Transformational Leadership

Why Is This Strategy Useful?
This leadership practice involves working with staff members in a way that brings mutual support, inspiration, and motivation to all who are involved (including the principal). The opportunity to pursue new activities, obtain personal growth, and be part of important school decisions may increase teachers’ investment in and commitment to instructional improvement and improve school strategies for working in a more efficient manner.

Description of Strategy
The four dimensions of transformational leadership are: Charisma (appealing to listeners on an emotional level), Inspirational Motivation (communicating a clear and optimistic vision), Intellectual Stimulation (encouraging creativity and risk-taking), and Individualized Consideration (listening to staff members, attending to staff concerns, and showing appreciation of staff contributions). Transformational leadership differs from instructional leadership. Instructional leadership involves hierarchies and top-down leadership, where the school principal informs the staff of the instructional directions to take. Transformational leadership is collaborative in nature; the school principal enables collaborative goal setting, teachers’ professional growth, and teachers’ motivation. Transformational leadership also differs from distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is based on a process of delegating responsibility and authority to teacher experts and school improvement teams. In distributed leadership, there is still a leader who determines the extent to which responsibilities can be delegated to teachers. Transformational leadership is centered on building teachers’ motivation, commitment, and growth.

There are many ways to encourage transformational processes in the school. Here are few examples:

- Treat failure and success as opportunities to figure out what works, aspire to build new skills, and improve interpretation of events.
- Communicate visionary, inspirational messages to the staff, and provide opportunities for revisiting the school vision statement.
- Identify and recognize exemplars of successful performance of teams and individual teachers.

Research Evidence
Two large correlational studies are described here as examples that support for this strategy. The first study used a large nationally representative sample of teachers. About 2,290 teachers from 655 primary schools responded to two forms of a survey (literacy and numeracy). Results showed that transformational leadership had strong positive effects on teachers’ work settings and motivation, weaker but still significant positive effects on teachers’ capacities, and a moderate and significant effect on teachers’ classroom practices. The second study included all elementary schools in two large school districts in Canada. Results showed that transformational leadership had an impact on the collective teacher efficacy of the school and commitment to school mission.
Sample Studies Supporting this Strategy


Using data from a larger 4-year evaluation of England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, this study tested the effects of a school-specific model of transformational leadership on teachers (motivation, capacities, and work settings), their classroom practices, and gains in student achievement. Some 2,290 teachers from 655 primary schools responded to 2 forms of a survey (literacy and numeracy) measuring all variables in our framework. Our measure of student achievement was gains in the British government's own Key Stage 2 tests over either 2 (numeracy) or 3 (literacy) years. Path analytic techniques were used to analyze the several different versions of the results. Results indicate significant effects of leadership on teachers' classroom practices but not on student achievement.


Transformational leadership researchers have given little attention to teacher expectations that mediate between goals and actions. The most important of these expectations, teacher efficacy, refers to teacher beliefs that they will be able to bring about student learning. This study examined the mediating effects of teacher efficacy by comparing two models derived from Bandura's social-cognitive theory. Model A hypothesized that transformational leadership would contribute to teacher commitment to organizational values exclusively through collective teacher efficacy. Model B hypothesized that leadership would have direct effects on teacher commitment and indirect effects through teacher efficacy. Data from 3,074 teachers in 218 elementary schools in a cross-validation sample design provided greater support for Model B than Model A. Transformational leadership had an impact on the collective teacher efficacy of the school; teacher efficacy alone predicted teacher commitment to community partnerships; and transformational leadership had direct and indirect effects on teacher commitment to school mission and commitment to professional learning community.

Additional Resources


Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change. Available at: [http://www.sedl.org/change/leadership/welcome.html](http://www.sedl.org/change/leadership/welcome.html)