Perceptions of Transformational Leadership Behavior by Secondary Principals and Teachers in Diverse and Non-Diverse Schools

Dr. Fernando Valle and Gionet L. Cooper

Teachers and principals across the country are continuously called to improve and transform underperforming secondary schools. Today, accountability requirements for *ALL* students place teacher effectiveness and the improvement of student learning in the educational spotlight. To improve schools, the examination of teacher and principal disposition toward the diversity in public schools is part of the import work to meet the diversified set of challenges faced by secondary campuses. School leaders and teacher alike must embrace their school context and the demographic as strengths to succeed in today's public school accountability climate. Effective transformational school leaders enact the principles of transformational leadership across and within schools to begin the transformative process of improving student achievement. This explanatory, sequential mixed method study focuses on principals and teachers perceptions of these transformational practices in diverse and non-diverse secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

Leadership studies support a belief that one of the primary goals of twenty-first century public school leaders is to lead schools with the purpose of sustained and substantive improvement (Eaker, 2008; Green, 2010; & Spillane, 2006). The impetus for this study was to delve deeper into the transformational leadership style and practice of secondary school principals in diverse and non-diverse secondary campuses. Principals and teachers participating in this study were given the opportunity to report the frequencies of transformational leadership characteristics being practiced by their administration through the Leadership Behavior Inventory (Kent, 2007). For the purpose of this study, a school population consisting of a proportion or combination of less than 40% of African American, Hispanic, and Asian students within a school campus was defined as non-diverse. Both diverse and non-diverse campuses provided the backdrop for authentic discourse and the continued examination of current secondary school leadership practice.

Review of the Literature

The Transformational School Leader

Secondary public schools in the twenty-first century are faced with the challenge and opportunity to educate a more diverse student population. Current literature (Shields, 2013; Shields & Sayani, 2005) suggests that educational leaders must embrace this cultural and linguistic diversity as a valuable educational resource rather than as a detrimental complication. Cooper (2009) further asserts educational leaders must strive to become cultural change agents that equip themselves with current knowledge, support, strategies, and valor to make curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and family partnerships culturally responsive.

According to Green (2010), transformational leaders lead with knowledge of individuals inside and outside of the schoolhouse. They have a vision for the future of the school organization, can effectively communicate that vision to followers, and are able to convey the importance of its attainment. In addition, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to deeply commit to the school vision and work in an interdependent manner toward its attainment.

African American and Hispanic Student Achievement Gaps

The practice of transformational leadership with fidelity and conviction in secondary schools is vital to closing educational achievement gaps. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2011) longitudinal test data from 1992 to 2009 reveals that African American and Hispanic students' achievement scores in math and reading continue to remain significantly lower than White secondary students ranging from 8th grade to 12th grade. The achievement gap of African American to White students in 1992 for 8th graders was -30 in reading and -33 in math scaled achievement scores; the achievement gap of African American to White students in 2009 for 8th graders was -26 in reading and -32 in math scaled achievement scores (NCES, 2011).

The data on Hispanic student populations in secondary schools in the United States present similar statistics in regard to the achievement gap of Hispanic to White students. In 1992, NCES (2011) data for 8th grade students documented achievement gaps of -26 in reading and -24 in math scaled achievement scores. More than a decade later, the achievement gap of Hispanic to White students in 2009 for 8th graders was still -24 in reading and -26 in math for scaled achievement scores.

Demographic shifts, stagnant national achievement gaps, and divergent achievement scores for secondary schools are prompting educational leaders to lead schools differently. Consequently, Green (2010) states if transformational leadership is to be effective, school leaders must create a trust-based culture wherein teachers are satisfied to the point that they collaborate with the school leader and assume leadership roles and responsibilities for enhanced student achievement and growth.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by transformational leadership theory. In a transformational leadership model, the role of the secondary school principal is to create a school climate and culture that continues to address the changing needs of a campus. Therefore, this shared role of leadership, which includes teachers and principals in the practice of transformational leadership, redefines the traditional role of leadership in secondary schools.

Secondary principals must be comfortable and confident in delegating power to other educational experts within the school community to carry out the leadership behavior or activity necessary to enhance teaching and learning (Eaker, 2008; Green, 2010; Muhammad, 2009; Spillane, 2006).

Methodology

This study includes the administration of the Leadership Behavior Inventory (LBI) Questionnaire to secondary teachers, assistant principals and principals to examine characteristics of secondary school principals and educators as transformational leaders.

The study was guided by an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2006). In the first phase of this study, participants were given the LBI quantitative questionnaire. The second phase of the research design, interviewing selected participants, was executed sequentially after quantitative data collection was gathered and analyzed. Participants for the second phase were purposefully selected from the survey participant's frequency scores. The rationale for this mixed method approach to secondary principal leadership was to have the quantitative data facilitate qualitative findings.

Findings from the Study

Quantitative Phase

The LBI data collected from secondary principals served as a self-report and reflection of their practice based on the 13 core competencies. Secondary teachers from various campuses were also given the LBI, and in turn, evaluated their own principal's transformational leadership practices according to the same 13 core competencies. After conducting a T-test, the questionnaires revealed a significant difference between the $t(104)=2.156$, p=.03. These findings indicated a significant congruence and disparity between teacher's perception of leadership and the principal's self report on their own transformational leadership practice.

The total number of teacher and principal participants included in the study were N=106. Forty-three were male, 60 were female, and 3 were recorded as unknown. The educational positions for participants consisted of 45 principals and 61 teachers.

Table 1
Principal and teacher demographics of participants

Gender	N	Percent
Male	*43*	40.6
Female	*60*	56.6
Unknown	*3*	2.8
Principal	*45*	42.5
Teacher	*61*	57.5
Total	*106*	100

Table 2 displays both principal and teacher mean scores of transformational leadership practice from the LBI. The core competency with the strongest congruency between principal and teacher data was Reflection. Principals also reported that promoting the core competency of Diversity was their second highest campus priority. Principal data further revealed Curriculum and Instruction to be the least likely core competency they practiced. The core competency of Visionary Leadership was the second highest characteristic their principals practiced. Secondary teacher data revealed Professional Development as the least likely core competency practiced by their principals.

Table 2

Principals and teachers frequency scores for from Highest to Lowest

Core Competency	*M*(SD) for Principals	Core Competency	*M*(SD) for Teachers
Reflection	3.4 (.44)	Reflection	3.57(.57)
Diversity	3.27 (.46)	Visionary Leadership	3.49 (.67)
Visionary Leadership	3.21 (.42)	Inquiry	3.43 (.54)
Learning Community	3.17 (.50)	Learning Community	3.43 (.60)
Professionalism	3.17 (.63)	Diversity	3.37 (.68)
Prof. Dev.	3.16 (.51)	Org. Mgt	3.34 (.70)
Assessment	3.13 (.59)	Professionalism	3.34 (.76)
Org. Mgt	3.10 (.50)	Curr. & Instr	3.33 (.75)
Inquiry	3.08 (.68)	Unity of Purpose	3.33 (.68)
Unity of Purpose	3.02 (.64)	Assessment	3.30 (.65)
Collaboration	3.01 (.62)	Collaboration	3.28 (.74)
Instr. Leadership	2.99 (.74)	Instr. Leadership	3.22 (.72)
Curr. & Instr.	2.94 (.65)	Prof. Dev.	3.21 (.74)

Qualitative Phase

Qualitative data from 8 participants-- 4 teachers (2 from diverse and 2 from non-diverse) and 4 principals (2 from diverse and 2 from non-diverse)-- was collected to expound core beliefs, perceptions, perspectives and practices on their secondary school context, as teachers and leaders.

Table 4 displays the demographic data of the eight participants' who contributed to the interviews. Geographically, participants covered a large portion of the state of Texas and were from various diverse and non-diverse school districts in the state from both rural and urban areas.

Table 4

Demographics of participants from interview phase

Participant	Position	Gender	Years of experience	Middle or High School	Diverse or Non-Diverse campus
Mr. Victor	Principal	Male	11+	High School	Diverse
Mr. Schultz	Principal	Male	6-10	High School	Diverse
Ms. Wall	Teacher	Female	1-5	High School	Diverse
Ms. Smith	Teacher	Female	11+	High School	Diverse
Mr. Potts	Principal	Male	6-10	Middle School	Non-Diverse
Mr. Griffin	Principal	Male	11+	Middle School	Non-Diverse
Ms. West	Teacher	Female	6-10	High School	Non-Diverse
Mr. Jordan	Teacher	Male	11+	High School	Non-Diverse

Findings of Secondary School Leadership Practice

Through interpretation and analysis of qualitative data, five themes emerged to continue filling in the gaps of knowledge among transformational leadership practice of secondary school leaders: 1) Culture of secondary schools; 2) Factors influencing leadership styles; 3) Perceptions of Diverse and Non-Diverse school leadership; 4) School wide interventions; and 5) Recommendations for leading twenty-first secondary schools. The amalgamation of thick, rich descriptive data from secondary principals and teachers from both diverse and non-diverse secondary campuses provided multicontextual experiences and realities of transformational leadership practice. This is a paradigm shift, one of opportunity and development for twenty-first century secondary schools to continue improving culture and through school wide interventions.

Diversity & Staff Development—The LBI data disclosed the need for educators to increase awareness and understand student engagement, especially with diverse students through professional learning and staff development. Secondary leaders must create and promote a school culture that embraces diversity as an opportunity for personal and professional growth rather than the deficit--a constant challenge. This becomes imperative for the successful implementation and practice of culturally relevant embedded instructional strategies for student engagement.

***Unchanged Roles and Practice*s**— The belief that secondary principals can lead schools alone the same way they did 10 years ago is a leadership fallacy. The demographics of secondary schools have changed nationally, but the practices of many teachers and leaders have not. This was a consensus across all eight participants. Their voices cemented the belief that

promoting a learning environment that embraces cultural diversity must be a vision of all educators. It must be a conscious and all-encompassing effort.

Moving Beyond Compliance—At non-diverse campuses, principals and teachers found themselves struggling to adjust and adapt to the changing demographics of their students. As a result, many instructional programs and initiatives implemented for school improvement were met with minimal compliance and apathy. Secondary principals at diverse schools however, wear multiple "hats" and play multiple roles in their schools and communities. Principals in these campuses are compelled to incorporate and execute leadership characteristics and practices derived from transformational leadership theory to move beyond compliance in closing the achievement gaps for all students.

Implications for Secondary School Leadership

Secondary public schools in the twenty-first century continue to face increased challenges in accountability, standardized testing, and ensuring all students perform at a national standard. Educational leadership must progress being inclusive and harness the whole educational community to increase student, teacher and school leadership performance. Secondary public schools are faced with changing demographics of student populations, which requires cultural sensitivity to a more diversified school population in terms of ethnicity, culture, and language. Leadership and teaching practices must transcend from a practice of isolation to a more collaborative practice with growth and rubric evidence oriented feedback in the educational process. The intertwining and combination of data in this study provided deeper analysis in creating the findings, which emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data sets of this study:

1). Twenty- first century secondary school leaders must have a holistic and inclusive understanding, promoting genuine relationship with the students they are serving.
2). Twenty- first century secondary school leaders must guide the school community to resist isolation and transform school culture into a collaborative one that strives to share effective practices.
3). Twenty-first century secondary school leaders must emphasize, equip, and train *all* secondary teachers in literacy and numeracy best practices. Literacy and numeracy will close the English and math educational gap for historically struggling African American and Hispanic students.

Conclusion

Carolyn Shields (2013) advocates for equitable change in schools by urging educational leaders to effect deep and equitable change, deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice and focus on democracy, equity and justice. Several conclusions can be drawn from this mixed method study that deserve consideration with respect to secondary leadership and teaching practices within diverse school settings. Collaborative learning and work is a key component to student success and teacher improvement. Isolation results in surface teaching and status quo leadership. Outdated roles of secondary principals need change; the current result is an existing and widening achievement gap for both educators and students. Educators in the building must gain a continuous understanding of the diverse populations they are serving, if they are to have a grasp of culture and student knowledge, which will impact their education. To truly become the transformational change agents needed today,

secondary principals and teachers alike must welcome and embrace the opportunities that come with diversity in secondary schools.

Spillane and Diamond (2001) state that a transformational perspective will directly impact the school community in the way school leaders approach daily tasks, challenges, and educational goals/objectives. This requires a shared responsibility of all the stakeholders involved. The traditional paradigm of a school leader/principal being the sole decision maker is replaced with a collaborative and distributive leader who promotes a shared involvement both directly and indirectly with all stakeholders

Finally, the authors agree with a 45 year old argument by Miriam Schleisch (1968), where she stresses the importance of secondary teachers having the moral and ethical obligation to provide literacy instruction across all content areas which will enable them to identify, support, correct and fill the gap and voids in *all* students reading/literacy deficiencies. We must move current in-service secondary and preservice teachers beyond being a content oriented teacher. To be effective, secondary teachers in today's diverse schools must skillfully connect content, pedagogy and culture (Almager, 2012) to improve student achievement through their teaching performance. Ultimately, this shift will result in all secondary students developing higher levels skills which commensurate with their abilities that will directly enhance learning for the rest of their lives.

About the Authors

Fernando Valle is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Texas Tech University. Currently, i3 Innovation REFLECT and SEED federal grant work across the state is informing his teaching and research. Dr. Valle received a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from The University of Texas at Pan American and after serving as a middle school teacher, middle school counselor, high school counselor and principal, he moved into university work. He examines distributive and transformative practices in secondary schools and collaborates with scholars nationally to develop Latina/o Leaders and research Latina/os across the Educational Leadership pipeline.

Dr. Gionet L. Cooper is principal at Dunbar College Preparatory Academy in Lubbock, Texas. He is also currently an Adjunct Professor at Texas Tech University for the College of Education. Dr. Cooper is in the process of implementing comprehensive literacy that will address reading, writing, and numeracy challenges within the school.

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