciation for the diverse and complex characteristics of each person and the unique value that each person brings to the culture. Peters and Waterman (1988) report that highly successful leaders display special characteristics of courteous and respectful behaviors to their employees. The fact that politeness was rated as the highest personally inviting

behavior is a positive sign because, as Purkey & Siegel (2003) noted, "Nothing is more important in Invitational Leadership than respect for people" (p. 7).

Another item rated highly by teachers was that their principal cared about his/her co-workers. We view this finding positively because, the ethic of caring is one of the most important personally inviting behaviors that enables the other behaviors to be manifested. Inviting leadership behaviors provide numerous ways in which leaders can expresses a sense of caring, along with a framework of practice that reflects this attitude to others in the organization (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Caring is an ethic that guides action (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hammer, 1990; Prillaman, Eaker, & Kendrick, 1994) and is reflected through modeling, dialogue, and practice that brings a feeling of ownership to members (Berg, 1992). Being cared for by their principal may be especially important during a time of test-based accountability when teachers have reported feeling a lot of pressure and stress (Jones & Egley, 2004).

Relationships Between Inviting Behaviors and Job Satisfaction, School Climate, and School Ratings

To assess whether there was a relationship between the Professionally and Personally IB scales, we correlated these two scales and found that there was a statistically significant relationship (r = .84, p < .001). We also correlated the Professionally and Personally IB scales with measures of teachers' job satisfaction and school climate and found that both scales were moderately correlated with these variables (see Table 2). In other words, the higher the teachers rated their principal in his/her professionally and personally inviting behaviors, the higher they rated his/her job satisfaction and the climate of the school. These findings are similar to those of Asbill (1994) and Egley (2003) who also found teachers' job satisfaction to be correlated with principals' inviting behaviors. Although these findings are only correlational, they provide evidence that when principals are professionally and personally inviting, they also tend to create a healthier climate in which teachers are more satisfied with their jobs.

Table 2. Correlations for the Variables of Interest

	Professionally IB	Personally IB
Personally IB	.84***	—
Level of job satisfaction [a]	.36***	.34***
School climate [b]	.65***	.61***
FCAT school grade [c]	.16***	.09*

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
[a] Teachers rated their job satisfaction on a 7-point Likert-format scale where: 1 = very dissatisfied, 4 = satisfied, and 7 = very satisfied
[b] Teachers rated their school climate on a 7-point Likert-format scale where: 1 = very unhealthy, 4 = somewhat healthy, and 7 = very healthy
[c] Each grade was assigned a numerical value: A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2, and F = 1

Another interesting finding was that principals' professionally and personally inviting behaviors were correlated with the FCAT grade assigned to the school by the state based on students' test scores (see Table 2). Again, these data are only correlational, but schools whose principals were more inviting tended to receive higher FCAT grades. This finding is similar to those reported in Mississippi, where principals' inviting behaviors were rated higher in higher-rated districts (Egley, 2003).

Further analyses using an ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences in the mean values for the Professionally and Personally IBs at each school grade level (see Table 3). In general, teachers at schools with higher FCAT school grades rated their principals higher on both the Professionally IB scale and the Personally IB scale (and statistically significantly in some cases; see Table 3). For instance, teachers at the highest-rated schools (i.e., "A" schools) rated their principals higher on the Professionally Inviting Behaviors scale than teachers at schools rated a "C" or "D." One exception to this general trend was that the teachers at the schools graded an "F" rated their principals higher than would be expected by the trend at the other schools. This finding may be due in part to the fact that the group of teachers at schools receiving an "F" grade was relatively small (N = 13); and therefore, this group may not have been representative sample of teachers from all F-rated schools.

These findings are worthy of note because they indicate an association between the manner in which principals interact with their faculty and the achievement level of students. This suggests that effective principals focus not only on ways to improve student achievement directly, but are also perceived as being more inviting by their teachers. These findings provide some means of validation for what invitational education theorists have said for several years: that improving the interactions among and between teachers and principals is a significant factor in the school improvement process (e.g., Barth, 1991).

Table 3. Mean Comparisons by FCAT School Grade

	FCAT School Grade					
	A	B	C	D	F	F-Value
	N = 235	N = 166	N = 203	N = 28	N = 13	
Professionally IB scale	4.44 [c,d]	4.23	4.09 [a]	3.85 [a,f]	4.68 [d]	8.21***
Personally IB scale	4.27 [d]	4.14	4.07	3.66 [a]	4.47	3.50 **

$* p < .05$; $** p < .01$; $*** p < .001$
Scheffe mean comparisons were used to test all possible pairs. Different superscripts for a particular variable indicate differences between groups at the $p < .05$ level. Superscript "a" indicates the "A" schools group, "c" indicates the "C" schools group, "d" indicates the "D" schools group, and "f" indicates the "F" schools group.

Limitations

As with any study, this study has several limitations that may limit its generalizability. First, the results of this study represent the teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership behaviors. We have not documented the actual practices of the principals. Second, we do not know how the non-respondents might have differed from those teachers who completed the survey. Third, the results do not consider all of the variables that have been established by earlier research to determine the effects of professionally and personally inviting behaviors of the principals. Fourth, Florida might have unique factors that make the findings less generalizable to principals in other states. Finally, we do not know if these results are generalizable to middle or high school principals. Teachers in the upper grades might perceive their principals' leadership behaviors differently than elementary school teachers. Nonetheless, we believe that the findings provide a picture of how some elementary teachers in one state are reacting to the leadership behaviors of their educational leaders.

Conclusion

Despite the pressure of test-based accountability, teachers report that principals demonstrate fairly high levels of inviting leadership behaviors. Interestingly, principals at higher-rated schools tended to exhibit higher levels of professionally and personally inviting behaviors. These results extend and support the research of Invitational Education Theory as having merit in transforming the school setting by focusing on the interactions between teachers and principals. In a time of test-based accountability when principals often focus solely on improving student test scores, these findings underscore the importance of creating and maintaining an inviting climate that fosters respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality.

Note

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