

Volume 14, 2011
ISSN: 2165-1019

Approved March 2011
www.ala.org/aasl/slr

Educating Preservice School Librarians to Lead: A Study of Self-Perceived Transformational Leadership Behaviors

Bass 2008; Burns 2003; Posner and Kouzes 1994). Transformational leaders look beyond their personal needs and strive to achieve goals that are important to an organization as a whole. The end result of change guided by transformational leadership is an organization with members who are empowered, share a vision, and deliberately labor to achieve a common goal (Posner and Kouzes 1994).

Transformational leadership assists a group of people to move from one stage of development to a higher one and in doing so [to] address and fulfill better a higher human need (Couto 1995,102). This is because of the deep interest transformational leaders take in the well-being of their followers and the lasting effects of their leadership efforts (Bass 1990; Burns 2003). These exceptional leaders exhibit the willingness to take risks, the ability to create a shared vision, collaborate with followers and other leaders, model exceptional practices, and encourage the people around them (Bass and Bass 2008; Burns 2003; Posner and Kouzes 1994). These skills can be applied to a variety of settings, whether the leader works with one person, an organization, or an entire culture (Northouse 2004). Generally speaking, transformational leaders are able to challenge their followers and motivate them to achieve levels of success they originally did not think were possible (Bass and Bass 2008).

Transformational leadership can be applied to schools—the setting relevant to this study. Sheppard (2003) theorized that without sharing the leadership role, changes within a school will likely be short-lived because of competing priorities that can change the leadership focus. Transformational leadership is useful because it is a process for creating change within an organization. When seen as a process, this type of leadership becomes a behavior instead of a role and the need for formal distinctions between leaders and followers is less necessary (Uhl-Bien 2003). In fact, anyone can be a leader at any given time within in an organization as long as he or she is inspiring others to create change. Because dramatic reforms are often called for in educational environments, transformational leadership is well suited for schools.

This approach to leadership eliminates the need for principals, the formal leaders of the organization, to accept the entire weight of a school reform and distributes some of the leadership roles to others to share the vision for the change. Often, school leaders must bring



Many variables have the potential to influence leadership development. Organizational culture (Conner 2006; Schein 2004); the availability of mentoring (Daresh 2004; Scandura and Williams 2004); the debate between learned versus innate leadership traits (Bass 1990; Copeland and Chance 1996; Feidler 2001; Kouzes and Posner 2007), experience (Bridges and Hallinger 1995; Herron and Major 2004; McGough 2003), educational level (Barbuto and others 2007; Laflin 2009), and age (Arsenault 2004; Huusko 2006; Oshagbemi 2004) reflect the circumstances that create unique social contexts for individuals. These variables are often externally constructed and outside an individual's control. Nonetheless, research has demonstrated that they can play a pivotal role in the performance of any kind of leadership.

Method

Population

There were 30 students chosen for the Project LEAD program from 6 Florida counties. The Project LEAD directors, 2 FSU professors, assessed leadership potential by combining several applicant scores. These scores consisted of a leadership rubric completed by principals, points awarded on a sliding scale for grade point averages, points for answers on the application questions, and points for leadership essays. Details concerning each of these criteria can be found in **Figure 1**. Points also were given to achieve a diverse group according to gender, race, age, ethnicity, and the subject taught. The total of the possible points was 100. The final selection of Project LEAD students was made from the students with the highest scores.

Figure 1. Assessment of Leadership Potential

Data Collection and Analysis

The research reported here uses a mixed-method design. A concurrent triangulation mixed-method design was chosen for this study because it was a purposive sample—the participants were chosen because they were all leaders. There was a concern that the statistical analysis might not be able to make distinctions between the participants. Therefore qualitative data was collected to provide an understanding of the similarities and differences within the population. A closed-ended quantitative survey would not have provided this specific information.

Two paper-based self-administered surveys were used to collect the majority of the data for this study. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), aligned with the theoretical framework of transformational leadership (Abu-Tineh Khasawneh and A-Omari 2008; Brown and Posner 2001; Fields and Herold 199



collection instrument. The LPI has been shown to be valid and reliable instrument for measuring transformational leadership (Brown and Posner 2001; Fields and Herold 1997; Harris 1996; Hautala 2005; Ridgway 2001). The LPI assesses five dimensions of transformational leadership: Modeling the Way, Challenging the Process, Encouraging the Heart, Enabling Others to Act, and Inspiring a Shared Vision (Kouzes and Posner 2007). These areas align to the types of leadership school librarians are encouraged to practice and the areas emphasized in the Project LEAD program.

Adding to its suitability, the LPI has been used to evaluate leadership practices in a variety of contexts. For example, Joseph (2009) used the LPI to evaluate a principal preparation program. The LPI was used by Koh (2008) to compare the management skills of preservice teachers to their leadership skills. Suwandee (2009) evaluated the leadership behaviors of executives who participated in a leadership program. Laflin (2009) assessed the extent to which students participating in a graduate teacher program perceived themselves to be practicing effective leadership behaviors. Moniz (2008) studied the correlation between exemplary leadership behaviors and the relationship that protégés participating in a mentoring program had with their mentors. The inventory has also been accepted as an instrument that can help analyze the differences and similarities of leadership behaviors according to social contexts, such as years of experience (Hillman 2006).

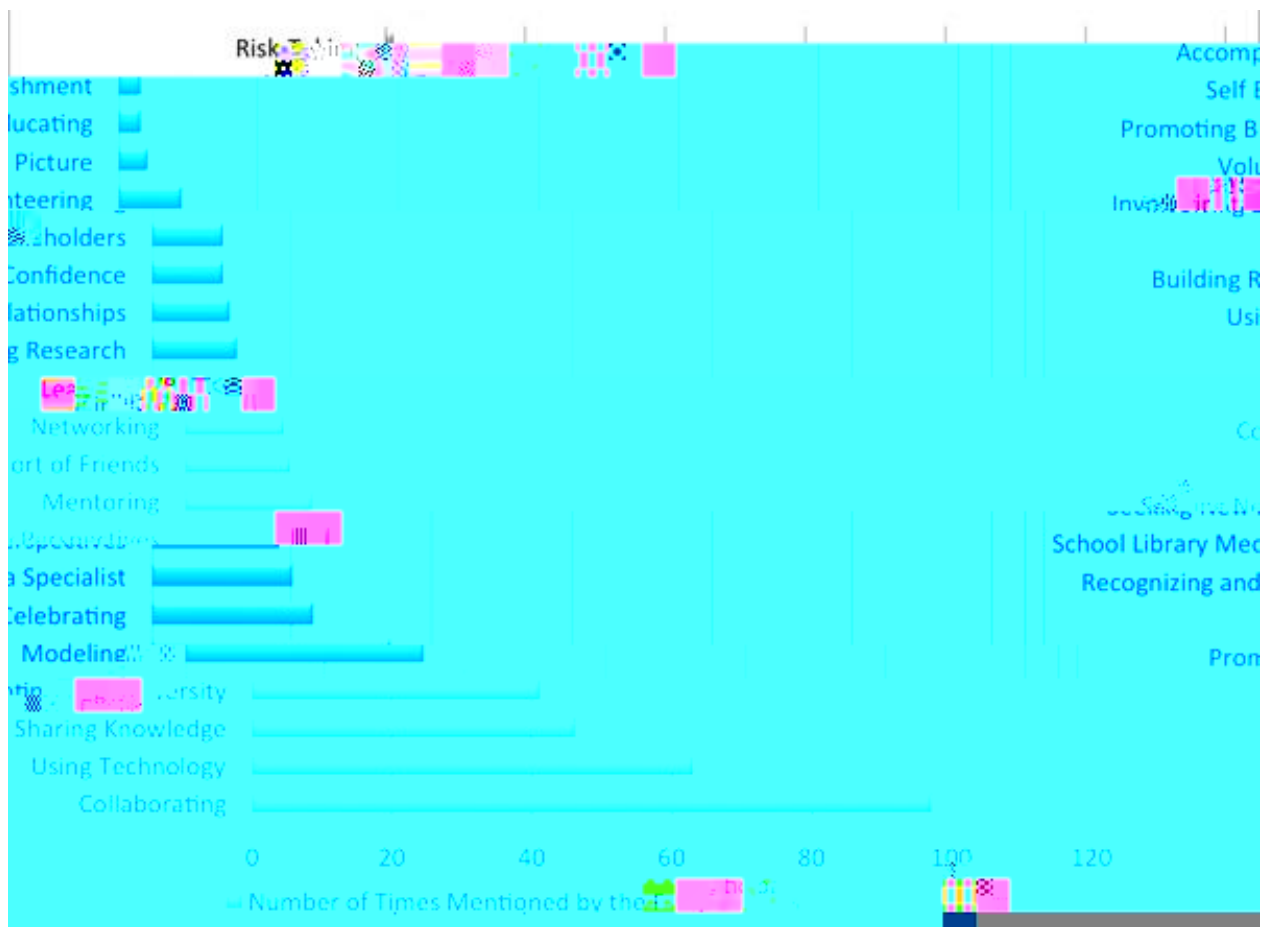


creating ties between their schools and communities. Hence the purpose of the teaching profession is to provide students with the tools that enable them to be successful in the future. Therefore it is logical that the Project LEAD assessment designed to find teacher-leaders had a high correlation with the Enabling Others to Act subscale.

When considering the reliability of the Project LEAD assessment, given the high scores of the participants on the LPI and the positive relationship the assessment had with the Enabling Others to Act, $r_s = .446$, $n = 28$, $p = .017$ LPI subscale, one can assume the assessment achieved its purpose. The Project LEAD directors were able to pinpoint a process appropriate for identifying candidates with strong leadership potential.

This study also uncovered significant relationships between the participants' self-perceived transformational leadership potential and the following social contextual variables: school poverty, GRE scores, mentor contact hours, mentor selection, and satisfaction with the mentors. Age, grade point averages, district support, school support, experience, school grades, school levels, community types, the type of contact the mentors had with the Project LEAD students, and the location of the mentors did not have a significant relationship with the LPI.

Figure 3. Benefits of Project LEAD



School Poverty

Poverty levels within the participants' schools had a negative correlation with the LPI subscale Challenging the Process, $r_s = .387$, $n = 29$, $p = .038$. Students who worked in schools with higher poverty levels found themselves less likely to take risks. Perhaps they were less likely to take risks because of the school communities they work in. Their school populations typically need stability because of less funding and social circumstances.

While social circumstances might affect test scores, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is administered to students in grades three through twelve. Much of the school year is spent learning standards in preparation for the test. The test is used to determine whether students have made adequate yearly progress and their scores are perceived to be a direct reflection of each educator's ability to teach.



development (Leithwood and Jantzi 2008), the results of this study indicate support structures and self-efficacy can counteract these negative effects. The study participants had great willpower and a strong belief in their ability to complete the program. Their confidence seems to have manifested itself in their self-perceived leadership potential. It can be assumed that factors that normally hinder others are mere hurdles for people who deem themselves to be true leaders.

Age

The findings of this study were also contrary to other studies regarding the effects of age on leadership. Age is seen as an indicator of competence (Kearney and Gerbert 2009). It has also been determined that people from different generations have different leadership styles (Arsenault 2004). The participants were between the ages of 25 and 61. However, each person included in this study, despite their age, was a part of Project LEAD because their administrator found them to be highly competent. Moreover, this group was quite similar in their leadership skills despite the different generations represented among them. Perhaps if this group had not participated in a rigorous selection process that actually was able to pinpoint exceptional leadership potential, there might have been a relationship between age and the LPI. Again, the results for this factor attest to the success of the selection process.

Experience

The findings of this study concur with Miracle's (2001) research using the LPI. Years of experience were not a factor in the participants' leadership practices. Instead, the qualitative responses show the type of experiences of the Project LEAD students during the program made a dramatic difference in their leadership practices. This supports the findings of previous studies that suggest providing experiences beyond formal classroom settings can develop leadership skills (Thomas and Cheese 2005). During Project LEAD, specially designed experiences took the form of hands-on assignments in school libraries, interacting with mentors, volunteering at conferences, networking with highly acclaimed school library leaders, and interacting as a team within their county cohort.

Suggestions, Recommendations, and Implications

The conclusions drawn from this study have yielded suggestions regarding professional development for teachers, the education of school librarians, and the design of distance learning programs. Several recommendations also are offered concerning mentoring and relationships between institutions of higher education and school district partners. Lastly, there are implications regarding self-efficacy and its role in transformational leadership development.

The LPI and School Librarians

This study confirms that leadership skills can be taught. By their own admission, the transformational leadership skills that were taught to the preservice school librarians who participated in Project LEAD made a substantial difference in their schools even while they were still enrolled in the program. This implies that in the future school librarian programs can be tailored to pinpoint specific transformational leadership skills that may need to be addressed by individual students.



The Project LEAD Assessment



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