Characteristics of Effective Turn Around Principals in Urban Middle School

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EDLE 770: Instruction to Educational Leadership

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**Introduction**

We live in a society that believes that public education is the gateway to democracy (Barth, 2001). Public education gives every student the right to have access to the same tools for learning as every American. As a society, public education is touted as important to create responsible citizenship, sustain our economy, and develop a society that can set goals and prosper. As a society, there has not been an established universal standard to ensure that every student receives an education that affords children the opportunity to be successful. Since there are not any universal standards established as it relates to academic success, how do we determine if schools are academically successful?

Our government, with specific measurements for student success, has allowed each state the freedom to develop standards to measure success in public schools. With these measurements applied to each state, individual school districts are required to develop a process on how to demonstrate success on the standards required by the state to support successful academic learning in our public school. Each school within its district develops structures and implements various resources to reach these standards. Additionally, there are numerous protocols that schools implement to ensure they can achieve academic success.

With the aforementioned measurement standards that have been mandated by our federal government, there are schools that are demonstrating difficulty in achieving state identified academic success. One type of school, in particular, is urban schools with an urban population consisting of a high percentage of low-income minority students. What research is accessible that can outline the traits that urban schools need to be academically successful?

After pondering the question what traits do urban schools require to be academically successful there was one factor that continuously came up. The one factor that consistently contributed to a school’s academic success is a principal with experience in a variety of leadership strategies and turning around schools in an urban environment. I had to narrow my topic down. My topic question would be, “What are the leading characteristics of effective turn around principals in urban middle school?” When I narrowed down my topic, I found two particular articles that support answers to my question. The articles by Muhammad Khalifa, A Re-New-ed paradigm in Successful Urban School Leadership: Principles as Community Leader and an article by Viviane Robinson, Claire Lloyd and Kenneth Rowe, The Impact of leadership on Student outcomes: An analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership types gave me specific answers to my stated question. The purpose of this paper is to review the two articles that directly relate to my stated question. After I discuss the two articles and how they relate to my stated question, I will write a conclusion that discusses the lessons I learned from the articles.

**Literature Review**

The article by Viviane Robinson, Claire Lloyd and Kenneth Rowe, The Impact of leadership on Student outcomes: An analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership types gave me a clear answer to my question. The purpose of the article was to address the paradoxical differences between the qualitative and quantitative evidence on leadership impacts by taking a fresh approach to the analysis of the quantitative evidence. Rather than conduct a further meta-analysis of the overall impact of leadership on student outcomes, they focused on identifying the relative impact of different types of leadership. By focusing on types of leadership, rather than on leadership as a unitary construct, they recognized that leaders’ impact on student outcomes will depend on the particular leadership practices in which they engage. They asked the question if empirical research indicates that some leadership practices have stronger impacts on student outcomes than others (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Specifically, the authors discussed the impact that instructional leadership and transformational leadership had on student academic success. The methodology involved was an analysis of findings from 27 published studies of the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. The first meta- analysis, including 22 of the 27 studies, involved a comparison of the effects of transformational and instructional leadership on student outcomes. The second meta-analysis involved a comparison of the effects of five inductively derived sets of leadership practices student outcomes. Twelve of the studies contributed to this second analysis. The findings of the first meta-analysis indicated that the average effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of transformational leadership. Inspection of the survey items used to measure school leadership revealed five sets of leadership practices or dimensions: establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. The second meta-analysis revealed strong average effects for the leadership dimension involving promoting and participating in teacher learning and development and moderate effects for the dimensions concerned with goal setting and planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum (Robinson et al., 2008). Although there were various factors that resulted in the achievement of students, it was apparent that the instructional leadership model with a focus on the five dimensions yielded a higher measure of success than the transformational model.

The article, A Re-New-ed paradigm in Successful Urban School Leadership: Principles as Community Leader by Muhammad Khalifa had an important significance to my stated question. The article examined the impact that a principal’s community-leadership has on school–community relations and student outcomes. Comparisons were drawn between leadership behaviors that emphasize school-centered approaches and community-centered approaches. Khalifa (2012), stated that he looked at three research questions relevant to the investigation of a principal who positively influenced the social and academic outcomes of his alternative school students: (a) research that conceptualizes the relationship between school and community as overlapping spheres, which allows me to operationally define what counts as effective school–community relations; (b) research that suggests community leadership is an essential component of school leadership in urban communities; and (c) the historical and current cultural aspects of Black school and community leaders. The information presented in the literature highlights what elements of school–community relations may be most useful for principals in urban and predominantly African American. The author’s methodology was an ethnographic research that was conducted over a 2-year period from 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic school years at the Urban Alternative High School, during which the researcher conducted participant observations, and interviews. The finding of the article was the principal’s role as community leader—including high principal visibility in the community and advocacy for community causes—led to trust and rapport between school and community. Consequently, parents who were previously hostile changed their relationship with school, and supported his or her handling of their children. This led to improved academic outcomes for students (Kahlifa, 2012). This article discussed the historical relevance of the principal being the “heart” of the community. If a principal wants their students to be academically successful, the principal must find a role in the community.

**Conclusion**

When I went back to my original question, I had to reflect and think if I was on the right path to an answer. “What are the leading characteristics of effective turn around principals in urban middle school?” I realized that I have two predominant themes that successful principal display. One theme is what is explicitly being done in the building and another theme is what is explicitly being done in the community. I realize that if you truly want to be successful as a principal you have to develop the whole child. As a principal, you have to find a balance of school structure and community involvement. To promote my growth as an educator, I hope to continue to develop and research my two identified themes and put those themes into personal practice.

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