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NOVICE PRINCIPALS' TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Article by Maria de Lourdes Vilorio, Gloria Palau, and Jeanette Montalvo

Abstract

Novice school principals' challenges range from school and curricular restructuring, pressures of accountability, and changing local initiatives. The interplay from these different variables leads some novice school principals to abandon their positions during their third year (Fuller & Orr, 2008). This narrative case study explored the relationship of the transformational and transactional leadership practices of two elementary novice principals. The first goal of this narrative case study was to complement course content with a field-based learning experience. Secondly, in this field-based theory to practice research experience, Educational Administration graduate students interviewed two novice school principals. Data analysis focused on the interplay of transformational and transactional leadership decisions when novice school principals address challenges like school and curricular restructuring, pressures of accountability, and changing local initiatives.

Introduction

Novice school principals' challenges range from school and curricular restructuring, pressures of accountability, and changing local initiatives. According to Shirrell (2015), "the tension between accountability and commitment may also be particularly strong for principals during their first years on the job" (p. 560). *Novice principal* is defined as a school principal who is within the first three years of his/her principalship (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). The interplay from these different variables leads some novice school principals to abandon their positions during their third year (Fuller & Orr, 2008). Novice school principals assume their roles with trepidation every school year. In this case, novice school principals could benefit from reading about novice school principals who have successfully navigated similar challenges during their first three years in their principalship. This research project addresses the theory to

practice gap in Educational Administration (Mendels, 2016). In addition, this narrative case study explores the transformational leadership of two elementary novice principals and its impact on teachers' "intrinsic motivation to teach, affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction" (Thomas, Tuytens, Devos, Kelchtermans, & Vanderlinde, 2018, p. 5).

Theoretical Framework

The first goal of this narrative case study was to complement course content with a field-based learning experience (Barnett, 2003; Cresswell & Poth, 2017; Fullan, 2002; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Vilorio, Gonzalez, & Reyes, 2017). Secondly, in this field-based theory to practice research experience Educational Administration graduate students interviewed two novice school principals. As a result, Educational Administration graduate students collected campus data and novice school principals' narratives, which chronicled their individual maiden voyage. Moreover, the intent of this narrative case study is to inform Educational Administration graduate students' understanding about the principal's role so they can make connections between theory and practice (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Hallinger & Murphy, 2012; Kearney & Valadez, 2015). Furthermore, this paper examines the role of two elementary novice school principals using the framework of transformational and transactional leadership models (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Relatedly, Berkovich (2018) proposed three conceptions about transformational leadership which are pertinent to this narrative case study:

Conception 1: Principals' transformational leadership behaviors are more prevalent in national contexts that are restructuring-oriented.

Conception 2: Principals' transformational behaviors are more effective than transactional behaviors.

Conception 3: Principals are either transformational or transactional. (p. 892)

For this study, the research team used Conception 2 to analyze the leadership practices of two elementary novice school principals as either transformational or transactional (Berkovich, 2018). Therefore, data analysis focused on the interplay of transformational and transactional leadership decisions when novice school principals address challenges like school and curricular restructuring, pressures of accountability, and changing local initiatives. In that respect, Nguni, Slegers, and Denessen (2006) concluded that "research on the relationship of transformational and transactional school leadership and teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior in primary schools is scarce" (p. 146). In that case, although this is a small narrative case study, the researchers' intent is to contribute to the discourse pertaining to the relationship of transformational and transactional in school leadership.

Transformational Leadership

In their analysis of 32 empirical leadership studies published between 1996 and 2005, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) presented four conclusions:

1. Transformational leadership effects on perceptions of organizational effectiveness are significant and large;
2. Transformational leadership effects on objective, independent measures of organizational effectiveness are less well documented and less uniform in nature but are positive and significant, although modest in size;
3. Evidence about transformational leadership effects on independently measured student outcomes, in particular, seems quite promising though limited in amount;
4. Recent evidence about transformational leadership effects on students' engagement in school, while still modest in amount, is uniformly positive. (p. 93)

Fundamentally, Burns (1978) postulated that transformational leadership encompasses the elevation of a leader's and his/her followers' motivation and moral commitment to an organization because of a shared vision. In this narrative study, moreover, the researchers looked at the transformational leadership behaviors presented by Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998), such as individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling to analyze the two novice school principals' leadership behaviors (Thomas et al., 2018). While transformational leadership behaviors, previously mentioned, are salient within transformational leadership research, a principal's approach to influencing a school's organizational climate (Hoy, 2012) and culture (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996) is proportionate to their individual reflection and introspection of a normative educational system(s) (Viloria, 2018; Young & Laible, 2000), principal training and preparation (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Kearney & Valadez, 2015), charisma, a concept from which transformational leadership originates (Bass, 1985; Paul, Costely, Howell, & Dorfman, 2002; Weber, 1968), and trustworthiness (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Transactional Leadership

Burns (1978) distinguished transactional leadership from transformational leaders based on how leaders motivate followers and or appeal to their followers' values and emotions (Nguni et al., 2006). For example, transactional leaders motivate followers to engage in tradeoff-type relationships, which appeal to their self-interest and the expectation of a reward. In this case, Burns (1978) considered transactional leadership as a complete opposite of transformational leadership practices and only serves to maintain the status quo and it is based on an active or passive reward or punishment system (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013; Nguni et al., 2006).

Furthermore, as found in Nguni et al. (2006), transactional leadership practices represent “low forms of leader activity and involvement” (p. 149). In addition, there are four transactional behaviors (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Hater & Bass, 1988):

1. Contingency reward: The extent to which leaders set goals, make rewards on performance, obtain necessary resources, and provide rewards when performance goals are met.
2. Management by exception—active: The extent to which leaders closely monitor followers’ performance and keep track of mistakes.
3. Management by exception—passive: The extent to which leaders may not be aware of problems until informed by others and generally fail to intervene until serious problems occur.
4. Laissez-faire leadership: The extent to which leaders avoid responsibility, fail to make decisions, are absent when needed, or fail to follow up on requests.

In this study, researchers analyzed the data to determine how and to what extent transactional leadership behaviors influence teachers’ commitment to their jobs and the organization. Nguni et al. (2006) concluded that “transactional leadership behaviors had no significant and weak aggregate effects on value commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job satisfaction and had a strong positive effect only on commitment to stay” (p. 168).

Methodology

Educational Administration graduate students utilized narrative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to interview two elementary novice school principals (Appendix). Two aspiring school principals who are graduate students conducted this study as a requirement in their graduate school experience. Relatedly, this study aimed to have aspiring principals conduct research in authentic school settings and learn more about the real-life, day-to-day challenges of novice school principals (Archer, 2005; Vilorio, Garza, Jasso, & Silva, In Press). Participant selection aligned to Merriam’s (1998) purposefully selected, and somewhat homogeneous. Novice school principals participated in two semi-structured interviews that lasted from 45 to 60 minutes each. The first interview took place at the beginning of the Educational Administration graduate students’ fall semester in 2017, and the second interview served as a follow-up interview conducted at the end of the same semester.

Participants’ interviews were conducted in private at their respective schools. Access to participants was secured either via a telephone request or in person in the case of Susan, who was the new principal assigned to the graduate student’s campus. As co-investigators, graduate students were acquainted with narrative inquiry tools related to the thorough examination of the contents collected from two participants’ interviews

(Wells, 2011). In addition, the researchers analyzed the novice principals' narratives using a case study design involving two individuals, Cresswell and Poth (2017). Participants and schools were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Participants

Fictional pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. The participants presented in this narrative case study are two females, elementary novice school principals: (a) Elizabeth, a second-year elementary assistant principal; (b) Susan, a first-year elementary school teacher.

Participants' Pseudonym	School's Pseudonym	School Size	Students' Demographics	Economically Disadvantaged	English Learners	Teachers' Experience
Elizabeth	Green Elementary	732	Hispanic 86.5% White -13.5%	97.8%	69.4%	Beginning- 0.0% 1-5- 12.7% 6-10- 17.2% 11-20- 50.1% Over 20- 20%
Susan	Spirit Elementary	558	Hispanic 98.4% White- 0.4% Asian-0.9% Two or More Races-0.2%	79%	47.3%	Beginning- 2.8% 1-5- 19.6% 6-10- 19.6% 11-20- 33.0% Over 20- 24.9%

Source: (TEAa, 2015–2016; TEAb, 2015–2016)

Data Analysis

After conducting each interview, the graduate students prepared a written reflection of the participants' narratives. Subsequently, the Educational Administration graduate students conducted a holistic analysis of the collected data using Yin (2009). Individual participant's responses were analyzed and manually coded to extrapolate each of the participant's responses and its alignment to either the transformational or transactional leadership models. The following data analysis protocol was implemented: (a) each researcher analyzed their interview transcript and created initial codes for participants' narratives; (b) researchers ensured data reliability by having exchanging narrative transcripts and creating an independent list of codes; (c) the professor conducted an independent analysis of the data; and (d) researchers meet to review the codes, and evaluate the data for inter-coding reliability.

Elizabeth was a first-year assistant principal at Green Elementary at the time of this study. When she was approached about her potential participation in this narrative case study, she did not hesitate and said, "*Absolutely!*" She was cooperative and excited to

share her experience as a novice vice-principal and requested to have the interview questions emailed prior to her initial interview. Elizabeth was elated that this interview would make her part of an educational study, and that her participation would help aspiring school principals. Elizabeth said, *“I want to be ready and set with my statements.”*

Susan was a first-year principal at Spirit Elementary at the time of this study. Although, Susan was hesitant at the beginning of the study, she agreed after her questions about the intent of the study and the type of questions that she would be asked during the individual interviews were emailed to her and she had an opportunity to review them.

Novice School Principals’ Transactional Leadership Behaviors

According to Hvidston, Range, McKim, and Mette (2015), two important responsibilities that principals oversee are instructional and organizational leadership. Within each of these responsibilities, exist individual students’ academic needs, teachers’ professional and personal interests, and community stakeholders’ demands. Therefore, novice school principals frequently resort to transactional leadership behaviors during their first years in their principalship, perhaps due to lack of experience and competing responsibilities. Novice school principals’ general inexperience might deem them as transactional leaders based due to their inability to be proactive and prevent problems from surfacing, or because of the outset of interpersonal relationships between the novice principal and teachers (Bass, 2000). In fact, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) proposed that “the best leaders are both transformational and transactional; transformational behaviors augment the effects of transformational behaviors” (p. 178). For example, in her new role as a novice school principal, Susan exemplified the following transactional behavior when asked the following interview question (Appendix):

How do you know if you are enhancing and changing teachers’ classroom practices? What guides your decision?

Data, data, data . . . no matter how good a teacher can present a lesson, or how elaborate a lesson may be it is meaningless if students are not learning. Teachers need to use data to guide their instruction, to re-teach what is confusing to students and to see the growth or progress that each student is making.

Susan’s response to this question is an example of “Management by exception—active,” which is a transactional leadership behavior. Although, Susan is actively engaged in classroom observations, she is making assumptions about teachers’ abilities to interpret students’ assessment data to inform their instruction, prepare individual intervention and educational plans.

In this case, what Susan can do to align her leadership behavior to transformational leadership is to conduct individual teacher meetings to review individual students' assessment data and collaboratively design instructional plans for each student (Park & Datnow, 2017). Furthermore, Susan could provide instructional support by ensuring teachers' professional development training is commensurate to their individual needs (Darling-Hammond & MacLaughlin, 1995). Moreover, transformational leadership will encompass supporting teachers through a critical self-reflective process that interrogates the economic and educational inequities that exist within the larger social context (Capper, 2015; Duncan-Andrade, 2004).

The following is an interview question and Susan's response to it:

Please tell us the importance and elaborate on the following educational goals, which do you consider the most important and why? Promoting social-justice issues like equality, culturally-relevant lessons, and advocacy for the underrepresented, underserved, and underprepared students:

Having diverse cultural knowledge is a plus when it comes to the workforce. Knowing how to respect one another and work together as a team are skills that companies seek in potential employees. Students learn about current event issues and history through their social studies lessons and at the same time begin to develop their own self-opinion on the diverse issues.

In this example, Susan's leadership behavior is laissez-faire, meaning that she passively dismisses the opportunity to identify teaching practices to ensure that students at Spirit Elementary receive culturally responsive curriculum (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2013). Susan fails to understand the importance of including culturally responsive pedagogy in the school's curriculum and teaching practices especially since more than 98% of the students at Spirit Elementary are Hispanic (Gay, 2010). Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999) studied highly successful schools in predominately Hispanic communities and concluded that "teachers were found to be empowered to adapt, modify, make culturally relevant, and match curricula to the unique needs of Hispanic students" (p. 4).

Elizabeth made similar remarks but in different questions of the survey (Appendix). For example, Elizabeth responded to the following question:

What are the most pressing issues at your school right now?

I believe that one of the most pressing issues at this campus right now is the fact that many teachers do not follow through with the student-centered teaching. Teachers are not consistent, I believe, because they do not feel that the students are able to work independently. Many teachers still insist on teacher-center teaching. Not being consistent with implementation of accommodations is also an issue. Students do not produce as well as expected to because accommodations are not provided daily.

In this example, Elizabeth clearly identifies the lack of teacher fidelity to student-centered teaching but blames the teachers for not believing in the students' capacity to learn from one another. Instead, Elizabeth blames the lack of implementation to teachers not following students' accommodation plans, which is a compliance issue. In order to change teachers' lack of compliance, Elizabeth needs to employ the collaboration of the community. Reyes et al. (1999) proposed that in "high-performing Hispanic schools, an ethic of caring and learning prevails, power is shared, problems are solved collaboratively, and linguistically diverse students are celebrated" (p. 5). Elizabeth's response is another example of *Management by exception—active*, a transactional leadership behavior.

In addition, in the following question: Please tell us the importance and elaborate on the following educational goals, which do you consider the most important and why? Elizabeth procured the following response:

Promoting foundational skills like (reading, math, writing, English speaking) is of extreme importance to teach the foundational skills in all areas to our students. Students will not be able to produce to their fullest potential without these skills.

Elizabeth's response is an example of laissez-faire transactional behavior because she does not invest any time to provide curricular input pertaining to real examples of how Green Elementary is enhancing students' college readiness (Dyches, 2018; Radcliffe & Bos, 2013). Her response alludes to institutionalized teacher practices (Bridwell-Mitch, 2015) pertaining to building Hispanic students academic hopes without providing rigorous, in-depth academic preparation that will make them college-ready (Yosso, 2013).

NOVICE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS

Transformational leadership behavior is inspirational, charismatic and uplifting (Bass, 2000). For instance, transformational leaders focus on the teachers' self-concept and self-worth (Bass, 2000) as these concepts correlate to the school's mission and vision (Bass, 2000; Hallinger, 2005). Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) propose that transformational leaders possess an array of leadership behaviors ranging from organizational effectiveness, focus on student outcomes, and attention to students' engagement in school which are anchored on teachers' intellectual stimulation, shared vision, and organizational commitment (Aydin et al., 2013).

In this case, Susan exemplifies transformational leadership behavior in relation to the following interview question:

Please describe your leadership style.

I practice a combination of leadership styles because I really like to get faculty and staff involved in the decision-making process. I think that this give teachers an opportunity to take ownership of how they will get students to the next academic level. I also consider myself a transformational leader because I think change is good at times in order to adapt to the new learning styles. My other leadership style would be visionary leadership. People that have worked with me know that I am all about goals, data, and instructional planning.

In addition, Susan demonstrates strong self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) in her ability to lead Spirit Elementary and maintain student achievement as she shared in the following thoughts related to high levels of achievement in the following survey question (Appendix):

How do you accommodate new practices based on your ever-changing accountability situation to ensure that the needs of the underrepresented, underserved, and underprepared students are met?

As an administrator that has worked in both the north and south schools of this district, I have seen the academic struggles that students face regardless of the geographic location of a school. Accountability is always going to be there, and every year the stakes increase. By having a good support system at school both teachers/staff and administrators working together to ensure that we develop a campus culture that is nurturing to the students and makes them feel safe. In other words, leveling the playing field so that they are ready to learn in an equitable classroom environment. Also providing support through instructional interventions.

As per Elizabeth she also demonstrates a collegial leadership although she is not at the helm of Green Elementary. As an assistant principal, she believes in learning and taking in as much leadership knowledge as she can so she can be ready when it is time for her to lead a school. In the following question, Elizabeth highlights the characteristics of transformational leadership:

How do you accommodate new practices based on your ever-changing accountability situation to ensure that the needs of the underrepresented, underserved, and underprepared students are met?

I promote new practices through trainings after identifying the need of a certain practice. After conducting walkthroughs, I can identify the needs of teachers. Sometimes I will sit with teachers one-to-one and help them plan and come about with strategies to help struggling students. Data is always utilized to inform instruction. After weekly, monthly, and quarterly assessments, students are grouped based on their individual needs.

In this example, Elizabeth demonstrates the transformational leadership characteristics of instructional leadership and collective efficacy “which is the belief that the faculty can make a positive difference in student achievement; the faculty believes in itself” (Hoy, 2012, p. 85).

Furthermore, in this additional example, Elizabeth displays a self-reflective knowledge of what makes a transformational leader.

In this survey, question (Appendix): Please describe your leadership style.

I feel that I am a transformational leader. I like to help teachers and encourage them to do their best. I am always willing to help teachers and encourage them not to give up. I like others to succeed. I like to look for the positive in everyone.

Moreover, Elizabeth is positive attitude and pro-student and has a strong, pro-teacher attitude, which encapsulates three elements of what Hoy (2012) would label as academic optimism: collective-faculty trust in students and parents, collective efficacy, and the enactment of academic emphasis.

Limitations

The researchers do not intend to generalize the findings of this narrative case study since only two participants were involved. Furthermore, due to the limited sample size the data analysis only represents the perceptions of the novice school principals who participated in this study.

Concluding Discussion

The rationale for this narrative case study correlates with Neumerski's (2012) recommendation, which is to capture the essence of the relationship and the connections that exist between a principal, teachers, parents, and students. The purpose of the research study was to expand what is currently known about principal leadership practices and investigate the relation between principals, teachers, and parents to student outcomes, thus capturing the essence of their interdependent relationship using transformational and transactional leadership theories. Furthermore, this paper examined the role of two elementary novice school principals using the framework of transformational and transactional leadership models (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). This narrative case study had two research goals. The first goal was to complement course content with a field-based learning experience (Barnett, 2003; Cresswell & Poth, 2017; Fullan, 2002; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Vilorio et al., 2017). The second goal was to provide Educational Administration graduate students with a field-based theory to practice research experience.

Relatedly, these researchers believe that it is important for principal preparation programs to complement coursework of aspiring principals with field-based learning experiences (Barnett, 2003; Fullan, 2002; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Furthermore, according to Rigby (2014), there is no characterization in either the practice or the leadership literature research, which outlines the various ways in which instructional leadership is presented in the institutional environment. Therefore, we hope

that sharing these experiences of two novice school principals can inform aspiring principals.

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Appendix

PRINCIPAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

The purpose of this survey is to obtain information about principals, such as principals' experience, hours worked and instructional leadership priorities. The survey is being conducted by Maria de Lourdes Vilorio, Ph.D, and students in the EDAM 5338 Administration of Special Programs, Fall 2017. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Maria de Lourdes Vilorio will have access to the records. Information about you will be stored in a locked file cabinet; computer files protected with a password.

1. How long have you been a school assistant principal and/or principal at this school?
2. Was your Master's degree in Educational Administration or other field of study awarded by the local university, or by a different institution? Please elaborate on your major field of study before obtaining your master's degree.
3. How many years did you teach and at what level before you became an assistant principal and/or principal? Please explain and elaborate on the grades and subjects that you taught.
4. Please tell us the importance and elaborate on the following educational goals, which do you consider the most important and why?

A. Promoting foundational skills like (reading, math, writing, English speaking),

B. Promoting College- readiness skills for all students,

C. Promoting social- justice issues like equality, culturally-relevant lessons, and advocacy for the underrepresented, underserved, and underprepared students,

D. Promoting teachers' professional development in the areas of mathematics, and science

5. How do you know you are enhancing and changing teachers' classroom practices? What guides your decisions?
6. How often do you continue to do things in a certain manner just because they have always been done that way?
7. How do you accommodate new practices based on your ever-changing accountability situation to ensure that the needs of the underrepresented, underserved, and underprepared students are met?
8. What are the most pressing issues at your school right now?
9. Please describe your leadership style.
10. Please tell us who do you consider to be your mentor and why.