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THE EFFECTS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON TEACHER
RETENTION DECISIONS IN URBAN, VOUCHER SCHOOLS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Arts in Teaching.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Capstone Overview

Every child deserves a quality education. While many factors go into providing this, the most influential is having a strong and capable classroom teacher (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, & Weinfeld, 1966). However, this has become increasingly more challenging to provide as teachers are leaving the classroom at alarming rates, both during and after the school year (Ingersoll, Merrill & Stuckey, 2014). In the United States, nearly half of all new teachers leave the profession within five years. In addition, these attrition rates tend to be highest in urban districts in which students are often already academically behind (Shann, 1998). High teacher attrition is costly and time consuming for schools, detrimental to staff culture and harmful to student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

This capstone seeks to answer a question that may help mitigate this problem: *What effects does a principal's transformational leadership style have on teacher retention at an urban, voucher school?* This Chapter details my own experience with teacher attrition, initially as a teacher and then as an administrator. I will then delve into why this question is essential for the success of schools and students. Finally, I will point to a gap in the current research. The Chapter will then finish with a preview of Chapters 2-4.

Experience as a Teacher

My journey with teacher attrition started in October of 2012. It was not my first year teaching, but my third. I was at a new school, teaching a new grade level and content, and it was, by far, my hardest year of teaching yet. One morning at six a.m., I found myself in my principal's office, intending to put in my two week notice. I did not want to quit, but I felt that I was failing my students. I was not able to control the classroom and knew that my students' learning was affected because of it. However, after a lengthy conversation with my principal, I left with a renewed faith that I could do it. I would improve for my students. I did, after all, have a principal who believed in me, and a staff who shared my core beliefs. Seven years later, I am still working in the same building and with the same children.

Experience as an Administrator

Four years later, I was no longer a teacher, but the Dean of Instruction, coaching and helping develop other teachers. It was October and our fourth-grade teacher had just put in her own two week notice. She, similar to my own experience, felt she could not control the classroom and her students were suffering because of it. In this case, however, there was nothing my principal nor I could say to make her change her mind or realize, that while she did have room to grow, leaving the classroom was not what was best for her students. Additionally, less than three weeks later, our fifth-grade teacher resigned and two months after that, our seventh grade teacher.

This pattern of staff resignations continued throughout the year, resulting in the loss of five classroom teachers. Moreover, that year was not the anomaly we had hoped.

The pattern of losing teachers mid-year continued for the next two years and now into the present day.

These losses significantly affected both our staff and students. First, it placed an exceptional burden on administration. As the Dean of Instruction, my assignment was to be the substitute teacher in these classrooms until we found replacements. Once we did hire, I would then go through an extensive onboarding process with the new teacher before he or she finally took over the classroom. This meant I was unable to do the other facets of my job for months on end and the other teachers, many of them also novice teachers, did not get the coaching or support they relied on to improve in their craft and educate their students. I typically met with each teacher twice a week, once to give a pedagogical action step and next to analyze student data. These meetings abruptly halted when a teacher quit, leaving teachers without the adequate professional support they craved and needed.

These teacher losses also put psychological stress on the staff and teachers in the building. Studies have shown that teacher attrition leads to a loss in staff cohesion and reduces trust among faculty (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). The tight-knit community that we tried so hard to build in the beginning of the school year was collapsing, which made an already hard job even harder. While I tried to salvage the sense of community and trust we once had, I was overworked and exhausted, trying to do two jobs at once. I did not have adequate time to investigate or implement the needed changes to help improve the unsatisfactory staff culture that was emerging.

However detrimental the effects were on staff; they were much worse for students. Teacher attrition negatively impacted student achievement. The classrooms that lost teachers mid-year were also those with the lowest test scores at the end of the year, a phenomena which has been widely studied and recorded (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Ronfeldt et al. (2013) argued that attrition negatively impacts student achievement because the teachers who replace those leaving are generally less effective. Additionally, Hanushek (1992) observed that being taught by an effective teacher can translate to a loss of a whole grade level of achievement in just one year.

I experienced all of this firsthand. Turnover increased the likelihood that students were taught by less than capable teachers, as the majority of the new teachers hired, due to a small candidate pool, had never taught before in a classroom. I also saw how losing teachers mid-year took away instructional minutes as it took incoming teachers time to learn each student's needs, as well as new curriculum and management systems. This was lost time no student could afford.

These experiences have led me to think back to that October morning in my principal's office. Walking into that meeting, I was so certain that I was not the right person for the job. What made me change my mind and stay? As I considered this question, the same answer kept coming back to me: it was the person who sat behind the desk. I was sure I was not the right person to be teaching my class, but he convinced me I was wrong. I constantly felt overworked and exhausted throughout the entirety of that first year, but his support and belief in me pushed me to persevere until the end.

Our school leadership had changed throughout the years as I had three different principals in a span of seven years. Each principal was excellent and had numerous individual strengths and talents. However, the retention rates were quite different depending on the individual principal at the time. The principal who convinced me to stay that day in October never had a staff member resign mid-year, and had minimal turnover in the summers. His leadership style was comprised of every characteristic that would be considered “transformational”. He was charismatic; he was ethical; he treated everyone as an individual and ensured that each person was challenged intellectually and professionally. He inspired the entire staff to focus on the collective goal of student achievement and community betterment. He did all this to create a change in the school to bring it from a failing school to one with some of the best test scores in the entire nation.

These experiences have led me to ask the questions: Would his leadership style have inspired the other teachers, who did not experience his principalship, to stay? How much influence does a principal’s leadership style have over the retention decisions of his or her teachers?

Current Project

While there has been some research on how transformational leadership affects teacher retention rates, as we will see in Chapter Two, there is little research specifically on how transformational leadership affects teacher retention in urban, voucher schools. Voucher schools are schools that allow parents to use public funding for private school tuition (Farrell & Matthews, 2006). Therefore, in this capstone, I will study this link to

discover how to increase the retention of quality teachers through transformational leadership so staff and students do not experience the adverse effects that go along with teacher attrition. Based on my findings, I will create a principal toolkit that principals and other school leaders can use to support their skills in learning how to lead with strong transformational leadership.

Summary and Preview

Chapter One provides background for the reasoning behind the project. Chapter Two will include a review of literature specifically around the impacts of teacher attrition, as well as different strategies to improve teacher retention. It will then discuss the retention strategy of strong principal support using transformational leadership and how this type of support can help retain more teachers. Chapter Three will outline my professional development project for school leaders, which is a website that gives school leaders practical ways to build transformational leadership. The website will contain four sections that each center around a different characteristic of transformational leadership: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985). Lastly, Chapter Four will conclude the study with what I learned from the experience, recommendations and other thoughts to consider.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to investigate the question: *What effects does a principal's transformational leadership style have on teacher retention at an urban, voucher school?* Chapter One described how this question stemmed from my experience as a teacher and as an administrator. It then identified how teacher attrition affects administration, staff culture and student learning. One method of addressing teaching retention is through strong principal leadership, specifically a transformational style, which is what my project attempts to build in school leaders. This project will give school leaders practical ways to build transformational leadership and therefore provide strong support to teachers.

This Chapter discusses the reasons behind this study and describes the relevant research that supports it. The research summary is organized in the following way: I will begin by identifying the current trends and rates in teacher attrition, as well as how high teacher attrition affects students and schools. I will then delve into one strategy that supports strong teacher retention: principal leadership. Next, I will explore the correlation between a principal's transformational leadership and teacher retention. After that, I will outline each of the traits commonly associated with transformational leadership and indicate how a principal can exhibit each characteristic in an urban, voucher school. I will then provide an introduction to the adult learning principles that I

will use in my project. Lastly, I will briefly outline the project that will be described in more detail in Chapter Three.

The Rates of Teacher Attrition

In this section, I will define teacher attrition and identify national rates and trends. I will then discuss how attrition is costly to schools and students and why it is essential that we retain more quality teachers.

Ingersoll, Merrill and Stuckey (2014) divide teacher attrition into two different groups: movers, or teachers who stay teaching but move to a different district or school, and leavers, teachers who completely leave the profession altogether. Both movers and leavers have a significant impact on students and schools, so for the sake of this study, attrition will refer to both movers and leavers.

The attrition rate in the USA in 2016 was over 8%, with only a third of those teachers leaving due to retirement (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). This rate is unusually high when compared to similar countries such as Finland and Canada, where the rate is typically 3% to 4%. In the United States, approximately half a million teachers leave their schools each year, a number that has been on the rise in recent years (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Leob, & Wyckoff, 2011). In addition, teacher attrition rates are significantly higher than that of many other careers including nursing, law and engineering (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

In order to fully understand the scope of teacher attrition, we must first understand who is leaving. The highest rates occur among new teachers. Ingersoll et al. (2014) stated that 44 percent of new teachers, both in public and private schools, leave teaching

entirely within five years, a number which has increased since the 1980s. Kukla-Acevedo (2009) found new teachers had 1.5 times the likelihood of leaving a school compared to the rate of experienced teachers. Similarly, teachers younger than 30 were three times as likely to leave teaching altogether and four times as likely to switch schools. Also, the odds of attrition are higher in, females, young, married, White, those who have children, have degrees in math or science, have no graduate degree and those who score lower on standardized tests (Borman & Dowlong, 2018). Lastly, attrition tends to be higher in schools with low-achieving-students (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

The Costs of Teacher Attrition

While there are many costs to teacher attrition, it most significantly leads to a decrease in student learning. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) contended that the higher the rates of teacher attrition, the lower students perform academically, with more impact being felt on schools with low achieving students. One reason for this loss of student learning is because new teachers leave the classroom before they can fully develop their skills as teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2014). In a study on teacher effectiveness, Strunk and Robinson (2006) asserted that teachers were much more successful after two or three years in the classroom. Meister and Melnick (2009) argued that new teachers not only struggle with work overload but also with behavior management.

Teacher attrition has contributed to a growing teacher shortage in the United States and, therefore, to a lack of qualified teachers in its classrooms (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Between 2009 and 2014, teacher education enrollments dropped 35%. This, coupled with the attrition rate of 8%, has led to these

severe shortages. The shortages are highest in special education, mathematics and science and typically also have a greater impact on schools with disadvantaged students.

Lastly, teacher attrition is financially costly to schools. Borman and Dowlong (2008) surmised that for the 170,000 non-retirees who left teaching in 1999-2000, the total cost of replacement was nearly \$2.2 billion. A similar study estimated that, in Texas, the 40 percent attrition rate in public school teachers in their first three years cost the state \$329 million, or \$8,000 per leaving teacher (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000). Money that could be used to improve our schools through new curriculum or student resources is instead being used for the recruitment and development of new teachers.

As current national attrition rates are considerable and these rates have shown to have a negative impact on schools and the students that learn in them, there has been much research on various strategies to increase teacher retention. These strategies will be discussed in the following section.

Administrative Support in Decreasing Teacher Attrition

The strategies researchers have proposed to increase teacher retention include increased salaries, better working conditions, stronger teacher preparation programs and new mentoring models (Darling-Hammond, 2003). While all of these are instrumental in attempting to retain more teachers, they are beyond the focus of this one project. I will concentrate on the strategy that has to do with the project described in Chapter 3: administrative support.

Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Leob, and Wyckoff (2011) described administrative support as “the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers’ work easier and help them to improve their teaching” (p. 307). It has been widely observed that when teachers perceive support from their administration, they are much more likely to remain teaching (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Boyd et al., 2011). Boyd et al. (2011) found that dissatisfaction with administration, at 40%, was the reason most cited for leaving a school. In the same study, former teachers indicated that they received more support and recognition from their current manager than they had as teachers from their then principal, one of the most common complaints being that the principals did not encourage the professional collaboration that the teachers craved. Pogodzinski, Youngs, Frank and Belman (2012) specifically studied novice teachers and found that a teacher’s perception of the administrator-teacher relations was also the strongest predictor of retention, even stronger than school resources, workloads or administrative duties. Additionally, Thibodeaux, B. Labat, Lee and A. Labat (2015) studied leadership styles and found a significant correlation between the principal leadership style and teacher satisfaction and retention.

Transformational Leadership

One such way to provide strong administrative support is through leading with transformational leadership (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). The term transformational leadership was used by Burns in 1978 as a type of political leadership (Burns, 1978). The theory was then adapted by Bass in the 1980s to describe business leadership (Bass, 1985). Not long after, the theory was adapted as a form of school leadership and has

henceforth been one of the leading theories of leadership for school principals and leaders (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999).

Hallinger (2010) described transformational leadership as a type of distributed leadership that encourages bottom-up participation and focuses specifically on change in an organization. He also described this type of leader as one who increases the capacity of others to carry out their mission well. The leader sets a vision and encourages others to take part in implementing this vision until it becomes reality.

Hauserman and Stick (2013) argued that a transformational leadership style is the type that teachers both want in a leader and will make them feel most supported. In their study, they randomly selected teachers from 135 schools in Alberta, Canada and had them complete the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, an instrument that rated their principal's leadership style. Principals were then identified as either being low or high on the scale for transformational leadership, at which point teachers were identified for in-depth interviews. In the interviews, teachers with transformational principals "...could not report enough positives about their principals" (p. 193). Among other characteristics, transformational principals were described as leaders who developed leadership, worked collaboratively, emphasized teamwork, were role models and were seen as visionaries.

Mancuso, Roberts and White (2010) also studied the link between retention and a principal's transformational leadership style. In their study, they surveyed both Stayers and Leavers at international schools to identify which factors impacted teacher retention decisions. One significant factor was having a supportive leader who displayed transformational characteristics. These teachers described their principals as leaders who

encouraged collaboration, helped problem solve, developed and upheld the school's vision and were respectful to all staff members. Mancuso et al. (2010) argued that school leader preparation programs that focus only on aspects of school management such as curriculum, instruction, human resources and finance need to reevaluate the setup to start including trainings that teach school leaders how to lead with transformational leadership. This research argues that a school leader needs to embody characteristics of transformational leadership in order to increase retention of quality teachers.

The Four Characteristics of Transformational Leaders

Since transformational leadership has been shown to increase teacher satisfaction and retention, it is imperative to identify exactly what transformational leadership looks like in a school. In this section, I will identify the four characteristics that are commonly associated with transformational leaders: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985). I will then describe real-world applications for each characteristic.

Idealized influence. The first characteristic commonly associated with transformational leadership is idealized influence (Bass, 1985). A leader who possesses this trait is a role model, goes above and beyond for the collective mission, makes whatever sacrifices necessary, and possesses strong ethics (Hughes, 2014).

Frisch (2013) researched what specific behaviors an ethical leader exhibits by analyzing interviews with ethical, executive leaders. First, she found that ethical leaders foster positive relationships by providing various opportunities to do so through such avenues as impromptu get-togethers or by always having an open door for questions and

concerns. Next, ethical leaders focus on fairness towards employees, which includes providing them with fair wages and job security. They also work hard to enhance their employees' work-life balance through various avenues of allowing them to work part-time if needed, or even giving extended maternity or paternity leave.

Lastly, an especially important part of ethical leadership is providing employees with ethical guidance (Frisch, 2013). The leader is a role model that shows excellent work performance. One of the leaders interviewed in Frisch's study said the following:

I think being a role model is one of the most important aspects of our leadership. You can't demand something of your employees while not doing it yourself. When we introduced the daily gymnastics for everybody, it worked only because we stood up in front of everybody and did the gymnastics ourselves. Our employees thought: 'If our bosses dedicated their time to it, it can't be too bad after all' (p. 35).

Another essential feature of ethical guidance is communicating ethical standards to employees (Frisch, 2013). The leader demands that employees work with integrity by following the rules of the workplace. Leaders not only communicate work expectations through handouts but also through development and training, as they see expectation setting as an ongoing process.

Inspirational motivation. The second quality of transformational leadership is inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985). A leader with this characteristic will inspire a compelling vision for the future and foster a sense of team spirit and enthusiasm amongst

the staff in order to encourage the resilience necessary to work through any challenges obstructing that vision (Hughes, 2014).

One way to exhibit this as a principal is through creating a strong vision via a mission statement. Gunther (2019) argued that having mission statement in which teachers are in agreeance is “worth a salary premium equal to approximately half of the drag of moving from an “A” - to an “F” - rated school” (p. 23). Fayad (2011) surveyed principals about their school mission statements and found they were both widely used and essential to their work. Many of the leaders said the statements were used daily as they had found ways to make them operational while managing their schools. One principal said that the mission was rooted in all the decisions made and others cited the use of the mission statement in parent and disciplinary meetings, letters, school culture promotion, professional development, and school identity emphasis.

Kampen (2019) suggested a six step approach to creating a school mission statement. This approach starts with gathering staff, students and other community members to identify the current state of the school. Step two is to identify the school’s strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and challenges. Step three is to decide where everyone would like to see the school in five to ten years and what steps are necessary to make that vision a reality. Step four is to write a first draft that is both specific and authentic. Step five is to give the mission statement to the school community in order to gather feedback. The sixth and final step is to put the mission statement into action.

Individual consideration of group members. The third characteristic of transformational leadership is individual consideration of group members (Bass, 1985). A

leader who has this characteristic is one who develops followers, treats staff members as individuals, identifies what these specific individuals need, and develops their strengths (Hughes, 2014).

Personal Relationships. When thinking about individual consideration of group members, it is first essential that the principal builds personal relationships with everyone on staff. Sack-Min (2016) argued that a principal needs to build relationships through continuous conversations with teachers and staff. For instance, Kathleen Gombos, who took the job of principal at Sandy Hook Elementary following the shooting, said that her overall strategy to build a supportive school climate has been in building these relationships. Gombos said she focused on “meeting people where they are, valuing their strengths, and doing whatever I can to be supportive, as well as building networks with staff and community” (p. 31).

Instructional Coaching. Another way to exhibit individual consideration of group members is through instructional coaching (Knight, 2006). Instructional coaching is a way to ensure that all teachers are being seen as individuals and developed professionally based upon their individual needs. In order for coaching to be effective, however, a principal must focus on eight factors, of which I will share just a few.

First, a coach needs to have sufficient time to work with teachers (Knight, 2006). A coach’s primary job should be to be *in* classrooms, observing teachers and then debriefing individual action steps. However, many coaches are often bogged down with various administrative tasks that take them out of the classroom, because their schedules

are seen as more flexible. In order for a coach to be effective, however, they must spend the majority of their time in classrooms.

The second factor for successful instructional coaching is to ensure coaches have the necessary skills and practices to share with the teachers with whom they work (Knight, 2006). These specific areas of skill and knowledge include behavior, pedagogical and content knowledge as well as knowledge about formative assessments. Often, instructional coaches need professional development themselves to acquire these skills. They also need development in other areas such as learning how to identify action steps, gather and analyze data, and effectively communicate and build relationships. This professional development will ensure coaches are able to discuss, teach, model and observe each practice with the teachers they are coaching.

Coaches also need to work closely with their principals (Knight, 2006). Principals and coaches should be meeting weekly to ensure they are of the same mind and so that they can problem-solve together. Lastly, principals need to hire the right instructional coaches. They must look for coaches who are accomplished teachers, are skilled at building relationships and are ambitious about the change that is needed in their school and their teachers.

Intellectual stimulation. The last characteristic of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985). A leader who has this characteristic looks for multiple perspectives when attempting to solve a problem, encourages non-traditional thinking and suggests new ways of looking at things (Hughes, 2014).

One way to encourage intellectual stimulation in a school is through professional learning communities (PLCs), in which teachers use inquiry and reflection as guides for their work. Thessin and Starr (2011) argued that if we are expecting students to work collaboratively and to problem-solve, we must also provide opportunities for teachers to do the same. Many schools are now using PLCs to both give teachers this opportunity and to increase the learning of their students through identifying new instructional practices. For the purposes of this project, I will use the format of the Stamford PLC cycle when discussing PLCs, which uses the following format:

1. **Inquire.** Members research the instructional area of focus.
2. **Analyze Data.** Members analyze the student data in the area of focus and identify the problem to be addressed.
3. **Look at Student Work.** Members analyze student work tied to the focus area.
4. **Examine Instruction.** Members observe one or more teachers by using a specific protocol to address the area of focus.
5. **Assess Student Progress.** Students are given another assessment and student progress is assessed.
6. **Reflect.** Teachers reflect on student progress in that instructional area. (Thessin & Starr, 2011, p. 50)

Effective implementation of PLCs takes deliberate effort and design (Thessin & Starr, 2011). In preparation for PLCs, a school must first carve out weekly common planning periods. Next, the principal and teacher must both take part in strong

professional development to better learn both what a PLC is and what it does, so principals can provide adequate direction and support in leading them. In Stamford, Connecticut, the district provided teachers with various team-building resources, including a PLC toolkit that included detailed explanations of each of the six steps of the Stamford PLC process as well as articles about each step, so they were prepared to lead them well.

DuFour (2004) argued there are ideas that represent the principles of PLCS that a school must adhere to in order to sustain the professional learning model. The first big idea is “ensuring that students learn” (p. 1). The model of PLCs comes from the assumption that students should not just be *taught*, but need to *learn*. The staff members then need to ask what practices are most effective in ensuring that all students are actually learning. Teachers look at student data, identify problems or difficulties that their students are facing and then find best practices to help bridge the gap.

The second big idea is “a culture of collaboration” (DuFour, 2004, p. 3). In this, the school community understands that they must work together for the good of the student community as collaboration encourages best practice. It is in this collaboration that they will achieve school improvement and remove barriers to student success.

The third and last big idea is to “focus on results” (DuFour, 2004, p. 4). The effectiveness of a PLC is judged based off of the results of student achievement. They rely heavily on student data to identify gaps and improve results. These three ideas will be fully incorporated into the project so that the learning communities are bettering the school community and improving student achievement. Focusing on these big ideas will

also challenge teachers intellectually and fulfill the intellectual stimulation characteristic of transformational leadership.

Adult Learning Principles

So far, the discussion has centered around how transformational leadership can increase teacher retention. Since the goal of this project is to make a professional development tool for school leaders, adequate thought must be put into implementing learning strategies that are appropriate for adult learners. In order to do so, this next section will be dedicated to an exploration of adult learning principles.

Knowles. Knowles (1980) argued that adults learn differently than children and therefore, must be taught in a different manner. Adult learning is defined as androgyny, to which Knowles defined as “the art and science of helping adults learn” in contrast to pedagogy, “the art and science of teaching children” (1980, p. 43). There are four main assumptions that Knowles made about adult learners. The first assumption is that, in contrast to child learners, adult learners are much more self-directed. While they may occasionally act dependent, they have a psychological need to learn independently. As a result, the teacher acts more as a guide than as a teacher and the learning becomes a mutually shared responsibility between the teacher and student.

The next assumption is that adults bring many different experiences to their learning (Knowles, 1980). These experiences become resources for their own learning as well as for the learning of those around them. Additionally, adults learn better if they can do so through experiences. Therefore, primary techniques for learning include avenues

such as discussion, case studies, problem-solving, field experience, and consultation groups.

The third assumption is that adults are ready to learn when they have a need to do so through confronting real-life problems that they must solve (Knowles, 1980). Knowles argued that, similar to how children learn only what they are ready for developmentally at the time, adults are the same, and are ready to learn something only when they need it. As adults, these developmental tasks are connected to social roles and identities. For example, when one is presented with the role of becoming a mother or father, or starting a new career, one will learn to do so only when needed. Knowles (1980) stated,

Adults, on the other hand, tend to have a perspective of immediacy of application towards most of their learning. They engage in learning largely in response to pressures they feel from their current life situation. To adults, education is a process of improving their ability to cope with life problems they face now. They tend, therefore, to enter an educational activity in a problem-centered or performance-centered frame of mind (p. 53).

Therefore, learning should be organized in such a way so that the learner can immediately apply it to his or her own life.

The last assumption is that learners see education as a way to achieve their full potential in life by increasing their competence in a needed area (Knowles, 1980). The learner has self-identified what they need to learn and these needs are congruent with what is being taught. The learner must have a model for what they hope to achieve, such

as a model for what it looks like to be a good teacher or a good principal. Next, the learner identifies precisely where their competencies lie in accordance with this model and lastly, identify what they are missing in order to meet that model, giving the learner ample motivation and direction.

Knowles (1980) said that based off of these assumptions, there are various implications for adult learning, of which I will name just a few. The first element is the learning climate. The adult must feel at ease with a comfortable physical climate that is tailored to adults. This includes not only furniture that is comfortable and adult-sized, but also an environment that invites collaboration. In addition, adults must have a psychological climate in which they feel both respected and supported.

Another element is the planning process (Knowles, 1980). If adults are involved in planning, they will be much more invested in the learning. One way to do this is to ensure that adults have different options and activities to choose from and therefore, more autonomy over their learning. Adults should also identify their own learning objectives and design their learning experiences based on those objectives.

The last element is the evaluation of learning (Knowles, 1980). Adult learners often see being graded as a sign of disrespect that makes them feel as if they are being treated as children. Therefore, Knowles proposed using self-evaluation as a tool for learning evaluation. The teacher can work with the learner to help them judge their gains in competence.

Kolb. Kolb (1984) also significantly influenced the field of adult learning. Kolb defined the experiential learning cycle which includes four stages: concrete learning,

reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. First, in concrete learning, the learner encounters a new experience. Then, in reflective observation, the learner personally reflects on what was learned. In abstract conceptualization, the learner forms new ideas based off of the first two stages. Last, in active experimentation, the learner applies what was just learned to his or her surroundings to see if there is any learning that needs to be modified. This cycle consists of learning with concrete tasks such as scenarios or role-plays. Kolb (1983) stated,

Immediate personal experience is the focal point for learning. It will give life, texture and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time provide a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process. When adults share an experience, they can share it fully, concretely and abstractly (p 21).

Kolb argued that learning is much broader than just a classroom, but it takes place in many different settings, from the store to the home, to the research laboratory. Adults learn best when they are given real-life ways to do so.

Synthesis

The research summarized above suggests that cultivating principals who encompass the four characteristics of transformational leadership will build schools that retain more teachers and therefore have the most positive impact on student learning. While there has been some research on transformational leadership and its effects on teacher retention, there has been little on how transformational leadership affects

retention specifically at urban, voucher schools. This project that is based on Knowles' and Kolb's adult learning principles seeks to combine the elements of a transformational leadership style into a professional development website for school leaders, that will increase teacher retention at urban, voucher schools.

Summary

In summary, this Chapter started by identifying the key terms of teacher attrition and retention, outlined the current national rates and trends of teacher attrition and then discussed strategies that can be used to retain more teachers, explicitly focusing on principal support using a transformational leadership style. A transformational leadership style is based on four characteristics: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985). In the next Chapter, I will discuss the project I created that came out of this research: a website that trains school leaders in these four characteristics of transformational leadership in order to retain more quality teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

For this project, I researched teacher attrition and retention. As described in Chapter Two, I investigated the current national rates of teacher attrition, as well as the various reasons teachers decide to leave either their current classroom or the teaching field altogether. I then focused on one specific strategy a considerable amount of research has centered upon: leader support. Within leader support, I identified the type of leadership strategy that has been proven effective in giving teachers adequate support: transformational leadership. Then, from my research, I outlined different ways school leaders can implement transformational leadership in their schools, all found from case studies, teacher surveys and testimonials.

Chapter Three outlines the website that aims to train school leaders in using transformational leadership at urban, voucher schools based on the research summarized in Chapter Two. The website will help principals learn practical ways to build the four characteristics of transformational leadership: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985). The goal of the project is to help increase teacher retention through supporting teachers with transformational leadership in order to help answer my research question: *What effects does a principal's transformational leadership style have on teacher retention at an urban, voucher school?*

This Chapter will begin by describing the project and with an explanation for how the project came out of the research described in Chapter Two. I will then outline the website by describing its framework, setting, audience, measures of effectiveness, timeline and end with considerations.

Project Overview

Based on the research presented in Chapter Two, I developed a professional development website that will give principals and other school leaders practical ways to build transformational leadership. Overall, there are four main pages or sections on the website, each centered around a different characteristic of transformational leadership: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985). In each section, there is one tangible way to incorporate that characteristic.

Section one, idealized influence, focuses on leading with integrity and gives the school leader various ways to do so. This section includes videos to watch, staff get-together ideas, open door policy suggestions, examples of codes of professional conduct, workplace ethics training activities as well as tasks and reflection space in which the leader can deliberate on whether his or her leadership decisions have or have not been ethical.

Section two, inspirational motivation, gives strategies for creating and implementing a mission statement to develop a sense of cohesion and purpose amongst staff. This section outlines exactly how to create a mission statement with staff input, as well as how to incorporate it in the daily life of the school, such as in daily morning

meetings, professional development and parent meetings. Lastly, the section also gives examples of other strong school mission statements that the school leader can use as exemplars.

The third section, intellectual stimulation, centers around implementing strong and purposeful professional learning communities (PLCs) that give teachers the tools to problem solve collectively. This section lays out how a PLC is run, and includes a calendar and toolkit to get the PLCs up and running. There is also an informative video that gives more information on PLCs.

The fourth and last section, individualized consideration, addresses how to implement instructional coaching that ensures each teacher is developed professionally. This section includes a webinar on instructional coaching, guidelines for hiring strong instructional coaches, links for instructional coach trainings, sample coaching schedules, as well as sample feedback and data meeting templates.

This project is a website because it is the most efficient and easily accessible format for professional development materials. This format makes it easy for the leaders to have the information with them wherever they go and therefore use it daily. It will also be an easy format to update with new research and based off of feedback.

Research Framework

The theoretical framework that aided in the development of this project is Malcolm Knowles' and David Kolb's work on adult education. Knowles argued that adult learners differ from child learners and therefore must be taught in a different way (Knowles, 1980). For example, an adult is more self-directed, brings more experiences to

the learning, and typically learns out of necessity when confronted with real-life problems.

The project was designed to include Knowles' adult learning principles in various ways. First, Knowles argued that an adult learner must have a learning climate that is comfortable and adult centered (Knowles, 1980). There should be adult-sized furniture and a place that makes the adult feel at ease. The toolkit is designed so that the learner can choose to learn, wherever and whenever, at his or her own pace with completely self-directed learning.

Next, Knowles argued that adult learners learn best by applying their learning immediately in order to solve real-life problems (Knowles, 1980). As the problem of teacher attrition is one of great significance at the school system in which this project will be used, the learning will be applied immediately to help mitigate the problem. Therefore, the goal is that the leaders will automatically be invested in their learning since it is relevant, useful and directly tied to their needs.

Last, Knowles proposed self-evaluation as a tool for learning (Knowles, 1980). He argued that since adults often feel disrespected when they are graded, they should instead use self-evaluation to gauge their progress. Therefore, at the beginning and end of the project, the school leaders will self-assess their leadership style as a means of identifying what was learned.

The toolkit is also designed using David Kolb's (1984) work in adult learning. Kolb argued that adults need to learn through experience and concrete learning. Everything in the principal toolkit is designed so the school leaders can follow the model

of experiential learning. The learners will first apply their learning to a concrete experience. They will then reflect on that learning, form new ideas and then identify whether any of their learning needs to be modified.

The design of the website will be influenced by the study of Beach and Willows (2014) which found necessary components website designers need to include when creating professional development websites for teachers. The first component was the quality of the information on the website. In the study, teachers commented on the trustworthiness of the website, saying that credibility was especially increased with quotations and links to other websites and journal articles. The second component was ease of use: the loading speed should be quick and the layout logical. The last component was visual appearance such as readability, color choice and visual technologies. Based on the findings of this study, the project includes quality information with various links to websites and articles, a logical layout and a professional look.

Setting and Audience

The toolkit was designed to be used by two primary audiences. The first primary audience is school leaders in a voucher school network in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There will be seven principals who use the toolkit, one principal at each elementary school in the network. These principals will vary in experience, gender, race, and school setting. The rationale for choosing these principals for this project is to see if building transformational leadership characteristics will help them retain more teachers in their buildings.

The second primary audience is deans of students and deans of instruction at the same voucher school network in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There will be twenty-four deans altogether. These deans will also vary in experience, gender, race, and school setting in the hope that building transformational leadership characteristics will also help retain more teachers.

The last, and secondary audience is the teachers that will be influenced by this project. The teachers will not directly participate in the project; however, they will indirectly benefit from the improved administrative support that the project will provide. They will also be completing surveys before and after the start of the project to gauge the change in leadership and therefore, the project's effectiveness.

Project Effectiveness

The effectiveness of this project will be assessed through school leader and teacher surveys. Before school leaders are trained on the website, they will evaluate themselves, using a survey, on their leadership style. Principals will grade themselves on a scale of 1 to 5 on questions such as, *My staff knows and believes in the vision I have for the school*, *Each staff member feels cared for individually as a professional and as a person*, and *My staff feels intellectually challenged by the work they do*. The data from this survey will be analyzed to identify where each leader falls on a scale of transformational leadership. At the completion of the project, the school leaders will again evaluate themselves using the same survey, at which time the leader will be given a new transformational leadership score.

The next survey will be given to teachers. At the beginning of the school year, teachers will be asked to complete a similar initial survey, assessing the transformational leadership qualities of their school leaders, principals and deans. The questions will follow the same format of the leader survey. For example, sample survey questions include: *I know and believe in my principal's vision for the school, I feel cared for individually as a professional and as a person, and I feel intellectually challenged by the work I do.* In this same survey, teachers will also be asked to rate the likelihood that they will stay at their current school after one, five and ten years. They will then be asked to identify the top three reasons that would affect their decision to leave or stay. At the end of the school year, the teachers will receive the same survey. At this point, the survey will be analyzed to identify whether the school leaders grew in transformational leadership, according to the teachers, and whether that affected the potential retention rates of the teachers at the school. These surveys will not be mandatory for teachers but will be highly encouraged. Based on the data from these surveys, revisions will be made to the project to make it more effective for future years.

The effectiveness of this project over time can also be measured through retention numbers at the voucher school network. It will be necessary to work together with the school network to gain access to this data.

Lastly, each leader who participates in the project will fill out a feedback questionnaire about the website itself. The school leaders will grade the website on a scale of 1 to 5 using questions such as, *The website has a professional look, The section Individual Consideration of Group Members has useful content, and I have more*

transformational leadership after engaging with and implementing the website's content.

I will take and update the website based off the feedback received.

Timeline

The research for this project began in the summer of 2019, continued into the fall of 2019 and was completed the winter of 2019. This will allow for the website to be launched in the summer of 2020. The school leaders will be given the website as a self-guided tool to be trained in each section of transformational leadership. The website is designed for school leaders to study in its entirety in the summer as they plan for their school year and then to use throughout the school year while implementing each section. Each section of the website will take one week of the summer, so a total of four weeks to study the information and plan for the school year. If school leaders are trained in each section in the summer, each new venture will be up and running in the school by October. Included in the website is an example calendar of the month of September that gives the school leader an idea for when to implement each section and task. At the end of September, the school leader will have led one ethics training, hosted office hours, hosted one staff social, created a mission statement with staff and community members, rolled out PLCs, and hired an instructional coach with whom the school leader meets with weekly. Surveys will be given in August of 2020 and May of 2020 to gauge the effectiveness of the project. The data from the surveys will be taken to update and improve the project on an ongoing basis.

Additional Considerations

There are a few considerations to keep in mind for this project. First, the literature is clear that principal leadership and support is one of the strongest indicators of teacher retention; however, by narrowing the methods to only principal leadership, the project will miss out on other strategies that may also be effective in keeping teachers in the classroom. For example, Darling-Hamond (2003) cited four main factors: salaries, working conditions, preparation and mentoring support to all be strong influencers on whether a teacher decides to leave a school or the profession. However, since the scope of principal leadership is so vast, in order for the current project to most effective, it will be necessary to focus in on this one strategy.

Next, implementing each section of this project will take careful planning, diligent thought, and sufficient time. As discussed in Chapter Two, professional learning communities and teacher coaching will not be productive if not implemented carefully and with fidelity. Some principals may choose to focus on implementing two sections from the toolkit in the first year and the last two sections in the second year, in order to ensure they are giving sufficient time to the implementation of each new juncture. If so, this may change the timeline of the project from one year to two years.

Summary

This chapter explained the reasoning for creating and designing a principal toolkit to answer the question: *What effects does a principal's transformational leadership style have on teacher retention at an urban, voucher school?* I first provided an overview of the project. I then discussed the framework, setting, audience, measures of effectiveness, timeline and then considerations for the project. This project, that is based on the adult

learning principles proposed by Knowles and Kolb, combines the elements of transformational leadership to create a toolkit for principals that aims at increasing teacher retention at urban, voucher schools.

In Chapter Four, I will discuss the final product, the experience of the capstone, as well as what I have learned along the way. I will also identify how this project could impact the school leaders, teachers and students at the voucher school network.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

Introduction

In Chapter One, I articulated my personal story: first, how I nearly resigned from teaching mid-year and then how I saw various teachers do this very thing. I then described the impact those resignations had on the school: the academic impact on the students and the repercussions on staff culture. Students need and deserve a quality education and this will only be achieved when we identify how to keep great teachers in the classroom. After wrestling with the research question, *What effects does a principal's transformational leadership style have on teacher retention at an urban, voucher school?* I believe I now know what it takes to retain strong teachers.

In Chapter Two, I researched teacher retention and attrition and identified various factors that impact whether teachers decide to leave or stay in teaching roles. I found that strong principal leadership, specifically transformational leadership, is a factor that increases teacher satisfaction and the probability that they stay. Chapter Three outlined my project: a principal toolkit in the form of a website. This website gives principals and other school leaders practical ways to build and lead with transformational leadership. The Chapter also included the framework, setting, audience, measures of effectiveness, and timeline of the project. Now in Chapter Four, I will conclude this project with insights, a revisiting of the literature, limitations, future research ideas and finally, my own reflections.

Insights

Perhaps the most important thing that I have learned from this experience is that the issue of teacher attrition is not one that is unique to my school or even my city. The issue is currently affecting an unacceptable amount of students in the United States, and at higher rates for students of low socioeconomic status. Teacher attrition is, however, a problem that can be solved, or at least mitigated. There is much research and many strategies to equip school leaders with giving teachers what they need to continue affecting student lives in the classroom. These strategies include, but are not limited to, higher wages, better working conditions, stronger professional development, consistent school procedures, principal support, and more mentoring opportunities. While all of these strategies are too many to consider for just one project, I genuinely believe that each is vital to consider in conjunction with providing strong leadership through transformational leadership. I also think that if a leader is truly leading with transformational leadership, the rest of these strategies should be ones that they are already using.

Revisiting the Literature

After completing a review of the literature, I found a plethora of reasons for high teacher attrition; however, one that I continued to see over and over again was lack of administrative support. For example, a study by Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Leob, and Wyckoff (2011) found that dissatisfaction with administration was the most cited reason for deciding to leave a teaching placement. In fact, study after study further convinced me that better principal support was one of the best strategies to increase teacher retention; however, I lacked any studies that told me exactly what that support looked like. After

more digging, I came across a study from Thibodeaux, B. Labat, Lee and A. Labat (2015) which studied leadership styles and found a significant correlation between the principal leadership style and teacher satisfaction and retention. From there, I found a study by Hauserman and Stick (2013) that argued that a transformational leadership style is the type that teachers both want in a leader and will make them feel most supported. This also concurred with my own experience as a teacher. The reason I did not decide to resign was because I had a strong principal who truly supported me and embodied the transformational leadership qualities of idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation

This was an inciting moment in my research and finally when I knew I had come across the question I wanted to research: *What effects does a principal's transformational leadership style have on teacher retention at an urban, voucher school?* After this, the research and the writing seemed to flow much more smoothly as I felt that I had discovered something of truth and something that could significantly impact the schools in which I work.

Lastly, I found the adult learning theories to be especially impactful, specifically the work of Knowles. Knowles argued that adult learners differ from child learners and must be taught in a different way (Knowles, 1980). Adults are more self-directed, bring more experiences to the learning, and typically learn out of necessity when confronted with real-life problems. I, therefore, had to design the project in a way so that the school leaders would be in charge of their own learning and could immediately apply what they

learned to their own lives. Doing this was challenging but it resulted in a project that will prove most beneficial to the adult learners for whom it is intended.

Limitations

One limitation that emerged is the seemingly impossible task of creating something that fits into an already incredibly busy schedule of a school leader. Halfway through the creation of my project, I shared my work with a fellow school leader. While she thought the content was helpful and would certainly help increase teacher retention, she shared reservations about the amount of time a school leader has compared to the amount of time it would take to implement everything within the website. While I believe that the pay-off of keeping quality teachers is more than worth the time put in, I have a few suggestions for school leaders who are not able to put in the time necessary to implement each step with fidelity.

The first suggestion is to implement two sections from the toolkit in the first year and the last two sections in the second year, to ensure school leaders are giving sufficient time to the implementation of each new juncture. Specifically professional learning communities and instructional coaching will not be productive if not implemented carefully and with fidelity. My suggestion is to implement the sections of Inspirational Motivation and Individual Consideration of Group Members, which include creating a mission statement and implementing Instructional Coaching the first year, and Idealized Influence and Intellectual Stimulation, which include leading with ethics and starting PLCs, the second year.

One other limitation I anticipate is keeping up with the demand of adding additional resources to my website and editing the website based on the feedback received. Thankfully, I was able to use a website builder, Wix.com, that is easy to use and also easy to edit and will help this process.

Contributions and Future Ideas

My capstone project contributes to the professional development and holistic training of school leaders. This project pushed past leader development in areas of curriculum and budgeting, to focus specifically on the way a leader leads. This website will be especially impactful as it gives the leader practical ways to build transformational leadership and step by step guidance on different school ventures to roll out. School leaders will learn how to lead ethically, create and use a school mission statement, roll-out professional learning communities and provide strong instructional coaching. I hope my project will encourage leaders to lead in such a way that makes teachers feel heard, developed and cared for.

My next step for this project is to pilot it with a group of leaders. Before I do this, I want to be sure that all of the information in the website is organized in a way that is easy to use and therefore makes it the most impactful. I also want to ensure that I am able to receive feedback from various school leaders beforehand. I will take the suggestions to update the website so it is most impactful for school leaders.

Further research could focus on how transformational leadership affects teachers differently at different types of schools. For example, do teachers at small private schools need this same type of transformational leadership? What about at large, public schools?

As each teaching placement is unique, it is worth asking what type of leadership teachers at respective schools need to stay in the classroom.

Author's Reflection

This project has become quite significant to me. I feel strongly that every student deserves a quality education and I do not believe that to be possible until we solve the problem of teacher attrition that is currently so prevalent.

I have also enjoyed the process of research and writing, much more than I expected at the beginning. I enjoyed becoming a sort of “expert” in the field and imparting the knowledge I gained. I also am ecstatic about the opportunity to use what I learned to make schools better for students. I truly think this project is one that will further education and tremendously affect the field.

Summary

The goal of this project was to answer the question: *What effects does a principal's transformational leadership style have on teacher retention at an urban, voucher school?* Through reflection, reviewing the literature and designing the project, I built a website to help school leaders build transformational leadership in themselves and therefore retain more quality teachers. I believe that teacher attrition is one of the most significant issues that education is currently facing, and we will not be able to provide our students with quality education until we give teachers the support and guidance they need through transformational leadership.

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