

# School administrators and teacher stress

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Education and the roles of principals and teachers have shifted in recent years (Blase and Blase, 1999). There has been a move from the traditional bureaucratic model of control toward shared decision making in schools; nonetheless, some schools choose to embrace the view of leadership that presents an obvious divide between the two (Maxfield and Flumerfelt, 2009). Teachers are expected to fill many roles in their daily tasks. Harrison and Killion (2007) have identified ten major roles that teachers fill in the school system.

They are mentor, resource provider, classroom supporter, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, learning facilitator, school leader, data coach, catalyst for change, and learner. As a result of balancing these many roles, stress will likely remain a part of the teaching profession. Several questions come to mind when considering whether the relationship between administrators (specifically, principals) and teachers impact the level of teacher stress: Research Question 1: What is the relationship between teacher perceptions of principal leadership style and teacher job satisfaction?

Research Question 2: Are there differences in teacher perceptions of principal leadership style based on teachers' demographics (i. e. , age, grade level taught, education level, and combined years of teaching experience)?

Research Question 3: Are there differences in teacher perceptions of job satisfaction based on teachers' demographics (i. e. , age, grade level taught, education level, and combined years of teaching experience) and external factors (i. e. , health, family, economic status)?

Research Question 4: What are the significant factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction as identified by secondary school teachers? While this literature review cannot address all of questions above due to time restraints, it will investigate and integrate existing research regarding administrator leadership styles, the roles and responsibilities of the school principal in the 21st Century, and teacher job satisfaction in order to present the relationship between teacher perceptions of administrators and teacher stress.

### The Evolving Role of the School Principal

Principals are discovering that their past duties and responsibilities are quite different from the complex role of the school principal today. The role of the principal has shifted its focus from managerial tasks (i. e. , staff, students, buildings and grounds, safety, etc. ) to issues that are centralized around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Although the principal must be able to “ manage” a school effectively, the principal must also be able to properly lead from an instructional stance in order to lead schools to proficiency and beyond.

Likewise, the role of the principal in the 21st Century must further expand on the instructional leadership component by continuing to integrate effective management skills and sound instructional leadership practices, while simultaneously facilitating the development of the entire school community as collaborative partners in the learning process (Maxfield and Flumerfelt, 2009). School principals are indeed an essential component to the effectiveness of any school, and their indirect effect on the success of the school cannot be underestimated.

Essentially, the school principal in the 21st Century will face the extraordinary challenge of integrating the concepts of instructional, community, and visionary leadership. In an article that explores the relationship between principal's leadership style and teacher occupational stress, author Nosheena Tahseen (2010) states: Almost all these global studies signify that the educational leader of the future, therefore, must be a highly competent person who has the knowledge, insight, ability, and skills needed to bring change and create a healthy organizational culture for producing school effectiveness. p. 109) While the role of a principal has evolved over recent years, the school principal in the 21st Century must continue to focus on maintaining effective management skills and leadership involving instructional improvement while, at the same time, further developing the potential of all stakeholders in order to maximize success for all.

This capacity development requires the school principal to possess a variety of 21st Century skills. Administrator Leadership Styles Vroom and Jago (2007) define leadership as “ a process of motivating people to work together collaboratively to accomplish great things. As such, some implications of this definition are as follows: (1) leadership is a process, not a property of a person; (2) the process involves a particular form of influence called motivation; (3) the nature of incentives, extrinsic or intrinsic, is not part of the definition; (4) the consequence of the influence is collaboration in pursuit of a common goal; and (5) the “ great things” are in the minds of both leader and followers and are not necessarily viewed as desirable by all other parties (Vroom & Jago, 2007, p. 18).

Leadership styles such as autocracy, democracy, and laissez faire serve as a foundation upon which relationships are built and influences work productivity. Leaders who command and are task-oriented follow the autocratic style. Leaders following the laissez-faire style see no role for leaders within an organization while the democratic style of leadership calls for collaboration between the leader and workers (Yusof, 2011). Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) have identified a model encompassing three broad categories of leadership practices, including a total of nine more specific dimensions of practice.

The first category, setting directions, includes the following specific dimensions of practice: (1) building school vision; (2) developing specific goals and priorities; and (3) holding high performance expectations. The second category, developing people, includes the following specific dimensions of practice: (1) providing intellectual stimulation; (2) offering individualized support; and (3) modeling desirable professional practices and values.

The third broad category, redesigning the organization, includes the following specific dimensions of practice: (1) developing a collaborative school culture; (2) creating structures to foster participation in school decisions; and (3) creating productive community relationship. These specific characteristics are considered desirable among building principals, according to the transformational leadership model.

Transformational leadership can be seen as an extension of instructional leadership because it seeks to increase the collective effort among followers and their accountability for the entire organization, which, consequently,

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helps members cultivate improved instructional practices (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006). Instructional leadership as a theme in educational leadership is a concept that is widely discussed; however the definition lends itself to scrutiny. In a 1999 study in which Blase and Blase conducted to examine teachers' perspectives on effective instructional leadership, they found that it consisted of two major themes: " talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth" (p. 132). Additionally, they proposed another set of instructional leadership qualities including: fostering the analysis of teaching pedagogy, promoting collaboration among teachers, establishing mentoring programs among teachers, utilizing research based instructional strategies to assist in making informed decisions, and advocating the use of interpersonal skills when interacting with teachers.

Blase and Blase (1999) further argued that instructional leadership from the school principal must invoke a feeling of collaboration among all stakeholders, particularly among teachers at the building level. Providing teachers with a choice in decision making is important. Teacher Job Satisfaction Job satisfaction in general is simply how people feel about their jobs and the varying aspects of their jobs. Hongying (2007) referred specifically to teacher job satisfaction as the attitude and views of teachers concerning working conditions and the teaching profession in general.

Not surprisingly, perceptions of teachers regarding principal leadership are very important since schools are primarily interpersonal settings. In fact, teachers asserted that lack of principal support and enforcement of rules, as well as little to no recognition or rewards are contributing factors to job dissatisfaction (Pearson, 1998). Therefore, it seems to be an understatement

to think that teacher job satisfaction with their principal may not affect their effectiveness as a classroom teacher.

For instance, teachers with higher levels of satisfaction with the teaching profession may perceive their organization as more valuable and successful than those who feel more dissatisfied and demoralized with teaching. Overall, teachers report more motivation and job satisfaction if they feel that the principal communicates effectively, seeks advice and input from others, and practices collaborative decision-making skills (Bogler, 2001). In a study that Dr.

Molly Fisher conducted in 2011 of secondary education teachers, 93% of teachers surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with the teaching profession. However, what she did find that was very interesting was that job satisfaction among teachers correlated to most variables such as stress, age, years of experience, burnout, but not to gender. “ In three multiple regression tests, stress and burnout was found to be the most statistically significant predictor of job satisfaction” (Fisher, 2011, p. 1). Teacher Stress Stress can be viewed as something that disrupts or enhances our daily lives.

It can be good or bad. It actually stems from the word “ distress” and originates from the word eustress which suggests humans have the ability to adapt or build stress (Yusof, 2011). Stress also signifies a person’s response, emotional or otherwise, that can cause a psyche or physical disturbance. It is not uncommon to rationalize that if someone experiences a problem in the workplace, then the individual will reflect on the same problem at home. Teaching is commonly recognized as one of the most stressful occupations in our nation.

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Teacher stress results in such consequences as early retirement, long and excessive absences, new teachers leaving during training, and an increase in teachers leaving the profession within their first five years (Bachkirova, 2005). In North Carolina, about 28% of teachers who resign each year leave the profession due to a career change, health, being dissatisfied with teaching, teaching at a private or charter school, or for unknown reasons (Annual Report of the Reasons Teachers Leave the Profession, 2007).

Najeemah Yusof's 2011 study on headmaster's (same as principals in the United States) leadership styles and teachers' stress in Malaysian schools was significant in showing that there exists a strong relationship between leadership styles and teacher stress. Furthermore, headmasters whose leadership style leaned more towards autocratic caused teachers a considerable amount of stress. Those headmasters that expressed caring attitudes and listened to the teachers and participated in helping them solve their problems reduced teacher stress.

Other variables merged from this study as well in directly influencing teacher stress such as student behavior and time limitations. While there are certainly situations in a school that would likely cause anyone stress such as preparing for a test, trying to break up a fight between students, needing to reach a parent whose cell phone has been disconnected when the student is sick, it points to the need for support from administrators.

Teachers experience stress when their values and perceptions of themselves as caring professionals are challenged by administrators whose ideology differs (Easthope and Easthope, 2007). Those teachers who are passionate and committed to their students are left most vulnerable when they perceive

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that an administrator does not care for them. Instead of compromising teaching, they respond to stress in the workplace by quitting, taking early retirement or they began missing a lot of days due to illness.

Teachers have an expectation of principals and assistant principals to support and back them up, “ to act as their spokespersons” (Easthope and Easthope, 2007, p. 10). Not all teachers experience stress as a result of administrator leadership or student behavior. Dr. Doris Santoro followed the story of a great teacher named Stephanie who had a realistic view of what teaching would look, but found rewarding ways to effectively teach students as well as establish meaningful relationships with administrators and the community (Santoro, 2011).

Stephanie worked for years as a successful teacher until policies at the state and federal levels changed the way she could address student needs resulting in her quitting. Implications According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2006, p. 202), considerable progress has been made over the past 15 years in identifying the significant effects of school leadership on school reform; nevertheless, the nature of effective school leadership still remains to be much more of a “ black box” than an exact model.

These characteristics and limitations of contemporary research on educational leadership suggest the need for more large-scale, sustained studies. This literature review presents an overview of notable studies concerning administrator leadership styles, teachers’ job satisfaction, teachers’ stress, and a discussion of the need for further studies examining the specific relationship between teachers’ satisfaction with their salary,

student behavior, teaching experience, administrative support, teachers' job satisfaction, and teachers' intent to stay in teaching.

While the relationship between working conditions, teachers' job satisfaction, and teachers' intent to stay in teaching has been established, there are few studies that have focused on the direct relationship between administrative support and these variables. Most of the existing research on teacher job satisfaction and teacher attrition treated administrative support as only one of several working conditions. This gap in the research prevents one from understanding the direct effect, and possible mediating effect, of administrative support on teachers' job satisfaction and stress levels. According to Ingersoll and Smith (2003), administrative support, among working conditions, has shown the strongest relationship with teachers' decision to remain in teaching. Studies have demonstrated a relationship between the transformational leadership model, teacher performance, organizational commitment, and teacher job satisfaction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

However, studies on transformational leadership are usually based on broad categories of effective principal behaviors that serve as the theoretical framework of the model. There definitely exists the opportunity for more studies to be done specifically on teacher stress, administrator support and coping behaviors. While it seems that qualitative data is currently the main method used to study teacher stress and coping behaviors, researchers may consider using quantitative methods to investigate this topic in the future.

By doing so, researchers can numerically measure teacher stress and coping behaviors to discover the most frequent causes of stress and coping

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behaviors used by teachers. Also, the literature is limited on stress within the teaching profession specifically. Some of the literature reviewed in this paper was limited in its applications due to the studies being conducted internationally and not within American schools.