

Can a Principal's Improved Behavior Result in Higher Pupil Achievement?

WILLIAM C. MILLER*

Several studies reviewed here point to the close relationship between administrative behavior and the productivity of teachers and pupils.

CITIZENS, parents, students, and school faculties are concerned about pupil progress. This is particularly true in urban areas, where great dissatisfaction with student achievement exists. In the current climate of accountability, the assessment of the quality of school programs focuses on outputs—what pupils are learning and how they are progressing.

In response to these pressures and in a genuine wish to improve pupil progress, a heavy emphasis has been placed on remediation. With the major effort and use of time and resources concentrated on drill and practice activities, often the result has been a “no nonsense” classroom and building climate, with non-cognitive aspects of the curriculum receiving less attention. This is because it is usually felt, by parents and educators alike, that the basic skills are of overriding importance and that more time and energy spent on them will yield improved performance on standardized tests. The results have usually been disappointing. Since many of these drill and practice programs

focusing on basic skills have been in operation for some time and their impact has not been significant, perhaps it is time to consider some new or additional approaches.

Administrative Behavior and School Productivity

There is some research which supports another route to improving pupil achievement. This strategy is based on studies which point out the relationship between administrative behavior and school productivity.

In Stogdill's exhaustive survey of the theory and research concerning leadership, he says in summary: “When teachers and principals are described high in consideration and structure, their pupils tend to make higher scores on tests of school achievement.”¹

Stogdill also points out that “consideration and structure are positively related to various measures of group cohesiveness and

¹ Ralph M. Stogdill. *Handbook of Leadership*. New York: The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974. p. 140.

*William C. Miller, Deputy Superintendent, Wayne County Intermediate School District, Detroit

harmony. . . . Consideration is related to low absenteeism, grievances, turnover, and bureaucracy."²

A study by Keeler and Andrews found that leader behavior of second level leaders (principals and cadre leaders) is significantly related to test achievement of followers. Forty-six schools were selected on the basis of a measure of productivity, location, size, scope, and the tenure of the principal. The productivity index was derived from grade nine departmental results and a scholastic aptitude test. The researchers stated:

All of the statistics give strong support to the hypothesis that leader behavior of the principal, as perceived by his staff, was significantly related to the productivity of the schools. . . . The weight of evidence supported the hypothesis that the morale of the staff of a school . . . was related to productivity.³

Further corroboration can be found in a recent study of two New York inner-city schools. In this investigation, it was found that important differences in pupil learning can occur between schools with nearly identical facilities, staff, and low income student enrollment. The researcher concludes:

The findings of this study suggest that the differences in pupils' reading achievement in these two schools were primarily attributable to administrative policies, behavior, procedures, and practices. Effectiveness of teaching, training and experience of teachers, appropriateness and availability of materials, and approaches to teaching reading did not differ significantly between the schools. The abilities of the schools' administrative team, however, were very different. In School A, the principal and his assistant principals were able to run an orderly, peaceful, and efficient school with a high degree of cooperation from pupils, teachers, and parents. In this atmosphere, decisions based on educational criteria could be put in practice and children could learn more. In School B, the principal and his assistant principals had difficulty eliciting cooperation from staff, commu-

nity, and pupils and implementing educational policy. Children in School B had less opportunity to learn.⁴

Another factor to be considered is the data which report the correlation between teacher behavior and pupil growth. Greenfield and Andrews looked at the behavior of a sample of 51 teachers of grade 9 and the pupils in their classes in three urban Canadian school systems. Teacher leader behavior descriptions were obtained from principals, five other teachers in the school, and ten students in each teacher's class. Data were analyzed using both parametric and non-parametric procedures. Teachers exhibiting a high degree of leader behavior tended to induce high achievement in their pupils.⁵

What are the implications of these research studies for urban school districts interested in raising pupil achievement? It seems logical that some resources should be directed toward helping administrators develop behavior that is high in consideration and which allows staff participation and fosters staff leadership. Improving the skills of the principal and the organizational climate of the school may, in the long run, have a significant payoff in student growth.

It is important that opportunities for such skill building and attitude influencing experiences be provided for the building principal. Wiggins looked at the organizational climate of 35 randomly selected schools in one large urban school district in southern California. He also examined the impact of the replacement of a principal upon the organizational climate, and the impact of the length of a principal's incumbency in a school upon the principal's behavior and perceptions of the organizational climate. His findings reveal:

⁴ Office of Education Performance Review. *School Factors Influencing Reading Achievement: A Case Study of Two Inner-City Schools*. Albany: State of New York Office of Education, March 1974. pp. 58-59.

⁵ T. B. Greenfield and J. H. M. Andrews. "Teacher Leader Behavior and Its Relation to Effectiveness as Measured by Pupil Growth." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 7 (2): 93-102; June 1961.

² *Ibid.*

³ B. T. Keeler and J. H. M. Andrews. "The Leader Behavior of Principals, Staff Morale, and Productivity." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 9 (3): 179-91; September 1963.



... the presence of a compelling school climate stability which has the effect of socializing the principal's behavior. . . . Climates did not change when principals were replaced. The principal's behavior became more significantly related to the organizational climate as the length of his incumbency increased.⁶

Opening Up the School Climate

Obviously, if change is what is needed and desired, the traditional "socialization" which tends to maintain the bureaucracy must be influenced. The research cited earlier points out the crucial role the school leader plays in increasing school productivity and pupil achievement. Efforts must be directed at helping principals to behave in ways which will "open up" the school climate.

There are cautions involved. Brown's excellent review of the impact of various dimensions of leadership raises this basic reservation:

To the tempting question of what kind of leadership is "best," an answer is typically attempted in educational, not organizational, terms. Research that seeks to throw leadership styles against the criteria of educational outputs (e.g., school marks, standardized test results) becomes trapped in what may be termed "the

cognitive fallacy." Good leadership, in and of itself, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a high cognitive payoff at the pupil level. The explanation lies in organizational, not educational terms. Good leadership, like other healthy organizational dynamics, enhances the probability of institutional policies being successfully implemented—*good* policies and *bad* policies alike. A school with top leadership, healthy climate, and open-minded teachers may be one in which the successful introduction of perhaps a new method of teaching arithmetic is facilitated. If the new method is good, leadership correlates with school marks; if the method is bad, the leadership at that school is going to look negative when the statisticians are through with it.⁷

Of course, it should be recognized that good leadership, like other healthy organizational dynamics, can enhance the implementation of *bad* programs as well as good ones. It is also important to be aware that the likelihood of a poor decision being reversed or modified in an open climate would be greater than in a closed situation.

Since the evidence appears to strongly support the idea that more effective leader behavior can lead to greater pupil productivity, it is hoped that urban school systems will give attention to the need to help principals improve their behavior. □

⁶ Thomas W. Wiggins. "A Comparative Investigation of Principal Behavior and School Climate." *The Journal of Educational Research* 66 (3): 103-105; November 1972.

⁷ Alan F. Brown. "Reactions to Leadership." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 3: 62-73; 1967.

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