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***Leadership behaviour of secondary school principals: what do
principals and teachers say.***

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to further explore and confirm the findings of a previous study (Barnett, McCormick and Conners, 2000) which suggested that transformational leadership behaviours of school principals in New South Wales secondary school were associated with school learning culture.

Four principals and eleven classroom teachers from four schools the principals of which had been identified, through the previous study as displaying transformational leadership, participated in the study. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used to collect data. Analysis identified patterns and themes that described leadership behaviours of the principals.

INTRODUCTION

Transformational approaches to leadership are increasingly advocated for schools as they continue to face the challenges of school restructuring. It has been argued that transformational forms of leadership are well suited to such challenges because of their potential to bring about the changes being demanded of schools and for building motivation, commitment and developing the capacity teachers will need to overcome the challenges associated with restructuring (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1997; Yukl, 1998).

Further, empirical evidence (e.g. Leithwood, 1994; Silins, 1994; Yammarino, Dubinsky, Spangler, 1998) in school settings has suggested that transformational leadership contributes to restructuring initiatives and the development of commitment and capacity. However, there is less evidence about the effect of transformational leadership on student learning outcomes. In addition, research evidence (Hallinger and Heck, 1998) has suggested that the effect of leadership on student learning outcomes is mediated by school conditions including, purposes and goals, school structure and social networks, people and school culture.

At the same time, research in the motivational domain (Maehr and Anderman, 1993; Maehr and Fyans, 1989; Maehr and Midgley, 1991; Maehr and Midgley, 1996) has amassed impressive evidence suggesting that the mediating variable, school learning culture can make a school a place in where teachers feel positive about their work and students are motivated to learn. A positive school culture has been found to be associated with higher student motivation and achievement, improved teacher collaboration and improved attitudes of teachers toward their job (Stolp and Smith, 1995). It is evident, that a principal is in a unique position to influence the norms, values and beliefs that shape policies, practices and procedures in a school. Some evidence has suggested that principals are able to do this (Deal and Peterson, 1990; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1997).

Thus, a significant challenge for leadership research is to investigate the school conditions that are likely to influence student learning outcomes, and examine the relationship between leadership and some school conditions that facilitate positive student learning outcomes (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study was adapted from a preliminary study of leadership and its relationship with teacher outcomes and school learning culture (Barnett, McCormick and Conners, 2001). According to this framework, teacher outcomes and school learning culture mediate the effect of leadership on student learning outcomes.

Transformational leadership in non school settings

James McGregor Burns (1978) first conceptualised two forms of leadership, transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership is based on an exchange relationship in which follower compliance (effort, productivity, loyalty) is exchanged for expected rewards. Transformational leaders raise followers' consciousness levels about the importance and value of designated outcomes and ways of achieving them. They also motivate followers to transcend their own immediate self interest for the sake of the mission or vision of the organisation.

Bass (1985) built on the ideas of Burns (1978) and proposed that leadership was composed of three dimensions: transformational, transactional and laissez faire. Bass (1985) viewed transformational and transactional leadership as distinct, but not mutually exclusive, processes and recognised that the same leader may use both types of leadership at different times in different situations. Contrary to Burns (1978), who considered transformational and transactional leadership as opposite ends of a continuum, Bass (1985) viewed transformational leadership as augmenting transactional leadership. In addition, Bass (1985) viewed transformational and transactional leadership as being made up of several underlying behavioural constructs.

Bass's most recent model (Bass and Avolio, 1997) proposed that transformational leadership can be identified by four distinct behavioural constructs. The first is idealised

influence (charisma) where leaders are role models and are respected and admired by followers. The next is inspirational motivation, where a leader motivates and inspires followers by providing meaning and challenge to their work. The third is intellectual stimulation, where a leader encourages followers to think creatively and approach situations in different ways. The fourth is individualised consideration, where a leader considers each individual's needs and assists them in their development. Three behavioural constructs identified transactional leadership. The first is contingent reward, where interaction between a leader and a follower involves an exchange. The second is management by exception (active), where a leader monitors to make sure mistakes are not made. The last one is management by exception (passive), where a leader only intervenes when things go wrong. A non-leadership construct known as laissez faire leadership, which reflects the absence of leadership and avoidance of intervention is also included in the model.

Transformational leadership in school settings

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) have extensively researched transformational leadership in schools and based on the work of Bass (1985) identified six dimensions of transformational leadership. The six dimensions include, building school vision and goals, intellectual stimulation, individualised support, symbolising professional practices and values, demonstrating high performance expectations and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, Steinbech, 1999).

The first three dimensions resemble Bass and Avolio's (1997) model. However, one difference is that idealised influence (charisma) and inspirational motivation are treated as one dimension of transformational leadership in Leithwood's model. The other three dimensions, symbolising professional practices and values (culture building), demonstrating high performance expectations and structuring are unique to schools and require further investigation to determine the extent of their relevance for schools.

Leithwood has recently added four dimensions of transactional leadership to this model based on a review of relevant literature. These four dimensions include establishing effective staffing practices, providing instructional support, monitoring school activities and providing a community focus (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000).

School Learning Culture

The view that schools have, reflect, or are 'cultures' is common (Deal and Peterson, 1990, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1996). The concept of school culture probably derives most immediately and directly from the oft-repeated observation that schools differ one from the other in the way they work as well as in the 'effects' that they have on the lives of children (Deal and Peterson, 1990, 1999; Sashkin and Walberg, 1993).

The concept of school culture embraces a wide variety of beliefs, goals, purposes, thoughts, knowledge and expectations (Deal and Peterson, 1990, 1999). However, the focus of this study is on a particular set of perceptions, thoughts and beliefs that have been found to be critical in determining motivation and student learning. Research in goal theory (Ames, 1990; Ames and Ames, 1989; Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Nicholls, 1989) has underscored the importance of perceptions of purpose in the determination of the nature and quality of investment in a task. Simply put, it is possible for schools to define teaching, schooling and learning in different ways and the choice of definitions has profound effects on motivation and student learning (Maehr and Midgley, 1991). Schools will have multiple goals, however, research on student achievement (Ames and Ames, 1989; Deal and Peterson, 1990; Maehr and Midgley, 1996) has indicated that teaching and learning occur in different forms, when guided by two different goals, task focus goals and performance focus goals.

A task focus goal is based on the belief that effort leads to success and the focus of attention is on the intrinsic value of learning. With task focus goals, the individual is oriented toward developing new skills, trying to understand his or her work, improving the level of competence or achieving a sense of mastery. In contrast, performance focus goals are based on the belief that the goal of learning is to do better than others or by achieving success with little effort. The focus of attention is on doing better than others do through grades and other rewards (Maehr and Anderman, 1993; Midgley, 1993; Midgley, Anderman and Hicks, 1995).

Purpose of the study

Central to most transformational leadership models (Bass and Avolio, 1997; Leithwood, et al. 1999) is charisma. One of the primary sources of charisma is the development and articulation of a compelling vision that inspires and motivates followers to higher levels of commitment and performance (Bryman, 1992). Indeed, the creation of vision is often viewed as the starting point for leader efforts to transform followers, groups and organisations (Awamleh and Gardner, 1999). However, a previous study (Barnett, McCormick and Conners, 2001) suggested that the positive effects of vision may be overestimated. Consequently, one of the purposes of this study was to more carefully investigate the influence of the transformational leadership behaviour, vision, in schools. A number of researchers (Conger, 1989; Holladay and Coombs, 1993; Tichy and Devanna, 1986) have suggested that visionary leadership behaviour is composed of two stages, the creation of vision and the communication of vision to followers and others. Thus, a primary research question and a number of secondary research questions were developed from the research purpose using this perspective. The research questions are shown below:

1. What influence does vision have in schools?
2. What is understood by the term school vision in schools?
3. What are the foci of school visions?
4. How is school vision developed?
5. How is commitment to school vision developed?
6. What are the expectations of principals for teachers in schools?

METHOD

Conceptual framework

The research questions were used to develop a conceptual framework that guided the research design, areas to be investigated, sample selection, data gathering methods and data analysis.

Sample selection

The school sample was identified in a previous study. The schools in the sample were identified by the transformational leadership practices of principals, which were characterised by individual concern and vision. Four schools were contacted by telephone

and asked if they would be involved in the study and all four schools agreed to participate. Thus, four principals and eleven randomly selected classroom teachers from the four schools were interviewed; three teachers from each of three of the schools and two from one school. Despite repeated attempts to meet with the third teacher from the latter school, time constraints made this interview impractical.

Data gathering

Interviews

Interviews were semi-structured and conducted face to face with individual principals and teachers. Principals were asked to respond to twenty-six questions concerning school leadership and school goals. Teachers were asked to respond to sixteen questions concerning aspects of school leadership. The interviews were approximately sixty minutes in duration for principals and forty minutes for teachers. The interviews were recorded on audio tape.

Interview procedures

The researcher introduced herself to the informant and told her/him a little about the general nature of the research and how the interviews were going to be conducted. This discussion covered the areas of confidentiality and anonymity, the motives and intentions of the researcher and how the information would be used. Other issues discussed included the interview protocol and the method of recording the interviews. These discussions helped to set the tone for the interviews and establish rapport. Interviewees were asked to read and sign the consent form before interviews were started. The interviews followed the interview protocols and the tape player was placed within reach of the interviewee.

Interview protocols

A semi-structured interview protocol was used in the interests of reliability. The interview protocol was based upon a series of open-ended questions that were developed after consideration of the literature and with research purposes in mind.

Thus, the interview questions concerning school vision concerned the principals' and teachers' understanding of the term 'vision', the content of the vision, the development of school vision, the building of shared vision in the school and the expectations of the principal for teachers.

The interview protocol encouraged informants to talk freely and openly about what they perceived to be significant. It also allowed for comparison between responses and ensured that issues considered to be crucial to the research were not neglected. The questions and the order in which they were organised, therefore, were designed to provide a common agenda for discussions between informants and the researcher. Each of the questions was accompanied by suggested prompts which could be used to obtain further details, invite the informant to elaborate or seek clarification (Patton, 1990).

Data analysis

Qualitative fieldwork in the four schools, which included fifteen interviews, inevitably yielded a large amount of data in the form of field notes, taped recorded interviews and the researcher's own recollections and impressions of interview experiences.

The large volume and diversity of the data made it necessary to organise them into smaller homogeneous units of information in order to begin to make sense of them. Consequently, the researcher arranged the data into segments of material based on an organising system derived from the issues raised in the open-ended interview questions.

The analysis of data from the field was deferred until the end of data collection. Thus, the interviews were transcribed and placed into transcript files. Careful reading of transcribed interview texts revealed that it was possible to identify patterns or categories in responses. It was clear that these categories could be separated into key concepts or themes that were cut and pasted onto cards. This process was explained to another researcher who independently read the transcripts and analysed the data using the same process. The two researchers discussed the tentative themes that seemed to be emerging from the data. This resulted in approximately 90% agreement between the two researchers with regard to emergent themes in the data. Questionable themes were discussed and debated between the researchers. As a result of these discussions the principal researcher made decisions about the themes that were emerging in the data. Thus, this process was not carried out in isolation, but checked independently.

The process was essentially one of cross-case analysis (Patton, 1990) one outcome of which was a two dimensional matrix based on the card index system with categories and themes related to leadership on one axis and the different sources of data, that is, principals and teachers on the other axis. The development of a two dimensional matrix made it possible to compare and contrast what principals and teachers had to say about leadership in schools. The richness of the insights provided by principals and teachers is reflected in the manner in which the research is reported.

Further, it was evident from the data that each theme was made up of phrases that identified it. Thus, the next step in the analysis was to identify the phrases that characterised different themes. A further step involved placing phrases into theme typologies that consisted of responses in which certain words were used in a certain context, and what linked these responses was the use of specific language and patterns in responses related to a theme. This type of analysis is complex because some informants said one thing and others contradicted them, and it was important to understand this contradiction in the interpretation of the data. In moving the analysis to the level of typology it was thought that patterns in responses and specific language could be identified. Each typology was examined and then propositions were generated. The propositions were placed across all identified themes and typologies to see whether there were more complex aspects and associations that needed to be included. Once the researcher had concluded that there was nothing more to be found in the data, the themes, typologies and propositions were interpreted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The length of this paper prevents the reporting of all the results from this study. Thus, this section initially provides background details of each school in the sample and addresses the research questions. Also reported are some findings with regard to the characteristics of leadership in schools that emerged from the data, which the authors thought were appropriate to include in a discussion of the results.

Background of schools

During the teacher and principal interviews it was possible to ascertain some background details concerning the four schools.

School A was a city school with approximately 800 students. The principal had been at the school for approximately eight years. The school was facing major change in 2001 and the principal and many of the staff mentioned that this future change was having an unsettling influence on the school.

School B was a city school with approximately 1000 students. The principal had been at the school for approximately three years. According to the current principal, the previous principal had been a visionary leader and had implemented major changes in the school. The school was currently renewing its vision with major projects instigated by the current principal.

School C was a school on the outskirts of Sydney with approximately 700 students. The principal had been at the school for two and a half years. The school had a poor reputation in the community and the principal and teachers were working towards raising standards and the development of a shared school vision.

School D was a country school with approximately 1000 students. The current principal had been at the school for approximately six years. According to the current principal, past principals had been visionary and the current principal continued to foster vision. The principal and the teachers both mentioned a recent industrial dispute as having an impact on the school.

Research questions

Primary research question: What influence does vision have in schools?

Since the results of the secondary research questions have implications for the primary research question these results are reported first, followed by a discussion of findings with regard to influence of vision in schools.

Secondary research questions

What is understood by the term school vision in schools?

School vision was seen by principals and teachers to be the future direction that the school community had agreed to pursue. Vision was seen to provide the school community with a sense of purpose and a picture of the future. Vision was collective in the sense that the school community had developed it together. It was not seen to be rhetoric but to involve action suggesting that little value was placed on a school vision that was not also practical. Further, vision was seen to be a stimulus for change.

What are the foci of school visions?

Principals and teachers said that vision was about being focused on individual student needs and the improvement of teaching and learning. Principals and teachers used terms such as 'identify individual needs' and 'meet the learning style of students' which reflected a focus on individual student needs. Both groups used words such as 'improve teaching',

'develop learning' and 'lot of professional development' to describe the emphasis on teaching and learning that was part of vision.

"The vision we have for our school is for it to be the best school. We have programs that allow students to reach their potential, we have a high academic focus but not at the expense of students who need academic support. We have a wide range of activities so that our students develop as well rounded people, our interaction with students is important so we develop people who feel good about being here and having been here" (Principal D).

"The vision describes us as a learning community, it links students, teachers, administrators and parents. Our goal is to improve teaching practice and shared decision making with the bottom line being impact on student outcomes... we see ourselves as lifelong learners and we work together to learn and find better ways to learn ... and we are trying to improve" (Principal A).

" We have a lot of professional development on lesson planning...how to take the students from rote learning to where they can do things without thinking about it...we are trying to put more effort into lesson planning...we are trying to lift our standards" (Teacher F).

" Our vision is to get students to do the best they possible can whether it be academic or performing arts" (Teacher B).

The visions expressed by principals were of their schools at their best. Two responses suggested that they accepted change and even had an appreciation for change but were not limited by it. They declared the need for the school community to communicate its values and its commitment to achieving its purpose.

"We are about equipping students for an appreciation of lifelong learning because we understand that things change, having respect for yourself and others because we want the learning to take place in an environment which is supportive and non-threatening and to be socially responsible and also to have enough confidence to project yourself into future roles" (Principal B).

Two principals noted that vision involved building relationships with teachers, students and parents and this suggested that they recognised this fostered commitment in teachers, parents and students to school vision.

"I would see relationships with students as paramount. Basically relationships are how the school has been built, relationships are genuine and positive between teachers and teachers and teachers and students and it is improving between teachers and parents and that's part of the overarching philosophy that I see emanating throughout the school" (Principal D).

The importance of a leader being relationship-centred was reported in a previous study (Barnett et al. 2001) and is also consistent with recent research on business leaders in England (Tampoe, 1998).

How is school vision developed?

The development of school vision involved staff and executive meetings, surveys, committees, workshops, professional reading and reflection. There are three interesting features, which need to be noted about these processes. One is that they encourage collaboration and build commitment to the development of school vision. The initiation of processes that were collaborative suggested recognition that school purposes and

internalised professional purposes of teachers need to be one and the same. Otherwise, there is likely to be little chance of realising the school's vision.

The second feature is the major role played by the principal in the initiation of these processes that were designed to get teachers, students, and administrators to collaborate in the development of the school's vision.

"We had a staff meeting and told them we were going to develop one (vision) together ... we (the deputy and principal) visited schools where we knew best practice was occurring and we did a fairly extensive literature search on effective schools and leadership selecting five outstanding pieces of writing and told them we would read one each week ... that worked fairly well ... we then ran workshops after school ... (we pulled the executive out) and they (teachers) did a series of questions and answers based on best teaching practice and the executive spent a whole day processing the data that had come from teachers ... from that we developed the vision statement" (Principal A).

One teacher's description of vision development illustrates the principal's role in initiating formal processes that were intended to encourage teacher commitment to the development of school vision.

"When I first came to the school the principal and deputy were new ... they both had visions for the school. They held a whole weekend and sat down with teachers and said where do you want to go in this school and got everyone involved" (Teacher F).

It seems that principals invested large amounts of time and energy in order to encourage collaboration within the school community with regard to development of school vision. These findings are supported by research reported by Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford (2000). In addition, these results suggest that these principals recognised that leadership was not about imposing their own vision on a school community. It was "about developing a shared sense of destiny and enrolling others so they can see how their own interests and aspirations are aligned with the vision and can thereby become mobilised to commit their individual energies to its realisation" (Kouzes and Posner, 1995, p124).

The third feature was that the development of school vision involved a lengthy, collaborative process. This suggested that these principals recognised the need to involve those who must implement and live with the results of vision through collaboration, the opportunity to develop vision and thus gain a sense of ownership. Without this shared sense of creation and shared responsibility, excellence is not possible (Caudron, 1993). Paradoxically, leadership is more essential not less, when collaboration is encouraged (Kouzes and Posner, 1995).

In addition, the processes described by principals reflected the values of the school community that suggested each individual in the school community was valued and their opinions were considered in decision-making.

"All our decision making is by consensus ... it's messy ... it's a philosophy in our school that everyone's thoughts should be taken into account and it's a belief in ourselves that together we do things" (Principal D).

How is commitment to school vision developed?

It was evident that commitment and consensus to school vision were built through communication, consistency of principals' actions with a school's vision and involving teachers, students and parents in processes that were designed to make vision a reality.

The communication of vision by a principal meant that it was continually repeated and revisited whenever the opportunity arose. This highlighted the centrality of vision to school purposes, helped in its clarification and focused attention on it. Thus, in a sense, principals were the guardians of the visions, but they were not perceived to be the sole owners of the visions.

"We have staff meetings...the P&C meeting and any sort of public meeting I use to get across my expectations" (Principal C).

"It keeps coming up at teams meetings those vision statements keep coming up as the flavour ... there will always be something there relating to the (vision) so you can't avoid them" (Teacher A).

Consistency of leadership behaviours with vision provides evidence that a school principal can be trusted and hence, may build commitment and consensus for vision. According to McShane and Von Glinow (2000) leadership behaviours that demonstrate this type of persistence and consistency builds up an image of leadership that is trustworthy, honest and moral. Acting consistently suggests to followers that a leader is credible and competent in the capacities needed to move towards the goals of school vision and to make it a reality. In a sense, consistency of leadership with school vision establishes a principal's legitimacy to influence and introduce new ideas that may assist the school community in accomplishing its goals (Chemers, 2001).

Central to developing commitment and consensus among the school community was leadership, which was relationship oriented. This result is not surprising as an earlier study (Barnett et al. 2000) had suggested that leadership in schools is mainly characterised by a relationship between the leader and the individual follower. Thus, a school principal who showed individual concern was able to obtain the commitment and support of members of the school community because they knew her or him.

" You can approach the principal anywhere, anytime about anything the principal will be more than happy to do that, the principal is exceptionally interested in the welfare of every individual staff member and knows them from cleaning staff to office staff " (Teacher J).

Leadership behaviours that were perceived to show individual concern included being accessible, showing interest, providing support, being fair and providing rewards and recognition. Accessibility may have demonstrated to teachers that principals were prepared to deal with problems, issues and questions that might occur whether they be in relation to school vision or any other school matter (Blase, 1987). Showing interest may have shown teachers that the principal valued their contributions to the school. The provision of support may have provided teachers with the assurance that the problems that they may encounter when implementing school vision would be taken seriously by the principal and that assistance would be provided to help them overcome the problems (Leithwood et al.1999).

Fairness may have suggested to teachers that principals were aware that individual teachers have different needs and problems in relation to school vision and were willing to demonstrate equality through decision making, resource allocation, assignment of distasteful duties and recognition or rewards. Other research (Blase, 1987) has suggested that fairness contributes to a reduction in ambiguity and unpredictability and to increases in faculty solidarity. In addition, it reduces informal status differences and barriers to communication and support among teachers.

Recognition and reward were used to clarify school vision, to encourage individuals in the school community and to communicate to them that their efforts to make vision a reality were valued.

"He will talk about it at morning tea and he will support people and congratulate them when they achieve and the executive staff will also add their congratulations so I think they are reinforcing the notion " (Teacher G).

Distribution of leadership involved sharing power and responsibility with others.

"In terms of delegating authority whereas other principals may keep some responsibilities for themselves or the deputy ... our principal is quite happy to have volunteers from the staff to work on various areas of responsibility ... if there is a coordinator's role in the school that would be advertised on the notice board maybe 5-6 people would apply, they would all be interviewed and if they missed out they would be told the reason" (Teacher J).

Furthermore, past research (Tannenbaum, 1968 cited in Sergiovanni, 2000) has suggested that it is not so much strong leadership from the principal, but the total amount of leadership exercised in a school that counts. According to Sergiovanni (2000) leadership density is an under-valued and underused contributor to school effectiveness.

Recent research has shown the importance of sharing responsibility for leadership at different levels within an organisation (Fullan, 1992; Hopkins and Harris, 1997). According to Day et al (2000) schools need to be led by effective principals, but that leadership needs to be replicated through the school.

In addition, the actions of these principals suggested that they shared responsibility with the school community for the implementation of school vision.

"What I really respect is that if you run out of time doing your job he will actually put in the hard yards doing the job with you" (Teacher E).

Leadership behaviour was perceived to be consistent with vision when a school principal made decisions using vision to solve problems that confronted the school community. These actions made vision visible and practical for teachers.

"When I first came here I had an inefficient teacher who I put on a program that led to termination of her employment that led to a lot of staff opposition but, I have done that three more times now and I found that the support I had last time was really powerful, the staff were really angry that this teacher was coming to school and shafting students and not doing the right thing by them, not preparing lessons, not marking and missing deadlines and holding everyone up so there is shift in teacher expectations of their peers" (Principal A).

These principals encouraged participation and fostered collaboration among teachers, students and parents in processes that developed policies and structures, which provided the framework for the school community to act according to its vision.

"We say we value the right of every student to learn in a safe and supportive learning environment so what we have done is review the welfare and discipline policy in the school ...to make sure that this is possible" (Principal B).

What are the expectations of principals for teachers in schools?

These principals had high expectations of students and teachers and encouraged excellence in teaching and learning. They had a commitment to professionalism, a belief that all students could and should be given the opportunity to reach their potential and a commitment to improvement in teaching and learning. However, it was the actions of the principal which communicated these expectations including the provision of support through opportunities for collaboration, professional development, policies and structures that enabled the school community to achieve excellence.

"The principal is a team player, our vision is to encourage student development but the principal does it for us as teachers, the principal listens, knows our strengths, if there is weakness the principal will provide support ...the principal is a fantastic leader...knows the staff and is an educator and guide but we work together " (Teacher K).

The results concerning research question one, *"what influence does vision have in schools?"* are somewhat perplexing. School vision was seen to be important by these principals and teachers. Principals described school vision as the 'glue' that held everything together while teachers described school vision as having a 'positive' effect on a school.

"I actually think it is really important ... it's something that makes teachers have an ethos and if there are enough teachers sharing it and believing it, it makes for a healthy environment, I guess it's really important it's what keeps the school going if you look at the down side you would go home and it obviously must be a shared vision ... that's what makes you stay there ... if things are going bad that's what sees you through" (Teacher E).

It was evident from the earlier responses of teachers that they had been involved in collaborative processes to develop a shared school vision. However, many of these teachers suggested that vision did not influence teaching practices or cause them to question teaching practices.

"No, I don't think so ... it's called survival ... it's about getting through the curriculum and making sure that students are on task and accomplishing the task ... we have the vision but, don't think of it in terms of that you know you have survived the day you have achieved something ... I think most teachers are surviving on a day to day basis ... I think the administration are more concerned about the direction we are heading" (Teacher G).

"I know it's there (the vision) but it doesn't influence me when I am teaching " (Teacher C).

"I don't run my classroom any different to what I have done at any other time" (Teacher A).

The responses of teachers provided several possible explanations. First, individual vision had been translated into a shared sense of purpose in the school's vision. Hence, for some teachers they were already implementing the school's vision in the classroom.

"The vision doesn't really affect me because I want my students to work to the best of their ability no matter what anyway" (Teacher H).

Second, some teachers suggested that because they operated in 'survival' mode this prevented them from contemplating big picture issues like whether school vision is reflected in teaching practice. One teacher suggested that for a female colleague, school vision was not influential in the classroom.

"There is a girl on my staff and I think probably if she can have two out of five lessons each day which are productive then she is very happy because she knows that especially with one class it is just going to be a dog fight" (Teacher H).

Third, most of these teachers were not thinking about vision when they taught in the classroom but were focused on students, what they were learning and how they could encourage students to learn.

"I don't think I've got this vision in my head and I'm standing there thinking am I achieving that in I keep thinking back to the students what is interesting them, the vision isn't there for me to use it's subconscious" (Teacher B).

"Teachers are not concerned with the big picture of educational change how to fix things their job is to come to school prepared to teach students" (Principal A).

Finally, these teachers did not seem to make links between school vision, school structures, policy and classroom teaching practice. Teachers were able to describe structures and policies in the school that reflected school vision and how these had changed teaching practices, yet did not think that school vision had an influence in the classroom.

"We have longer periods that has changed the way people teach and act in the classroom if you have 75 minutes you have got to do different activities" (Teacher A).

"We don't worry about the school vision, it is produced for others ...I don't run my classroom different to what I have done at any other time" (Teacher A).

A number of researchers (Elmore et al. 1996; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Griffin, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989) have reported similar findings and have suggested several different explanations why teachers do not question their practices. For example, Griffin (1995) suggested that it in part it was because the professional norm was 'live and let live'. However, Elmore et al (1996) suggested that teaching habits are complex and deeply rooted and are not likely to be changed by school vision. Teachers find it extraordinarily difficult to attain the deep, systematic knowledge of practice needed to make vision a reality. Moreover, they do not automatically see the connection between school vision and its implications for teaching (Elmore et al. 1996). In addition, some other researchers (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Rosenholtz, 1989) have suggested that the isolated professional cultures common in schools, act as obstacles for teachers to engage in collaborative professional activities designed to encourage 'practical thinking', identified by Leithwood et al (1999) as necessary for change in teaching practices.

5.4. General findings about characteristics of leadership in schools

As has already been mentioned a number of leadership characteristics became evident as the study progressed and it was considered important to report them. First, there were differences in terms of the progress schools had made towards the development of a shared vision. This suggested that school contexts were different and may have limited a principal's ability to take the initiative in developing a shared school vision and build personal relationships, which in turn influence perceptions of leadership. For example, School A had developed a school vision and had established a culture to support it. School B was undergoing a renewal of its school vision and was involved in discussions that examined many of the issues raised in the interviews. School C was beginning to develop a school vision and did not yet have a school culture that was supportive of it. School D had developed its vision and developed a supportive school culture.

In addition, there was some evidence to suggest that context influenced how teachers perceived principal leadership. In terms of outside contextual variables, a week or two prior to these interviews, a particularly long, major industrial dispute was settled between teachers

and the NSW Department of Education and Training. A number of principals and teachers made reference to this dispute.

"We will do what we have to do, we are not acknowledged by the Department so why should we do it" (Teacher H).

"The industrial dispute was the only thing that took our eye off the ball" (Principal D).

In terms of school contextual variables, it was evident in School C that past events were particularly influential in the response of teachers to the principal's leadership.

"He would like to think that he has all on board (staff support) but there are people going the other way because he is not using the right processes to get their support and move them with him ... they say they have seen it all before and it never worked" (Teacher D).

"The staff on the whole were disillusioned and were looking for someone new to come and do something, but at the same time a lot of them were burnt out, so I have tried to present a lot of ideas to them even if their reaction is a bit cool ... we have not got a vision statement written down but we have spent time developing values and beliefs" (Principal C).

Conger (1999) has suggested that the leader and the context influence each other and that the degree of this influence is dependent on the situation. He argued that contextual variables can be thought of in terms of an outer and an inner organisational context. The outer being the environment beyond the organisation and the inner including the organisation's culture, structure and power distribution. Several studies (Conger, 1989; Roberts and Bradley, 1988) have suggested that some situations are more receptive to transformational leadership.

Second, these principals displayed leadership behaviours that were transformational in the sense that they "raised one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p. 426). Further, they were concerned with exploring conventional relationships and organisational understandings through involvement and participation, characteristics described by Burns (1978) as transformational leadership. However, the data suggested a complexity of leadership that is not captured in some models of transformational leadership, for example, Bass and Avolio (1997). Not included in the Bass and Avolio (1997) model and evident in this study were important behaviours such as building relationships and sharing of power and responsibility, in essence, distributing leadership. These results are consistent with Day et al (2000).

In fact, the transformational leadership behaviours were more consistent with those proposed by Leithwood et al (1999), which included setting directions, developing people and organising and building relationships with the school community. Considering that most of the research on transformational leadership has used the multifactor questionnaire, which is based on Bass (1985) or Bass and Avolio's model (1997) this result casts doubt on using only the multifactor questionnaire.

Also, transactional leadership, ensuring that policies, teaching programs and teaching practices were meeting external requirements, and transformational leadership, building competence, autonomy and achievement of individuals within the school community, were described by these principals.

"The deputy, myself and the leading teacher spend time with head teachers and we do like an audit ...and we do this several times a year" (Principal B).

"I rely very much on my deputy, leading teacher and head teachers to inculcate that monitoring and see what is going on in classrooms" (Principal D).

"It's your head teachers ... they are your front line troops ... they are so needed in the school ... they are responsible within their faculty ... but that is where it can all fall apart in a high school, you can have the vision and the strategies as principal but unless you have the head teachers supporting you and you are supporting them ... because they are the ones who are day to day no matter how hard you try you are still remote from the classroom (as principal) ...so it's through head teachers" (Principal A).

Further, it is significant that the responsibility for management was given to deputies, leading teachers and head teachers. This suggested that principals regarded management as important and also provided them with an opportunity to demonstrate trust and respect for the abilities of those in school management positions.

This result is consistent with other research (Eden, 1998) that suggested transformational leadership is effective when it incorporates transactional leadership practices that are sensitive to teachers and accepted by them. Indeed, Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) argued that these types of management practices are required in schools because "the right things need to be done and they need to be done right" (p.314).

Last, these principals demonstrated a relationship-oriented approach to leadership. This finding is consistent with Bolman and Deal (1997) who have suggested that school principals tend to read and respond to day-to-day challenges from a human resource frame. However, the approach to leadership was more than showing a general well meaning consideration of members of the school community, these principals fostered genuine relationships with individuals in the school community and it was through these relationships that they established and expressed their leadership.

"Basically relationships are how the school has been built long before I came on the scene, the relationships are genuine and fairly positive" (Principal D).

"I have spent a lot of time and have a lot of fun building relationships because I really like people and working with them, but that to me is the essence of what this is all about building up that sense that we as a team can go anywhere" (Principal B).

In addition, these principals were able to provide support and encouragement or direction that was unique to each individual's needs and development because they knew them.

"The principal is a team player, our vision is to encourage student development but the principal does it for us as teachers, the principal listens, knows our strengths, if there is weakness the principal will provide support ...the principal is a fantastic leader...knows the staff and is an educator and guide but we work together " (Teacher K).

Limitations of the study

The main limitation of the study stems from the small sample. Obviously four schools, four principals and eleven teachers provided a range of insights into leadership behaviours, but firm generalisations cannot be drawn from such a small sample. These findings need to be validated with another larger sample of schools, principals and teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the limitation of the study, the authors believe that there is a number of conclusions that can be drawn from this study. First, vision was an important transformational leadership behaviour that provided the schools in this study with direction and purpose. Vision included leadership practices such as, building a shared vision, developing consensus and commitment for vision and expression of high expectations. It seems that building a shared vision involved the initiation of collaborative processes within the school community to develop a shared vision. This helped to bind people together and establish group ownership of school vision. Consensus and commitment to school vision were developed through leadership practices such as communication, leader credibility and the involvement of the school community in collaborative processes. Similarly, high expectations were expressed through leadership practices, including communication, consistency of leader actions, distributed leadership and provision of structures and resource support to achieve excellence.

Second, most models of transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1997; Leithwood et al. 1999) assume that it is the leader who articulates a vision that motivates and inspires followers to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the organisation. Vision is no doubt an important part of leadership, but evidence from this study suggests that it must reflect the needs, interests, values and beliefs of the school community (Sergiovanni, 1990). Simply, developing a vision may not be enough to motivate followers to higher levels of effort and performance. Vision needs to be grounded in some level of practicality otherwise followers may view it as unrealistic or wishful thinking (Berson, Shamir, Avolio and Popper, 2001). Indeed, other research (Pawar and Eastman, 1997) has shown that vision is likely to be more or less appealing depending on the extent to which it appears to be relevant to a particular context. Further, the inspirational strength of a vision appears to depend partly on the degree to which it reflects the interests and characteristics of an organisation and its employees (Pawar and Eastman, 1997).

Third, vision by itself was not enough to influence what members of the school community actually did. Yet, vision gets the most attention in the literature. According to Meindl (1990) people tend to overestimate the effects of leadership because they have implicit theories about organisations, which they attribute to the powerful effects of leadership. People tend to inflate the importance of leadership in explaining organisational events because of attribution errors, stereotyping and the need for situational control (Ayman, 1993; Lord and Hall, 1995; Salancik and Meindl, 1984). Meindl (1990) contended that the heroic descriptions of leaders in transformational leadership theory are consistent with these romantic distortions. Furthermore, Meindl (1990) asserted that follower motivation and inspiration might occur independently of a leader.

The fact that vision had little influence on changes in teaching and learning practices suggests the possibility that its effect may be overestimated. It is acknowledged that this result needs to be interpreted cautiously. However, the schools in this study had engaged in collaborative processes leading to the development of shared vision, but this had not resulted in teachers questioning teaching and learning practices. Moreover, this result is consistent with a previous study (Barnett et al. 2001) and Stevenson (2001) who reported that schools may construct governance structures, develop a shared purpose and sense of community, processes and a culture that promotes inquiry in some areas, but underlying assumptions and values concerning teaching and learning may remain unquestioned.

In addition, contrary to what might be expected the study suggested the possibility that vision may not have the positive outcomes portrayed in the literature. These findings are supported by a previous study (Barnett et al. 2001). A number of writers (Harrison, 1987;

Porter and Bigley, 1997) have argued that transformational leadership may be a liability in some contexts. Drawing upon examples of charismatic leaders, Conger (1989) found that negative outcomes for the leader and the organisation often occurred around vision. Vision was a problem when the leader made exaggerated claims about the vision or when they underestimated the resources necessary for its accomplishment. In addition, visions were a problem when they failed to reflect the needs and values of the organisation and changes in context that required a re-assessment of vision (Conger, 1999).

Fourth, it seems that school contexts were different and this moderated the influence, and the likelihood of transformational or transactional leadership behaviour of school principals.

Fifth, management practices such as the monitoring of policies, teaching programs and teaching practices were important in schools. Further, while principals retained ultimate responsibility for ensuring policies, teaching programs and teaching practices met external requirements, they had delegated the monitoring role to deputy principals and head teachers (departmental chairs). This meant that leadership was replicated through the school.

Last, building relationships with the school community was central to the leadership of principals in this study, because it was through these relationships that they established and maintained leader legitimacy, and encouraged commitment and effort towards making the goals of shared purposes a reality.

According to Chemers (2001) the decision to follow depends on the perception of the leader as credible and capable. Thus, a leader must be seen to be trustworthy and competent by followers. The evidence in this study suggests that school principals established and maintained their leadership credibility through the articulation and consistency of their example and actions with shared purposes.

In addition, school principals focused their attention on motivating and getting the school community as a group to apply their knowledge, capability and energy toward the attainment of shared purposes, but this was not at the expense of individuals. Indeed, the research suggested that the leadership behaviour, individual concern, which included accessibility, encouragement, provision of structures and resource support and recognition were fundamental, transformational leadership practices in schools. Individual concern was not simply being helpful and considerate towards members of the school community. The data suggested that these school principals knew members of the school community individually, and provided support through encouragement and recognition of individual efforts as well as direction and guidance based on individual needs and development. Effective motivation is based on a balance between an individual's wish for autonomy and need for structure (Chemers, 2001).

Implications for schools

The study has several implications for practicing principals. First, vision is important in schools. However, principals need to have a thorough understanding of vision and its role in schools. Principals should ensure that vision is relevant to context. Second, a principal should not overestimate the effect of school vision or underestimate the resources required for its accomplishment. Third, vision by itself may not be enough to actually influence what teachers do. It seems that a school wide approach may not encourage teachers to question underlying assumptions and values concerning pedagogy. Other researchers (Prestine and McGreal, 1997; Siskin, 1994) have suggested that it might be more appropriate for secondary schools to implement pedagogical change through departments or through grade level teams of teachers.

Fourth, a fundamental mechanism for leadership is likely to be relationships with individual members of the school community. Leadership in schools is mainly characterised by relationships with individuals, and it is through these relationships a principal is able to establish her/his leadership and encourage teachers to apply their abilities, skills and efforts towards shared purposes. It is important for principals to recognise that effective management behaviours are equally important in schools as transformational leadership behaviours.

Fifth, a principal should know that leadership is often exercised through management practices (Leithwood et al. 1997). For example, walking around the school provides information about what is being taught and the behaviour of students, and at the same time, offers the opportunity to reinforce values and expectations through communication with students and teachers (Leithwood et al. 1997).

Finally, as most principals would be aware the school contexts vary and so too, does the external environment. Principals should recognise the possibility that context may make leadership behaviours more or less effective. An important implication for a practising principal is that she/he must know and understand the contextual constraints placed on a school by the internal and external environment. Moreover, a principal must be able to adjust her/his leadership behaviours in order to ensure that leadership is relevant and assists a school towards positive outcomes.

Summary

In summary, the study highlights the necessity of additional research into a dimension of transformational leadership that is argued to be critical for organisational performance (Bass and Avolio, 1997; Leithwood et al. 1999). Future research needs to carefully investigate the relationship of vision (including its creation and communication) with actual changes in teaching and learning practices and school effectiveness.

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