

Transformational Approach To School Leadership: Contribution To Continued Improvement Of Education

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Abstract: Over the last decades, an impressive number of conceptual models in the field of educational leadership have emerged; contingency or trait theories, situational, instructional, shared or distributed school leadership approaches, all tried to demonstrate their specific impact on school development and students achievement. The present paper is focused on exploring one of the foremost models, subject of systematic inquiry and controversial debates developed in relation with school or in nonschool organizations: transformational school leadership. The approach is considered a relevant support for school change process. Its contribution is analyzed in comparison with the benefits of other competing models, the aim of the paper being not to establish hierarchies but to gather significant solutions for better schooling. As a reconciliation solution, the integrative leadership model is also advocated.

Key words: transformational school leadership, shared instructional leadership, distributed leadership, school improvement and development

1. Comparative approach to school leadership models

No matter the educational context, initiators of any school changing process

invariably assume that success of their effort is indestructibly linked with leadership involvement. Alongside recognition of this overall contribution of effective educational

leadership to school reform, a wide range of international studies have confirmed that leaders clearly facilitate major and concrete in-school differences to student achievement or organizational culture and relations, teachers motivation etc.

In supporting this complex “school change journey” (Fullan, 2002), leaders have to creatively expand their leadership repertoires; for this purpose, diverse models can be taken into consideration, as conceptions of educational leadership have been continually evolving over recent times. Thus, during last decade, a refreshed conception of educational leadership has emerged, shifting from early traditional administrative positions, to managerial ones, to individually assumed leading roles and to distributed leadership.

This dynamics of developing new approaches in describing school leadership was motivated not only by improvement purposes; Hallinger (2010) notices that today’s favourite brand is soon replaced by another and that leadership models in education are subject to the same faddism that is apparent in other areas of education. As a consequence, as Dinham et al. (2011) notice, focus on school leadership and educational effectiveness resulted in a variety of leadership theories: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, constructivist leadership, servant leadership, cultural leadership, and primal leadership. Certainly some of these models appear to be no more than ‘slogans’ (Leithwood et al. 2006, 7); some have almost no reference to a body of evidence or a cohesive conceptual framework (Dinham et al., 2011) or are just stylistic exercises meant to demonstrate authors’ ability of adding text to some newly invented labels.

For the purpose of this paper, three models are considered relevant and have been selected for an in-depth presentation, all being subjected to extended empirical study over the time:

- instructional school leadership
- transformational school leadership
- distributed school leadership.

Narrowly defined, instructional school leadership focuses on leadership functions directly related to teaching and learning (Murphy, 1988). The model emerged in North America in 1980s from early research on effective schools. Prior to this moment, there were neither coherent models nor validated instruments available for the purpose of studying instructional leadership; then several conceptualisations of the model emerged concurrently (Hallinger, 2010).

One frequently used conceptualisation of instructional leadership is based on Hallinger’s (2000) three-dimensional model; the approach includes defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. By integrating these dimensions, Hallinger defines instructional leadership as being focused predominantly on the role of the school headmaster in coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction school (idem). In his view, instructional leaders lead from a combination of expertise and charisma; they are hands-on principals, ‘hip-deep’ in curriculum and instruction, and unafraid of working with teachers on the improvement of teaching and learning (idem).

During the 1990s, this model of instructional leadership was criticized as being paternalistic, archaic, and dependent on docile followers (Burlingame, 1987, cit in Marks

and Printy, 2003); as a consequence, other terms came to light, such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership. As Hallinger (2010) underlines, the emergence of these models indicated a broader dissatisfaction with the instructional leadership approach, which many believed focused too much on the principal as the centre of expertise, power and authority. Leithwood (1994) has labelled this evolution of educational leadership role as 'second order' changes as it is targeted organization's normative structure before any other dimensions.

One of the models mentioned above, shared leadership, describes the active collaboration of principal and teachers on important pedagogical issues as curriculum or assessment. Within this model, teachers are not only "followers", but experts ready to be involved in school improvement process. Thus, the headmaster is not the sole instructional leader but the "leader of instructional leaders" (Glickman, 1989). In this way, the approach was analyzed in comparison with the individualistic views of leadership supposed to be specific to transformational model.

Distributed leadership is also considered concerned with the co-performance of leadership practice. In this model, formal leaders prompt emergent and creative actions among groups to whom leadership is distributed and those in formal leadership roles emphasise the management of interdependencies, rather than controls over process or outcomes (Harris, 2009).

In comparison with the previous models, "transformational leadership focuses on developing the organization's capacity to innovate. Rather than focusing specifically on direct coordination, control, and supervision

of curriculum and instruction, transformational leadership seeks to build the organization's capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2010).

This theory of transformational school leadership was funded 1970s and 1980s. It found a receptive audience in the educational community during the 1990s as part of a general reaction against the top-down policy driven Hallinger (2010). The main argument convincing the educationalists was the fact that transformational leader motivates the teachers and students by raising their consciousness about the importance of organizational goals and by "inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization" (Marks and Printy, 2003, pg. 375). In their relationships with followers, this theory posits, transformational leaders exhibit at least one of these leadership factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (idem).

2. Transformational school leadership practices: impact on school improvement

Extensive research undertaken in a variety of organizational school contexts highlighted the important functions transformational school leaders perform for improving education. Roles and concrete practices associated with this particular approach have been a consistent research topic for many studies including: Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi's (2001) transformational school leadership model, Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) proposed by Kouzes and

Posner's (1995), Principal's Transformational Leadership Inventory developed by Chong-Hee No (1994, in Ham, 1999).

A comparative analyze of these studies demonstrates a lot of common and

overlapping sets of transformational leaders practices performed within concrete schools. Sun and Leithwood (2013) identified and described 11 of such specific leadership practices:

Transformational school leaders practices (Sun and Leithwood, 2013):	
Developing a shared vision and building goal consensus	-identification, development, and articulation of a shared vision that is appealing and inspiring to staff;
	-achieving goal consensus among staff; motivating staff with challenging but achievable goals;
	-communicating optimism about future goals;
	-giving staff an overall sense of purpose for their work and monitoring and referring to school goals when staff are making decisions.
Providing intellectual stimulation	-challenging staff's assumptions;
	-stimulating and encouraging their creativity;
	-providing information to staff to help them evaluate their practices, refine them, and carry out their tasks more effectively
Providing individualized support	-listening
	-attending to individual opinions and needs,
	-acting as mentors or coaches to staff members, treating them as individuals with unique needs and capacities, and supporting their professional development.
Modeling behavior.	-“walking the talk,” providing a role model of ethical behavior;
	-instilling pride, respect and trust in staff; symbolizing success;
	- demonstrating a willingness to change one's own practices as a result of new understandings
Holding high performance expectations	-demonstrating through their behaviors that they expect a high level of professionalism from staff, hold high expectations for students, and expect staff to be effective innovators.
Providing contingent rewards	-rewarding followers for completing agreed-upon work.
Management by exception	-monitoring the work of followers but intervening only when followers' performance deviates from the norm or from the leaders' expectations.
Building collaborative structures	-ensuring that staff have adequate involvement in decisions about programs and instruction,
	- establishing working conditions that facilitate staff collaboration for planning and professional growth,
	- distributing leadership broadly among staff.

Strengthening school culture	-promoting an atmosphere of caring and trust among staff,
	-building a collaborative school culture that reflects the school vision,
	-encouraging ongoing collaboration for program implementation
Engaging communities	-demonstrating sensitivity to community aspirations and requests
	- incorporating community characteristics and values in the school, and actively encourage parents and guardians to become involved in their children's education
Improving the instructional program	-planning and supervising instruction, providing instructional support, frequent and regular monitoring of school progress,
	buffering staff from district or state initiatives that are potential distractions from school priorities.

By integrating such complex and comprehensive practices in a coherent and functional profile, the transformational school leader has all the chances to influence significantly school change process. Studies demonstrate the clear impact of transformational leader on schools improvement, on teachers and students. Thus, it has frequently proven that this type of leadership counts for teachers (Geijsel et al. 2009) and it positively affects teachers' commitment to the school goals and their participation in professional learning activities (Krüger, 2009, pg.115). Additionally, transformational leadership influences teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their commitment to change, and the organisational learning (Fullan, 2002). In the same time, a particularly noteworthy finding is the empirical link between this model and student achievements. In this case, Sun and Leithwood (2013) underline that some transformational practices make much larger contributions to student achievement than others. For instance, building collaborative structures and providing individualized consideration made the largest of those contributions (idem).

Conclusion: from instructional, to transformational, to integrated school leadership

Even the main purpose of the present paper was not to assess different competing school leadership conceptualizations, the review of some of these constructs indicates an obvious conclusion: no matter the label attributed to different models, they do share significant similarities. All these leadership models have improvement-oriented targets, they all aim to build leadership capacity among all school members in order to foster progress. As an example, one comparison between instructional and transformational school leadership construction showed that they both are focused on:

- Creating a shared sense of purpose in the school.
- Focus on developing a climate of high expectations and a school culture focused on the improvement of teaching and learning.
- Shaping the reward structure of the school to reflect the goals set for staff and students.
- Organise and provide a wide range of activities aimed at intellectual stimulation and development for staff.

- Being a visible presence in the school, modelling the values that are being fostered in the school (Hallinger, 2010).

Sharing such common aims, the two models tend to absorb each other characteristics, as a possible avenue of reconciliation for these constructs (Hallinger, 2010). Thus, when teachers perceive principals' instructional leadership behaviours to be appropriate, they grow in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate (Sheppard, 1996). In this way, instructional leadership can itself be transformational (Hallinger, 2010). Others opinions plead for enlarging transformational leadership areas, by including many other leadership models. "The inclusion of these newer dimensions into the transformational leadership model makes it a more comprehensive leadership model in different settings. Especially, in educational settings, the inclusion of instructional management dimensions makes transformational school leadership more relevant for schools (Sun and Leithwood, 2013).

As such conceptual common or overlapping aspects among different school leadership models seem to be stronger and more evident that the differences, they are even difficult to be identified in research practice.

Printy, Marks, Bower (forthcoming) demonstrate this: while quantitative methods such as the utilization of surveys permit the isolation of transformational and instructional forms based on the content of questions, these forms are likely to cohere in practice. As such, it is sometimes difficult with case study data to disentangle a transformational behavior from an instructional one or determine whether any specific action or comment represents instructional or transformational influence.

These practical research challenges underscore the interdependent nature of leadership enacted by principals and teachers (Printy, Marks, Bower, forthcoming); facing this situation, Printy, Marks, Bower had one single, significant conclusion: a new emerging concept has to be highlighted: integrated school leadership. Thus, while some authors plead for a hybrid formula and others are convinced that enlarging up the territory of one model is a very promising direction for new leadership research, Marks and Printy (2003) propose an integrative framework. This conclusion is adopted within present paper as well, as it highlights the synergistic power of leadership shared by individuals throughout the school organization (Hallinger, 2010).

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