

# The Move Toward Transformational Leadership



All illustrations in this issue by Terry E. Smith

*At the reins of today's new schools will be not one but many leaders who believe in creating the conditions that enable staffs to find their own directions.*

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“Instructional leadership” is an idea that has served many schools well throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s. But in light of current restructuring initiatives designed to take schools into the 21st century, “instructional leadership” no longer appears to capture the heart of what school administration will have to become. “Transformational leadership” evokes a more appropriate range of practice; it ought to subsume instructional leadership as the dominant image of school administration, at least during the ‘90s.

Sarason (1990) claims that the

blame for the “predictable failure of educational reform” rests, in large measure, on existing power relationships in schools: relationships among teachers and administrators, parents and school staffs, students and teachers. His view is widely held: most initiatives that fly the restructuring banner advocate strategies for altering power relationships. They include school-site management, increasing parents’ and teachers’ participation in decision making, and enhancing opportunities for the exercise of teacher leadership (Sykes 1990). In these respects, the restruc-

turing of schools is analogous to the groundshift in large businesses and industries begun more than a decade ago from Type A toward Type Z organizations (Ouchi 1981). Type A organizations, very useful for some situations and tasks, centralize control and maintain differences in status between workers and managers and among levels of management; they also rely on top-down decision processes. Such organizations, which include the traditional school, are based on “competitive” (Roberts 1986) or “top-down” (Dunlap and Goldman 1991) power. This is the power to control — to control the selection of new employees, the allocation of resources, and the focus for professional development. One cannot do away with this form of power without losing one’s share. It is a zero-sum gain.

In contrast, Type Z organizations rely on strong cultures to influence

employees' directions and reduce differences in the status of organizational members. Type Z organizations emphasize participative decision making as much as possible. They are based on a radically different form of power that is "consensual" and "facilitative" in nature — a form of power manifested *through* other people, not *over* other people. Such power arises, for example, when teachers are helped to find greater meaning in their work, to meet higher-level needs through their work, and to develop enhanced instructional capacities. Facilitative power arises also as school staff members learn how to make the most of their collective capacities in solving school problems. This form of power is unlimited, practically speaking, and substantially enhances the productivity of the school on behalf of its students. While most schools rely on both top-down and facilitative forms of power, finding the right balance is the problem. For schools that are restructuring, moving closer to the facilitative end of the power continuum will usually solve this problem.

The noneducational organizations that have undertaken this Type A toward Type Z groundshift have usually done so not out of concern for individual rights or social justice but because such a shift increases their productivity. Restructured schools also hope for these positive effects; as Sarason (1990) explains in defense of greater teacher participation in decision making:

... when a process makes people feel that they have a voice in matters that affect them, they will have greater commitment to the overall enterprise and will take greater responsibility for what happens to the enterprise (p. 61).

The term *instructional leadership*

focuses administrators' attention on "first-order" changes — improving the technical, instructional activities of the school through the close monitoring of teachers' and students' classroom work. Yet instructional leaders often make such important "second-order changes" as building a shared vision, improving communication, and developing collaborative decision-making processes (Leithwood and Montgomery 1986, Duke 1987, Smith and Andrews 1989).

We are learning that schools are complex systems made up of parts with greater interdependencies than we earlier believed. Successful first-order changes usually depend on the support provided through significant second-order changes. Failure to acknowledge this complexity is the second reason Sarason (1990) offers for the predictable failure of educational reform. Restructuring initiatives are primarily about second-order changes; they require leadership with a similar focus.

### Transformational Leadership

School administrators must focus their attention on using facilitative power to make second-order changes in their schools. "Transformational leadership" provides such a focus. As Roberts (1985) explains:

The collective action that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process. There is hope, there is optimism, there is energy. In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment.

In contrast, "transactional" leader-

ship is based on an exchange of services (from a teacher, for example) for various kinds of rewards (salary, recognition, and intrinsic rewards) that the leader controls, at least in part. Transactional leadership practices, some claim, help people recognize what needs to be done in order to reach a desired outcome and may also increase their confidence and motivation. Transformational and transactional leadership practices are often viewed as complementary. Both Bass (1987) and Sergiovanni (1990) consider transactional practices to be central in maintaining the organization — getting the day-to-day routines carried out. Such practices do not stimulate improvement, however. Transformational leadership provides the incentive for people to attempt improvements in their practices. This is why Avolio and Bass (1988) refer to transformational leadership as "value added."

The idea of transformational leadership was proposed in a mature form first by Burns (1978) and subsequently extended in noneducational contexts by Bass (1987) and others. Researchers, however, are only just beginning to make systematic attempts to explore the meaning and utility of such leadership in schools, and very little empirical evidence is available about its nature and consequences in such contexts.

My colleagues and I have recently completed three studies in an ongoing series aimed at addressing these issues. We have studied schools initiating reforms of their own choice as well as schools responding to both district- and state-level initiatives. Our results suggest that transformational school leaders are in more or less continuous pursuit of three fundamental goals: 1) helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; 2) fostering teacher develop-

ment; and 3) helping them solve problems together more effectively.

*Maintaining a collaborative culture.* In collaborative school cultures, staff members often talk, observe, critique, and plan together. Norms of collective responsibility and continuous improvement (Little 1982, Hargreaves 1990) encourage them to teach one another how to teach better. Our case study of 12 improving schools (Leithwood and Jantzi 1991) identified a number of strategies used by their leaders to assist teachers in building and maintaining collaborative professional cultures. These strategies included involving staff members in collaborative goal setting and reducing teachers' isolation by creating time for joint planning. Bureaucratic mechanisms were used to support cultural changes; for example, leaders selected new staff members who were already committed to the school's mission and priorities. These school leaders actively communicated the school's cultural norms, values, and beliefs in their day-to-day interpersonal contacts; and they also shared power and responsibility with others through delegation of power to school improvement "teams" within the school.

*Fostering teacher development.* One of our studies (Leithwood et al. 1991) suggests that teachers' motivation for development is enhanced when they adopt a set of internalized goals for professional growth. This process is facilitated when they become involved in establishing a school mission they feel strongly committed to. School leaders can do their part by helping to ensure that such growth goals are clear, explicit, and ambitious enough to be challenging but not unrealistic. Feedback from colleagues about discrepancies between their goals for growth and their current practices can be especially helpful.

School leaders can further enhance teachers' development when they give them a role in solving nonroutine problems of school improvement within a school culture that values continuous professional growth.

*Improving group problem solving.* Staff members sometimes want to and often have to work harder in order to bring about any meaningful school improvement. Transformational leadership is valued by some because it stimulates them to engage in new activities beyond classrooms and put forth that "extra effort" (Sergiovanni

1991). But our third study of transformational school leaders uncovered practices they used primarily to help staff members work smarter, not harder (Leithwood and Steinbach 1991). In this study of how such leaders solved problems in collaboration with teachers during staff meetings, we found that they ensured a broader range of perspectives from which to interpret the problem by actively seeking different interpretations, being explicit about their own interpretations, and placing individual problems in the larger perspective of the whole school

## The Leader's New Role: Looking to the Growth of Teachers

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**S**ince the days when we decided being a school leader meant being an instructional leader, we have added to this role the expectations of school-based management, choice, vision, and community involvement in schools. We have also seen a flurry of new instructional approaches: interdisciplinary teaming and teaching; cooperative learning; literature and primary source instruction; writing across the curriculum; thematic approaches to content areas; and authentic assessment. As a result of these changes in the basic assumptions about the teaching/learning enterprise, administrators are called on to shed the role of instructional leader and define new roles more like those of entrepreneurs.

Always problematic because many great administrators were not great classroom educators (and vice versa), appointing administrators as instructional leaders worked to the detriment of teachers. Although the role called for us to know the best forms of instruction, we often imposed one form: direct instruction. It fit nicely with our administrative personalities, was orderly, hierarchical, provided closure, and was easily observed and evaluated.

Today, however, teachers are encouraged to go beyond the old transmission models of instruction. They are also encouraged to participate more actively in school management: develop their own visions and decide how time and money are spent. Instructional leadership having outlived its usefulness, our profession now calls on administrators to be the servants of collective vision, editors,

and its overall directions.

These school leaders also assisted group discussions of alternative solutions, ensured open discussion, and avoided commitment to preconceived solutions: they actively listened to different views and clarified and summarized information at key points during meetings. They avoided narrowly biased perspectives on the problem by keeping the group on task, not imposing their own perspectives, changing their own views when warranted, checking out their own and others' assumptions, and remaining

calm and confident. These leaders shared a genuine belief that their staff members as a group could develop better solutions than the principal could alone, a belief apparently not shared by the nontransformational leaders in our study.

### Making a Difference

What hard evidence is there that transformational leadership makes a difference? The evidence is both substantial and positive in noneducational organizations, but only a handful of studies

in educational settings, in addition to our own, have been reported (Murray and Feitler 1989, Roueche et al. 1989, Roberts 1985, Kirby et al. 1991, Hoover et al. 1991). One of our studies, a case analysis in 12 schools (Leithwood and Jantzi 1991), paralleled the findings of Deal and Peterson (1990) in demonstrating a sizable influence of transformational practices on teacher collaboration. A second study in 47 schools (Leithwood et al. 1991) demonstrated highly significant relationships between aspects of transformational leadership

cheerleaders, problem solvers, resource finders. We must not only be self-conscious about change, but we must also encourage it in others.

### Promoting Individual Growth

The instructional leader model concentrated on the growth of students and rarely looked to the growth of teachers. Today's scholarship tells us that in order to promote true growth in any individual, we must be conscious of what drives us to become the best we can be. Deci and Ryan (1985) tell us we are motivated through a sense of competence, control, and connection. Learning theory tells us that we grow as we extend knowledge by experimenting and creating new meanings. Critical theory suggests we can advance community growth by promoting critical dialogue. Feminine theory suggests that growth happens in conjunction with others to whom we feel connected and for whom we care.

To promote teacher growth, leaders must first come to know who teachers are. Self-evaluations, unlike external evaluations, can enable teachers to articulate their dreams for classroom

instruction, climate, curriculum; their current assessments of their progress toward these ideals; and their plans for next steps. Self-evaluation calls on teachers to become their own instructional leaders and calls on us, administrators and teacher educators, to be their aides, locators of resources, and organizers of opportunities that will help them stay abreast of instructional innovations they are interested in.

Our new role also calls on us to protect teachers from the problems of limited time, excessive paperwork, and demands from higher agencies and offices. Often seemingly innocent clerical tasks—taking attendance, for example—not only take away valuable instructional time but inhibit good relationships between teachers and students.

### Promoting Collective Growth

Although educators tend to go into education because they have themselves enjoyed learning, once they are inside educational institutions, we leaders, by in large, have ignored their intellectual needs and interests. A strong ethic of collective study can provide for the commonalities and differences in the way humans grow

and counter the intellectual starvation many teachers feel. Through initiating research and study groups, we can also promote the critical dialogue around important topics that leads to collective action.

Administrators concerned about growth are always in the midst of the fray, in the process of change with both feet. While our new role of administrator/servant places leaders at both the top and bottom of the hierarchy, administrators of the future who can tolerate the ambiguity of the role will spark the change that can only happen inside institutions where everyone is growing. And we will no longer be ignoring the very people who can make a school great, or not—the teachers. □

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and teachers' own reports of changes in both attitudes toward school improvement and altered instructional behavior. This study, furthermore, reported little or no relationship between transactional (control-oriented) forms of leadership and teacher change — a finding also recently reported by Blase (1990). In sum, we judge the evidence

## One of our studies suggests that teachers' motivation for development is enhanced when they adopt a set of internalized goals for professional growth.

regarding the effects of transformational educational leadership to be quite limited but uniformly positive; clearly, giving more attention to such leadership in the future is warranted. □

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