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Mirel T. Mejia
California State University, Monterey Bay

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The Role Principals play in creating a Healthy Environment for Teachers and Students

Mirel T. Mejía
University of California Monterey Bay
Fall 2016
Senior Capstone
Advisor: Dr. Paoze Thao

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Dedication

I dedicated this work first and foremost to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for allowing me to have the opportunity of eternal life and supplying me in the spirit and that has sustained me and guided me through this process.

I also dedicate my capstone to my mother who has taught me the value of hard work and perseverance, from a young age I was faced with many challenges yet she has encouraged me to pursue my career dreams and loom past the challenges but look at the future.

Finally I dedicate my capstone to the educators throughout my education who have encouraged me and have seen potential in me even when I did not see it. I would like to thank Dr. Paoze Thao for his caring support and encouragement I also would like to mention Joseph DeRousi Jr. who has been my mentor since high school and has helped me get to where I am today.

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Abstract

When one observes high or low student achievement, teachers' performance seems to be the focus. Do we ever observe or question how leadership affects a schools environment? This senior capstone research project examines the role principals play in creating a healthy environment for teachers and students. Through the use of interviewing principals, teachers and surveys with students, the results show that when teachers feel supported by their principals, they perform better and students do well academically and socially. This senior capstone shed some light on the role of principals that help us understand the effects of good and bad leadership of the principals.

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Introduction

The environment in schools is crucial in developing a healthy environment where education is easily attained and prevalent. The importance of principals in creating this healthy environment is key to the transformation of schools. “School systems can either be worlds of disorder, frustration, and failure or worlds of enthusiasm and opportunity, based on how leadership is practiced (Bolman & Deal, 2008).” Leadership has a tremendous impact on schools.

I have placed my focus and time researching a topic not many times thought of majority of the time attention is solely placed on teachers and the students but very little attention is placed on leadership. Which has interested me greatly teachers are ranked by the performance of their students if a student is low academically the teacher is questioned automatically and if the teachers is not the problem then the attention falls on the student he must have a learning disability one might suggest. But has anyone stopped and question the leadership of the school? Can the leadership directly affect student achievement? Many questions arise from placing some thought in this question. I have been inspired greatly by this issue and its relevance to the generation of developing scholars we serve.

The main question, which will be the focus of this article, is, how does a principal create a healthy environment for teachers and students? My interest in this question has risen from personal curiosity. Working at schools I have seen the good and bad environments as a result of principals leadership, and I have wondered how the healthy environment is attained at a school. I also want to become a principal in the future and I feel interest in understanding how can I create that healthy environment for teachers and

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

students to promote academic success.

My research is valuable to everyone who is interested in reforming and improving our education. By understanding how good leadership is attained there could be better training for principals obtaining their administrators credentials and also the school districts superintendent can be accountable for who he or she hires and places at a school. I also believe that my research is valuable because it simply helps improve the quality of education offered to students and that should be reason enough to be interested in this topic.

After developing my primary research question, how does a principal create a healthy environment for teachers and students? I also developed secondary questions that would help answer the primary research question that are, what is the role and responsibilities of a school principal? Who does the principal report to? What are the other stakeholders that he or she is accountable to? What does research say about the role of a principal in creating a healthy environment for teachers and students? Are there different leadership styles among school principals? If there are, what are they? And how do the different leadership styles impact teachers and students? If so how do they impact them? Are there resources available for principals in creating a healthy environment for teachers and students? All the secondary questions will help answer the primary research question.

Literature Review

In attempt to answer the secondary research questions the literature review plays an important part in answering some of the questions. Firstly, from the literature review I

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

was able to find information that supported my topic as well as another scope on the topic of the roles principals play in creating a healthy environment. This portion of my project also helped to understand the principals and the support they receive from their direct supervisor.

The importance of principals has proven to be an evident factor in the academic success obtained by students. However the importance of developing better leadership has been ignored and rather the expectation for student success is measured by the performance of the teacher. Which is unrealistic since there are more people who influence students other than just the teacher. Some students in California's urban school systems do not have access to basic conditions for educational success. They also do not have learning environments that foster a sense of belonging and that promote healthy relationships among all members of their school communities. Expectations for success are low, which produces mass student failure. All students do not have equal access to education and their school culture and climate is toxic because of ineffective leadership (Asiedu-Kumi, 2013, p. 15). Leadership is a word that keeps resonating, although research is clear in stating the importance of a good environment, there continues to be mediocre leadership that keeps schools from reaching its full potential in serving the needs of students.

To try and understand why there is a lack in good leadership many questions can arise one may be pertaining the resources or trainings received by principals to help develop the fostering environment at schools. Do principals receive enough resources or trainings? Lack of support for principals can cause them to burn out and to leave the principalship, as they are not prepared to meet the challenges of the position. Principals

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

need support in order to meet the challenges of their new position with ease. Research on new principals suggests that professional development and support emphasize the needs of a principal in order to ensure longevity in the position. We must look for creative, practical ways to assist the person who has the greatest impact on a school – the principal. We must always look for ways to do the job better because the job is that important (Burt, 2015, p. 2). Good leadership requires support from the district office or superintendent of the schools and helping keep principals accountable for their work.

Helping teachers be happy at their job and supporting them is important in the learning of students. Teachers that are un happy or feel as if there is lack of support from their administrators tend to perform poorly and it reflects on their students learning. Teachers who are satisfied with the decisions and the degree of support provided by school administrators show more positive attitudes toward teaching (Cross, & Hong, 2012 p. 963). As principals there is a need to provide emotional stability to teachers.

There is little responsibility expected of principals in helping with state testing its almost as if the responsibility is solely dependent on the teachers and students. Little work has examined the role that principals play in mediating the context of high-stakes testing. Rather than seeing principals as middle management for the system's accountability practices, examining the role leadership plays in how schools would respond to the testing environment (DeMoss, 2003, p. 111). A trend of lack of accountability of school principals is present through the readings I have read.

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Many times a career may become a burden when there is unhappiness in the workplace. The workplace environment plays a key role in predicting employee motivation and job functioning teachers' perceptions of the support provided by their immediate superior were positively associated with intrinsic, identified, and interjected regulation, but negatively with external regulation (Fernet, Trépanier , Austin , & Levesque-Côté, 2016 p. 484) The environment in which staff is valued and appreciated motivates better performance. We can observe the importance of good leadership in helping the performance teachers. In a good school climate measuring, improving and sustaining healthy learning environments, the school and classroom climate is seen as important in the achievement and academic well being of students. Commitment to improving and supporting a healthy learning environment is seen as integral in sustainable school reform (Freiberg, 1999 p. 334).

Meaningful curriculum, instruction, and assessment; caring, supportive relationships; and a student-centered school culture, are essential components of intended efforts to balance the pressures of accountability and the needs of the students. Resources, shared decision-making, and a culture of mutual respect and responsibility may lead school leaders to address the pressures of accountability and meeting the needs of the teachers (Hall, D. 2009 p.13).

Principals should know that they can reform a school; lead it to being a "great" school; and still lead a healthy, balanced life. Surround yourself with good people, empower and support them, and let them create amazing programs that help adults connect with students to create a caring community in which kids reach their potential. Mediocre schools find ways to stifle creative new ideas. Great schools find avenues to

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

promote innovation in student learning. A great school places the individual before the policies and rules and works to find a solution that is right for each situation (Healey, T. 2009 p. 34)

Principals have a more positive view of testing, studies have shown that teachers have many concerns about high-stakes testing, including that it narrows the curriculum, causes teachers to teach to the test, dampens student and teacher motivation, and has an overall negative effect on public education (Jones, B. D., & Egley, R. J. 2006 p. 768).

Principals today are required to enact a wide range of functions such as developing staff, coordinating the school curriculum, creating a conducive environment for learning, balancing school budget, and so on. International research has consistently acknowledged the importance of principals in building effective schools and enhancing student achievement. As more countries are expecting higher performance and greater achievements from their schools, and are granting greater autonomy to schools in designing their curricula and managing their resources to achieve school goals, the role of the school leader has expanded beyond that of being a school administrator (Nguyen, 2015 p. 521).

Vision and planning, leading teachers, dealing with a complicated structure, powerlessness, leading with others and sources of power principals identified the three major obstacles that appear in the literature: powerlessness, isolation, and dealing with different stakeholders the major challenges presented by their jobs, their perceptions concerning the behaviors and practices they found to be most effective in meeting the various challenges, and their perspectives on school leadership (Pereg, G. 2012 p. 103).

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

In this era of accountability, the notion of "success" has been narrowly defined and appropriated within an educational context. Test scores, grades, attendance rates, and other markers of productivity have become proxies for success and school achievement. These objective markers of success not only emerge from and reproduce a problematic positivist discourse but also reduce our understanding of success to finite variables that are mechanistically determined by a discrete set of inputs. Knowing what needs to be done and doing it requires vision resourcefulness, creativity and some humility (Scribner, & Murtadha, K. 2011 p. 390).

Over the years, concept of safe school or safety school has evolved which refers to the provision of an atmosphere that facilitates the emotional, physical and over all well being of the students. Still in Indian context hardly any schools and teachers have the necessary acquaintance and skills to make the concept of safe school workable. Therefore the programme of capacity building will enable the school principals is to play a dynamic role to ensure a safe school environment besides leading to an efficient administration. Today, school principals have multifaceted roles to play. They are expected to uphold the highest educational standards in schools, develop communication and interpersonal skills among teachers and students, maintain a positive class room climate and ensure a positive classroom situation in terms of the modern infrastructure available (Sindhi, S. , & Sindhi, 2013 p. 77).

Schools leaders and faculties are likely to succeed when they make creating and supporting high quality teaching their utmost priority Professional learning communities have been acknowledged as successful entities for improving the quality of teaching and, therefore, sustainable progress in student learning The degree of trust among all school

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

participants significantly impacts school performance. Most studies indicate that principals indirectly affect student achievement through their influence on school organizational conditions, teacher working conditions, instruction quality, and school culture. A school principal's behavior has been shown to influence teacher motivation, teacher job satisfaction, teacher learning, and school-wide collaboration all of which are linked to trust among all school participants (Smith, H. H. R. 2014 p. 7).

The transformational leadership's embryonic stage. In this stage, the principal have no clear sense, and they cannot play the role of transformational leadership consciously and correctly. The principal in this period maybe not the new, but the one works for years in low ability and achievement. That does not means they do not have the literacy of transformational leadership, may be just because this literacy is potential and cannot play its proper role. This potential also prompt the principal think about the school development, proposed the strategy. But these thinking and strategies may not correspond to the actual of school, may not help to promote school development. This situation shows that the principal under the transformational leadership's embryonic stage have the desire to develop the school, but lack of ability to lead the development of the school. Especially during the key point of the school development - when the school face the turning point, principal's leading ability mainly performance in transformational leadership (Yang, Y. (2014 p. 282).

One of the clear conclusions from the literature is that successful school principal practice is more complex than a set of exemplary practices and behaviors. In fact, successful principals seem to develop "particular combinations of strategies based upon

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

their diagnoses of individuals, the needs of schools at different phases of performance development, and national policy initiatives"

Methods And Procedures

This is a qualitative case study, of multiple cases, that marks the beginning of a larger investigation of the leadership practices of successful school principals. The purpose of this research project is to probe the ways that school leaders define and operationalize successful leadership practice, discern emergent themes in each principal's definition, and, on the basis of these findings, identify questions for further inquiry.

As part of my research I focused on trying to obtain an answer to my Primary research question, which is how do principals create a healthy environment for teachers and students? I chose to specifically focus my research on elementary school principals, teachers, and students. My research was extensive entailing conducting research of many forms such as reading Articles, interviewing ten principals in my municipality as well as surveying elementary teachers, and students.

Since the beginning of my research I knew that principal interviews were a crucial part of my research, since principals are the organisms that determine the environment of a school. I conducted ten principal interviews where I asked questions that tied back to my primary research question. An example of the ten questions I asked principals were; "What do you think is crucial in creating a positive peaceful environment for teachers and students?" (see Appendix for Principal Interview Questions)

Aside from the principal interviews, I also surveyed teachers and asked them important questions such as; "Do you feel comfortable going to your principal for help?" which is important in understanding the different types of leadership and how it affects

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

the performance of teachers, which over all affects students academically if students do not feel support from their teachers. Surveying students was also relevant to the topic, due to academic success depending on student achievement being affected by leadership.

Results

The findings as result from my extensive research have been beneficial in understanding what is needed for principals in creating a healthy environment for teachers and students. From the ten principal interviews I obtained I noticed consistent trends in leadership. The first principal I interviewed from the Salinas City School District said that his leadership style was inclusive. He made an effort to meet with everyone on his staff not only teachers but also classified staff. He believes that everyone has an input and that he believes in empowering teachers and making them part of the leadership action plans. He also sees himself as a lifelong learner and is passionate about his work. He is also a flexible leader and leads by example. Principal A believes that to create a healthy environment for teachers and students it is important to make them feel comfortable, valuable. Principal A creates a climate and culture environment where he involves students and their families, and communities to be part of the school. Principal B from the Santa Rita school district believes his leadership style to be inclusive he believes that everyone's opinion should be heard. He is also pragmatic he processes and thinks things through before making a decision. He believes that in order to create a healthy environment the principal has to be a good listener is available to teachers. Having an open- door policy, also being responsive to needs, and Being patient. Principal C from North Monterey County unified school district considers her leadership style to be a leader by example and she has a mix of being directive and asking for opinions. She

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

considers herself authoritative and democratic. Principal C believes that to create a healthy environment there is a need of relationships with students. She believes that students do better academically when administrators and teachers care about them.

Some of the patterns I found from conducting principal interviews were that principal's longevity was essentially determined by their leadership style and approaches. Principals that have passion for there work and were actively involved in every activity in the school and provide an open communication with all their staff and students.

Problems and Limitations

Some of the problems and limitations that I came across with was that due to the short time for the project I was not able to interview at least one school from each school district in the Monterey County. Thankfully I was able to interview ten principals but not from each district some where from the same district, which kept me from getting input from all the school districts in the Monterey County. Also in the future I would make my research better by expanding my surveys to teachers and students to one hundred surveys to students and one hundred surveys to teachers.

I also encountered some problems finding literature related to my specific topic. I wanted to have the equal amount of supporting and opposing views. Another problem I encountered was not surveying students and teachers from the same schools of each principal I interviewed to analyze all views and opinions because of course a principal unless their being completely honest will not give themselves a bad review in answering questions about their leadership.

Recommendations

From the findings in relation to the topic some recommendations that can be of great benefit to consider would be that in order to be a good principal and create a healthy environment for teachers and students. A good leader should lead by example and promote inclusivity. A good leader empowers teachers to be part of leadership and have passion for what they promote which is education to all. As found in the literature review portion of this capstone teachers that feel comfortable and supported by their principals will perform better at their job. If teachers feel they lack support from their administrators tend to perform poorly and reflects on their students learning (Cross & Hong, 2012).

Conclusion

To conclude my findings, I have benefited and answered my research questions. I am extremely happy with my results I can say that I am most happy with all the principal interviews I obtained I was able to meet great principals that resemble good leadership, and that are truly caring and passionate for their work. Through my study I have learned that to be a good principal my style of leadership should include inclusivity to all the staff in the school as well as being passionate about my work.

Some of the most interesting things I have found and crucial in answering my primary research question of what creates a healthy environment for teachers and students. The knowledge, experiences, stories, and dreams that I have been granted with by the principal interviews and have been of great benefit to understanding that a principal has to have a role of compassion and humility when serving at a school. I have found that the principals who have the most years of experience as administrators share similar thoughts and characteristics such as passion and overall love their job.

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The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

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The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Appendix A Principal Interview Questions

1. What do you consider your leadership style to be like?
2. What do you think is crucial in creating a positive environment for teachers and students?
3. How are you held accountable for your work? Who do you report to?
4. Did you receive training for your job and if so what was it like? Do you feel it has prepared you for facing the challenges in the field?
5. Are there resources for principals to reference when facing a challenge?
6. What are your responsibilities as a principal?
7. Why did you decide to become a Principal or administrator?
8. How do you manage working with different personality types?
9. How available or open are you to helping teachers and students?
10. What are the factors that influence the stay of principals at a school? Study's show that principals do not last a long time at a school what do you think is the reason of that?

The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Appendix B

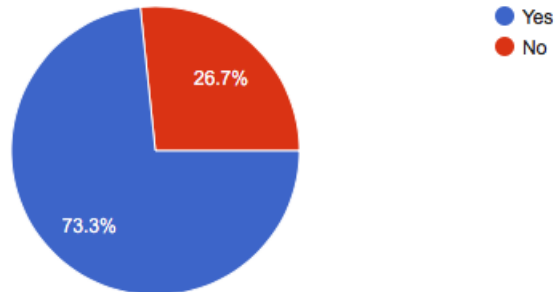
Teachers Survey Questions

1. Do you feel supported by your Principal?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
2. Do you feel comfortable going to your principal for help?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
3. Are there enough resources provided for your professional development?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
4. Do you want to continue working for your current school under your current principal's administration?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
5. Do you feel nervous when your principal walks into your classroom?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

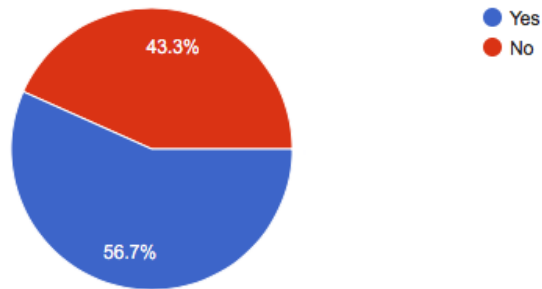
The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Results Appendix B

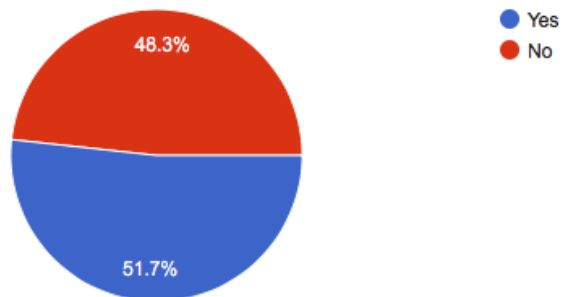
Do you feel supported by your Principal? (30 responses)



Do you feel comfortable going to your principal for help? (30 responses)



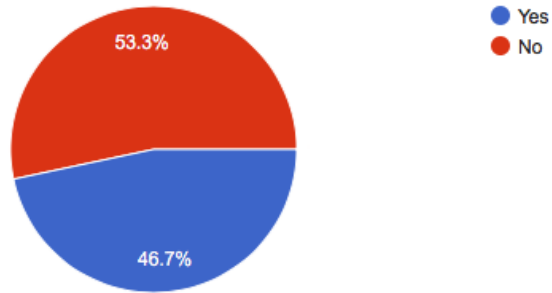
Are there enough resources provided for your professional development?
(29 responses)



The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

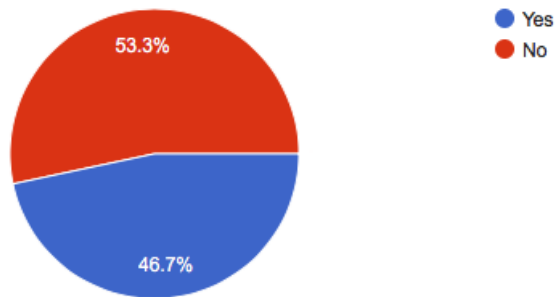
Do you want to continue working for your current school under your current principal's administration?

(30 responses)



Do you feel nervous when your principal walks into your classroom?

(30 responses)



The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Appendix C

Students Survey Questions

1. Do you like attending school?

A. Yes

B. No

2. Do you like your Principal?

A. Yes

B. No

3. Can you access the principal easily?

A. Yes

B. No

4. Are there many fun activities provided by your principal at school?

A. Yes

B. No

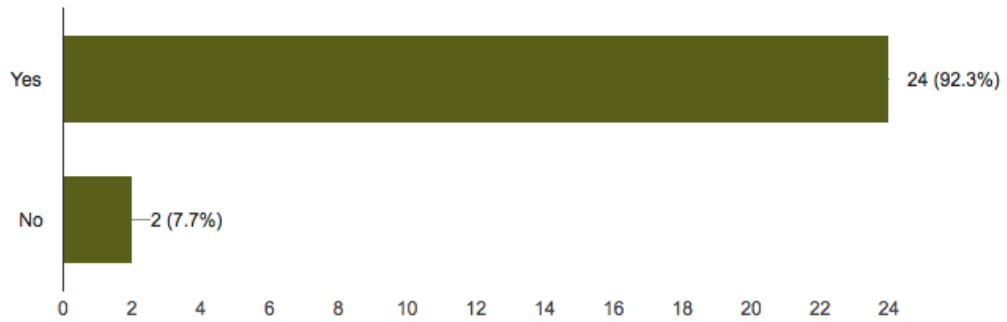
5. Do you see your Principal around the school grounds every day?

A. Yes

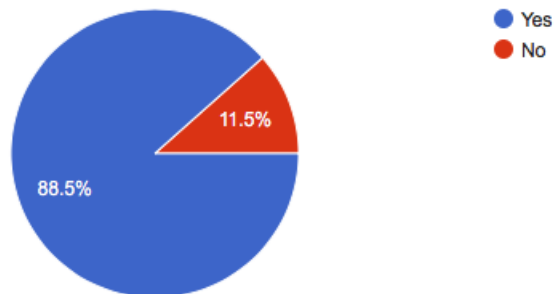
B. No

Appendix C Results

Do you like attending school? (26 responses)

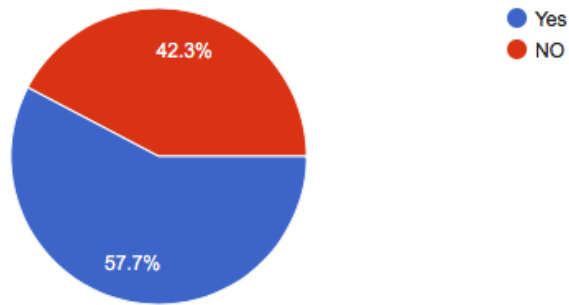


Do you like your Principal? (26 responses)

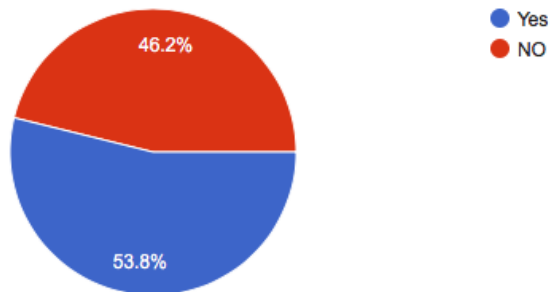


The Role Principals Play in Creating a Healthy Environment

Can you access the principal easily? (26 responses)



Are there many fun activities provided by your principal at school? (26 responses)



Do you see your Principal around the school grounds every day? (26 responses)

