

Perceptions of Relationship-Oriented Leadership Behaviors: A Descriptive Case Study

Dissertation

By

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Joyce Yvonne Tyner-Johnson. You were my first teacher and supporter. Thank you for teaching me how to believe in myself regardless of the circumstances, to push through and shine in a world that is constantly trying to dim my light, and most importantly how to never give up. You have been a constant supporter throughout my life and have always been there when I needed you the most. Thank you for always lending an ear and offering encouraging words when I couldn't find the words to encourage myself. Your unselfishness and consistent sacrificing of your time, finances and energy to ensure I had everything I needed will never be forgotten. Thank you for staying by my side and never giving up on me. There were times when situations got rough for us, but you saw it through, even when others decided not to. Last but not least, thank you for loving me unconditionally. I owe you this dissertation and so much more because without you, I would definitely not be who I am today. I hope you're proud!

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“By perseverance the snail reached the ark.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship-oriented leadership behaviors teachers and principals perceive as being most important to the role of principal leadership. The study also focuses on how the perceptions between teachers and principals differ. Research indicates principals as being the catalyst behind and building and maintaining effective relationships with teachers. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders serve as a framework for principals by providing them with standards that convey relationship-oriented characteristics leaders need to possess in order to be effective. The following study uses a mixed methods research design to collect data through online surveys and interviews. The surveys and interviews used in the study aid in determining what relationship-oriented leadership behaviors are most important to teachers and administrators. The data from the study also aid in determining additional relationship-oriented behaviors deemed important to the principal-teacher relationship, undesirable principal behaviors, the effects relationship behaviors have on teachers professionally and personally, as well as the effects of the behaviors on school climate.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Leadership was the main catalyst behind improving schools and turning them around (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). According to *New Leaders for New Schools* (2009), “nearly 60% of a school’s impact on student achievement was attributed to principal and teacher effectiveness” (p. 5). If a school was to successfully implement positive change, reach goals embedded into the school’s vision and mission, and have a significant effect on reducing the achievement gap within schools, an effective leader was necessary (Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Johnson, 2007). According to the American Institute for Research (2010), effective leaders worked to transform school organizations into environments that focused on obtaining and utilizing all available resources in order to improve student learning and the school environment.

Effective leadership had key components that included providing a safe environment conducive to learning, recognizing and producing leaders, improving instruction, creating harmonious interactions and relationships among individuals within the school and community, and shaping a vision that implied all students could be successful (Harvey & Holland, 2011; Le Cornu, 2013). Effective leaders worked to engage the community in the learning process, keep teaching and learning at the forefront of the school day, and dispersed leadership to teachers throughout the school to enhance the learning environment (Harvey & Holland, 2011).

When leaders were effective, they worked towards facilitating change and leading effective learning communities (Gray & Lewis, 2012). Effective leaders worked diligently to set high expectations and maintain a supportive climate for students as well as teachers in order to sustain success throughout the school. When leaders created a climate that was indicative of trust, respect, support, and building of quality relationships, teacher retention was likely to increase (Ladd, 2011).

Effective leadership was important to teacher retention because the school administrator was one of the key factors in retaining teachers in a school (Carlson, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) projected that enrollment within the public school system was expected to grow to about 3 million students within secondary education by 2024. With that forecast, it was important that leaders worked to retain teachers currently within public school systems.

Teacher Retention

Teacher retention was one of the major issues that faced the educational system, especially in urban school districts (Waddell, 2010). Nationally, 16% of public school teachers left the profession on a yearly basis (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). According to Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, and Darling-Hammond (2016), teacher turnover was 50% higher in schools with a high-poverty rate than schools with low-poverty rates. Burkhauser (2016) posited that public school districts that served high poverty students often struggled with retention of teachers.

Internal and external factors determined whether or not a teacher stayed in an urban school or left the teaching profession altogether. Two of the main external factors that affected retention within the urban school setting were relationships with administrators (Waddell, 2010) and administrative support (Thibodeaux, Labat, Lee, & Labat, 2015). Supportive leadership from principals increased the desire for teachers to remain within high-poverty urban school districts and created an environment where teachers felt valued personally and professionally (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015; Waddell, 2010). In a three-part study conducted by The Research Alliance for New York City Schools with over 4,000 full-time middle school teachers between the years of 2002 and 2009, researchers found retention was a problem. The study revealed among middle school teachers within the state, “27% left their school within the first year of

entering the profession, 55% left within the first three years, and 66% left within the first five years” (Marrinell & Coca, 2013, p. 7-8).

The study divulged teachers were more likely to stay in a school that had strong leadership and a leader that was trustworthy and supportive of the teaching staff. Teachers who reported they were considering leaving their current school were asked to rate the importance of 14 factors that played a role in influencing their decision to leave. Student discipline problems were the highest factor (75%), lack of administrative support followed (66%), and lack of influence over other school policies and practices were listed at 56% (Marrinell & Coca, 2013). By fostering strong leadership practices, providing teachers with some control into the daily decisions of the school, and creating a climate that supported teachers, school principals were able to retain more teachers (Marrinell & Coca, 2013).

In a study of over 4,200 teachers in Alabama, supportive leadership was found to be the most important factor in determining whether or not teachers remained in their current school or transferred to another school. According to the Alabama study, teachers who had leaders who supported them, created positive learning environments, and communicated clearly, were less likely to leave the teaching profession (Hirsch, 2006). Teachers also responded when working in a school where administrators supported them when needed, 65% said they were less likely to leave the teaching profession (Hirsch, 2006). According to Hirsch (2006), 94% of teachers placed leadership as being important when deciding whether or not to work in a particular school and 83% placed leadership as being extremely important in influencing their decision to work in a school (Hirsch, 2006).

In 2010, Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation conducted a study of 40,000 teachers across the United States to identify factors that affected teacher retention. The

study found that across all 50 states, supportive leadership was ranked as the number one factor affecting teacher retention (Scholastic & Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). In the state of Alabama, 70% of teachers viewed supportive leadership as being the most essential factor in retaining them as a teacher as opposed to 49% for teacher collaboration; 47% for access to high-quality curriculum and teaching resources; 46% for higher salaries; and 15% for pay tied to performance. In a more recent study conducted by Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2013) with more than 20,000 teachers, researchers found high school teachers were more likely than teachers of other grades to cite lack of support as being one of the challenges they faced in public education today.

Aside from the overall teacher retention crisis, the shortage and retention of minority teachers in the educational system was an issue. A significant amount of minority teachers were employed in urban districts and served high-minority, and urban communities. The shortage of minority teachers was important because minority teachers were two to three times more likely than non-minority teachers to work at hard-to staff schools and were more prone to transitioning from school to school or out of the teaching profession as a whole (Ingersoll & May, 2011, 2016). The main factors affecting the high turnover for minority teachers within their schools was not having input into the school decision making when dealing with administration; having little to no instructional autonomy within their classrooms; and having less than desirable working conditions (Ingersoll & May, 2011, 2016). Schools that provided more instructional autonomy to teachers and that displayed higher levels of teacher input, displayed a lower levels of turnover from minority teachers. It was important for urban schools to pay close attention to the working conditions and job satisfaction of minority teachers because they were the schools that employed mostly minority teachers (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

Since administration played a role in student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) and whether a teacher decided to stay or leave the profession (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Hammond, 2016), it was imperative that states, districts and school systems paid close attention to the leaders that were hired in an effort to retain teachers. By reconstructing and implementing effective administration programs and standards within colleges and universities, future administrators were able to become effective instructional leaders as well as leaders that were knowledgeable of ways to increase student learning and improve teacher retention (Gray & Lewis, 2012; Hirsch, 2006). In 2004, the state of Alabama set out to take proactive steps in enhancing the leadership programs within their colleges and universities by restructuring their leadership programs to better prepare principals for effective leadership roles within their school systems (Governor's Congress on School Leadership Final Report, 2005). Georgia's Professional Standards Commission revamped leadership programs in 2016.

Alabama and Georgia Leadership Programs

Preparing principals to become strong supportive leaders who created productive climates and suitable working conditions for teachers, students, and parents were key to a school's success. When individuals entered a leadership masters program that prepared them for effective leadership roles, they were better able to play an active role in retaining and attracting new teachers within a system (Hirsch, 2006). According to Waddell (2010), principals had the ability to directly improve or affect teacher retention therefore; it was imperative principals left school administration preparation programs prepared to meet the needs of teachers, students, and the community at large.

Over the past decade, there was a shift to move principals from school managers to instructional leaders (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). Colleges across the nation

faced criticism regarding the programs and processes used to certify and prepare school principals (Southern Regional Education Board, 2004, 2007). According to Levine (2005), the development of leaders was at an all time low as many of the leadership programs were willing to accept anyone who paid for entrance into a program, a curriculum that lacked rigor, and awarding degrees to students who were only in search of a pay increase. Many state departments of education agreed leadership programs needed review and the Wallace Foundation and the Southern Regional Education Board took a major leadership role working with districts across the nation concerning the needs involved in improving leadership within their perspective districts and states (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010).

According to Hess and Kelly (2005), many of the principals graduated from the existing programs were unsure of themselves and ill prepared to do the job. According to Hess & Kelly (2005), one of the main reasons principals were not prepared was due to the curriculum used in many of the principal preparation programs across the United States. In 2004 Hess and Kelly conducted a study that analyzed syllabi collected from leadership programs throughout the United States. The 210 syllabi collected were broken up into 2,424 course weeks and were taken from 4 core classes students were required to take in all leadership programs. Hess and Kelly (2005) discovered not enough course time was spent on issues considered important by superintendents and other key stakeholders. The syllabi and analyses revealed 16% of total coursework was geared towards analyzing data and accountability results, 15% on managing personnel, and 12% on adaptation to an organization's beliefs and value system.

With the criticism came the initiative for several colleges and universities across the nation to redesign and revamp their leadership programs to aid them in better selecting, retaining, and preparing future leaders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Southern

Regional Education Board, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2006). In 2007, researchers Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen identified a list of conditions that needed to be in place to aid colleges and universities to produce effective leaders. The conditions included creating university and district partnerships; being more selective of future leaders admitted university programs; rigorous coursework; residency experiences with neighboring school districts; effective mentoring programs; and cohort programs for all students. All six components had to be in place in Alabama and Georgia universities before students could be admitted into the newly structured Alabama and Georgia programs (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010).

The Southern Regional Board for Education Leaders (2007) suggested each state create a “learning-centered school leadership system” (p. 1) that encompassed learning focused leadership standards; recruitment of individuals who seriously desired to be in the leadership field; rigorous leadership preparation programs; tiered licensure; alternative licensure; professional development for leaders; and conditions to aid in improving teaching and learning. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (2007), leaders in the 21st century needed to be learning centered and have academics as a focus as well as knowing how to lead and support teachers.

Alabama became one of the first states along with Louisiana and Maryland to move towards making “promising progress” towards the restoration of their leadership programs (Southern Regional Board for Education, 2007, p. iii). In an effort to improve the quality of leaders and the teaching and learning process in public schools throughout the state of Alabama, Governor Bob Riley launched a statewide redesign initiative to aid colleges and universities in revamping their leadership programs across the state in 2004 (Governor’s Congress on School Leadership Final Report, 2005). Governor Riley created five task forces that were assigned

distinct areas of improvement. The areas included: (1) standards for preparing and developing principals as instructional leaders; (2) selection and preparation for school leaders; (3) certification of school leaders; (4) professional development to support instructional leaders; and (5) incentives and working conditions to attract and retain a quality principal in every school (Governor's Congress on School Leadership Final Report, 2005). The task forces were made of "200 individuals from K-12 organizations, higher education institutions, the Alabama State Department of Education, education foundation agencies, professional associations, businesses, community leaders, and the State Regional Education Boards and were known as the Governor's Congress on School Leadership" (Governor's Congress on School Leadership, 2005, p. 13; Kochan, 2010).

Redesigning of Alabama leadership programs was implemented in two phases. One phase involved issuing a request for proposal to colleges to create model programs for other colleges to follow at a later date. Phase two required all colleges and universities to restructure their leadership programs to fit state requirements (Kochan, 2010). By revamping goals, standards, and requirements for leadership programs, institutions and districts were better able to discourage individuals applying to leadership programs for salary increases rather than to make improvements in student achievement, gains towards social and economic progress, and increasing teacher professional development (Fry, O'Neill, & Bottoms, 2005; Gray & Lewis, 2012).

Since the creation of Governor Riley's initiative, the state of Alabama made progress in recruiting and selecting future leaders, redesigning their principal-preparation programs at several of their universities, developing programs with school-based experiences, and providing training and support for leadership teams in low-performing schools (Southern Regional Board

for Education, 2007; Southern Regional Board for Education, 2010). In 2010, Alabama was noted as one of the top three states of 16 Southern Regional Board for Education states in regards to the adequacy of their preparation programs of leaders (Southern Regional Board for Education, 2010). Alabama also aligned their leadership standards with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards and named their standards the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders. Since then, the leadership programs and standards for instructional leaders in Alabama continue to provide Alabama leaders with direction and guidance towards effective leadership practices (Southern Regional Board for Education, 2010).

Georgia leadership programs were designed with the Georgia Educational Leadership Standards and the Georgia Leader Keys Effective System at the forefront. Incorporating the two sets of standards aided leadership programs and school systems within Georgia to collaborate in order to create performance expectations for future leaders. Performance expectations were differentiated by tiers and worked together to create meaningful experiences for future leaders (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2015). Georgia's leadership program was divided into two tiers; Tier I and Tier II. Tier I placed emphasis on Instructional Leadership to impact the improvement of teaching and learning and led to entry-level certification. Tier II educational leadership programs addressed all standards and required clinical experiences (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2015).

According to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2015) "Tier I programs are open to any individual who meets the admission requirements of the Education Preparation Provider and Tier II programs are open to those who have completed Tier I leadership certification or the equivalent" (p. 5). Individuals admitted into the Tier I program were required to provide a minimum of 250 hours of clinical experience in order to demonstrate effectiveness

in administrative leadership. Individuals admitted into the Tier II programs were expected to participate in “a performance-based residency program providing significant opportunities for candidates to demonstrate leadership dispositions and synthesize the knowledge and practice (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2015, p. 9). Preparation programs within each state were vital because they prepared future leaders to be effective, build relationships, and prepared them for maintain working conditions and organizations that fostered healthy relationships.

According to Sutchter, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas (2016) and Ladd (2011), teachers’ working conditions played a significant role in whether or not teachers decided to stay in a school, left a school, or left the profession as a whole (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Ladd, 2011). According to Ingersoll, Merrill and Stuckey (2014), teachers cited working conditions as being one of the leading reasons they feel dissatisfied with their job.

Teacher Working Conditions

According to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015), leaders were expected to create caring and supportive environments for students and teachers, as well as create and sustain positive working conditions. Working conditions were considered to be the “physical features, organizational structures, sociological features, political features, cultural features, and psychological features” that made up a school environment (Johnson, 2007, p. 2)

Cucchiara, Rooney & Robertson-Kraft (2015) posited working conditions referred to how social and organizational conditions within a school affect teachers and students. In order to retain high quality teachers within high poverty schools and communities, teachers needed to be provided with working conditions that enhanced the school culture, and allowed teachers to feel supported by administration. When teachers did not feel supported by their administrators,

attrition rates' increased dramatically (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

Teachers felt working conditions were suitable when they felt supported (Cucchiara, Rooney & Robertson-Kraft, 2015).

When administrators were supportive and created positive working conditions for teachers, the environment was positive, teachers had clarity on what was expected, and they were able to focus most of their time on the instruction of students. In contrast, when the working conditions were unfavorable, there was instability and inconsistency, which caused teachers to feel frustrated and powerless (Cucchiara, Rooney & Robertson-Kraft, 2015). Aside from creating positive working conditions for teachers, building positive relationships with teachers was necessary. When leaders worked to build positive relationships with teachers, teacher working conditions, retention, job satisfaction, and productivity improved (Waddell, 2010).

Relationships in the School Setting

When teachers had mutual respect and responsive relationships with leaders, they were able to build resilience within the teaching profession, had an increase in self-esteem, and developed a positive teacher identity within the profession (Le Cornu, 2013). Positive and quality relationships with teachers led to emotional support, friendship, personal growth, mentorship, and assistance in completing tasks (Colbert, Bono, Purvanova, 2016). Positive relationships created change within school districts and moved organizations forward in a positive way (Fullan, 2001). Effective leaders nurtured relationships by engaging in purposeful interactions with their followers and the people with whom they came in contact with (Fullan, 2001). Developing and maintaining relationships within the school setting and creating a sense of belonging through a positive culture was vital to a school's success.

When organizations were successful, principals were concerned with the daily lives of people within the organization and possessed a desire to develop relationships. With positive relationships, support, and nurture from principals and teachers within a school, students found the motivation to go to school and worked more diligently towards reaching goals (Habegger, 2008). Building and maintaining relationships, as well as effective leadership were key resources when dealing with students who lived at or below the poverty level and when dealing with teachers who worked within those types of districts (Johnson, 2007; Payne 2005).

According to Payne (2005), there were four reasons that allowed individuals to break free from poverty and they were: (1) “it’s too painful to stay; (2) a vision or goal; (3) a key relationship; or (4) a special gift or talent” (p. 3). Relationships offered a support system to individuals in poverty by providing them with role models, opportunities to learn, and an increase in an opportunity to be successful. Individuals who made it out of poverty into the middle class status attributed the success to relationships formed with a teacher, administrator, coach or a person who took an interest in them as an individual (Payne, 2005).

According to the United States Census Bureau (2016), the official poverty rate in the United States is 13.5%. There were a total of 43.1 million people living in the United States at the poverty level. Of the 43.1 million people living in poverty, 14.5 million were children under the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). This was important because socioeconomic status was one of the key determinants of high school dropouts. Although, living in poverty did not directly mean a child will drop out of school, it did suggest show living conditions were favorable towards a child dropping out. Within poor urban communities, schools served as social institutions that aided students in moving out of poverty (Petrick, 2014). The bonds and relationships that were created and modeled for students from principal to teacher, teacher-to-

teacher, principal to student, and teacher to student were all important to the overall climate and success of a school.

Effective leaders built, maintained, and created relationships, valued people, and upheld values and morals within their organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1999). When leaders displayed effective leadership behaviors, they set the tone for an organization and displayed how they felt about themselves, their colleagues, their followers, and their organization. When a leader was effective, they created meaning within an organization and set clear standards that worked towards bringing out the best in people and the organization as a whole. If a leader was to truly be successful, they had to love people (Dourado, 2007). Dourado posited that displaying love towards a follower meant showing concern about what was important to them, what motivated them, and helping them to reach their full potential.

Statement of the Problem

According to Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016), teacher shortages were at the forefront of the educational system. By 2020 an estimated 300,000 teachers will be needed to fill teacher positions within the United States educational system and by 2025, that number will increase annually to 316,000 (Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). With the lack of supportive leadership listed as one of the top reasons as to why teachers left the profession (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Hammond, 2016), it benefited researchers and the education community at large to determine what role leader-follower relationships played in the overall success of a school, school climate, retaining teachers, and the professional and personal lives of teachers. Determining the importance of the leader-follower relationship and desired relationship behaviors through the teachers' perspective, aided principals, graduate leadership

programs, state departments of education, and school districts in grooming and developing leaders who placed supporting and encouraging teachers at the forefront.

Research Questions

The researcher proposed to investigate the relationship-oriented leadership behaviors teachers and principals perceived as being the most important and why those behaviors were important to teachers and principals. The researcher also aimed to discover what behaviors teachers and principals deemed as being undesirable and how certain behaviors affect teachers professionally and personally. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders identified several relationship-oriented leadership behaviors considered important to effective leadership. Research questions for the study included:

1. What do teachers perceive as being the most important relationship-oriented leadership behaviors in school principals?
2. What do principals perceive as being the most important relationship-oriented leadership behaviors in their roles as principals?
3. To what extent do the perceptions of the most important relationship-oriented leadership behaviors differ between teachers and principals?

Conceptual Framework

Relationships created and maintained between principals and teachers were an important aspect of effective leadership and creating a successful school organization. When principals formed quality relationships with teachers, they showed teachers they were valued and appreciated within the school. In order for principals to operate successful schools, they needed to build positive relationships with teachers by displaying positive relationship-oriented leadership behaviors. When principals displayed positive relationship-oriented leadership

behaviors with teachers, they aided in improving teacher retention, working conditions, job satisfaction, school climate, and student achievement. Due to the role teachers and principals both played in the daily operation of the school, it was vital to investigate which relationship-oriented leadership behaviors were important to the principal-teacher relationship. Figure 1 displayed the components that were important to the development of the study.

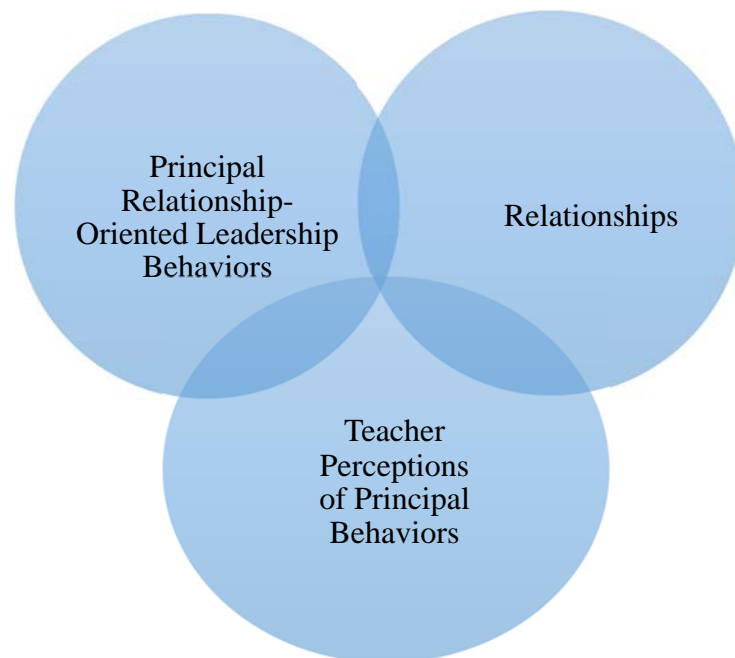


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of components related to principal relationship-oriented leadership behaviors, teacher perceptions of principal behaviors, and relationships.

Significance of the Study

Teachers valued suitable working conditions, positive relationships, and support from their principals. According to Colbert, Bono, and Purvanova (2016), support was a precursor to a thriving working environment and positive working relationships. When support was present, relationships, personal growth, friendships, professional identity, and nurturing for the worker as a whole developed (Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016). When teachers had supportive leaders