

FINDING THE WAY: LINKING SCHOOL MENTORS WITH SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

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Introduction

Today's reality forms a new context where new educational and social needs of the individual, especially the ones connected with pursuing, acquiring, managing and exploiting new knowledge, emerge.

Although knowledge and information explosion generally signals progress, offering new opportunities to individuals and society, it can also result in the increase of social inequity reflected also in the education system. Safeguarding access to information and knowledge necessitates providing equal opportunities for education and learning for all. In addition, continuous change, in terms of information and knowledge, that characterizes our age, makes a demand on individuals to continuously upgrade their knowledge by adopting practices of life-long learning.

At the same time as more and more nations are becoming multicultural and national economies are becoming increasingly internationalised, the fabric of society changes, becoming enriched with diverse cultural, linguistic, national and socio-economic characteristics.

For this reason it is necessary for individuals to develop greater understanding and appreciation of different cultures and for the state to discard the possibility of imposing a one-dimensional cultural model, thus reinforcing xenophobia and racism. In this newly emerging context, adopting ethical and moral standards of behaviour that foster respect to intellectual pursuits and humanistic ideals is considered of utmost importance. Moreover, the well established role of school to enable pupils to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for personal and life-long growth (by promoting knowledge acquisition) and for positive interpersonal and group relationship, facilitating thus, their smooth integration into society, should also be reinforced. This can be achieved by creating within the school a pedagogically sound educational environment and an atmosphere conducive to learning.

The main aim of this policy should be the organization and implementation of an educational system that will respond to current social dynamics and challenges. In the face of such innovative action the following priorities are set:

I. To provide opportunities for personal growth, nurturing in pupils personal qualities, such as self-awareness, emotional health, critical thinking and communication skills as well as a positive attitude towards co-operation and initiative taking. These factors combine to enable individuals develop as responsible citizens, embracing democratic and humanitarian values, free from religious or cultural prejudice.

II. To provide access to lifelong learning.

III. To assist the development of a critical attitude towards new information and communication technologies.

- IV. To maintain social cohesion, by providing equal opportunities for all and nurturing common positive attitudes and values.
- V. To assist the development of European citizenship awareness, while preserving national identity and cultural awareness.
- VI. To promote a spirit of co-operation as well as of personal and collective responsibility.

Within this framework our Greek's educational system is challenged to adjust accordingly, becoming more dynamic and effective, responding to the need for providing quality education for all.

Literature review

The literature identifies "leadership" as one of the critical success factors for sustaining continuous improvement in any organisation. The pivotal role of the school head as a factor in effective schools has been corroborated by findings of school effectiveness research for the last decades.

Extensive empirical efforts of the quantitatively oriented school effectiveness research – mostly in North America, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand, but also in the Netherlands and in the Scandinavian Countries – have shown that leadership is a central factor for the quality of a school (see for example in Great Britain: Reynolds, 1976; Rutter et al., 1979; Mortimore et al., 1988; Sammons et al., 1995; in the USA: Brookover et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993; in the Netherlands: Creemers, 1994; Scheerens and Bosker, 1997; Huber, 1999a, offers a critical overview).

How leaders develop and facilitate the achievement of the mission and vision, develop values required for long-term success and implement these via appropriate actions and behaviours, and are personally involved in ensuring the organisation's management system is developed and implemented.

Formal and informal leadership structures determine the nature and effectiveness of the leadership-staff relationship, which according to Bass (1960, p. 548), is one in which intended behaviour and results bring about functional behaviour and achievement of team objectives. The work of Leithwood and his associates suggest that an effective leadership-staff relationship requires a dynamic form of leadership behaviour based on the exercise of power to influence the behaviour and actions of subordinate staff. They argued that this style of leadership is both desirable and necessary in competitive environments, and requires organisations to be capable of fast, radical change and those aspiring to be the best must be able to lead change rather than just follow it. In summary, even though there are many alternative forms of management and leadership practices, a human relation, people-oriented leadership style is more likely to lead to staff satisfaction, group cohesiveness, and improved performance results.

Cheng and Cheung (1999) suggested that an effective implementation of site-based management often depends on how different actors (scholars, policy makers, school constituencies, etc.) perceive meanings and opportunities during the reform process. They believed that advancing the knowledge base of school actors, including teachers and school principals, helps to maximize all the potential benefits from the reform process.

Other scholars also believed that the extent to which the potential benefits of school reforms could be realized depends much on the knowledge and skills of the school personnel (Louis et al., 1996). Many of them advocated that teachers' continuous

learning and development would be the key for successful school reforms (Sykes, 1996; Louis et al., 1996). Parallel to this, some believed that principals' leadership is critical for successful school reforms (Bolman and Heller, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996; Leithwood, 1998; Cheng, 1998). They can perform some functions vital in the reform process.

These functions include the establishment of common goals and values, the building of collegiality, the provision of more control to teachers over events affecting them, and the development of teachers' knowledge and skills. In fact, these leadership functions were found to be important and were supported by many empirical findings on reform processes (Rosenblum et al., 1994; Hallinger and Hausman, 1994; Hilosky and Watwood, 1997).

Regarding teachers in the reform process, they are in fact facing numerous challenges from complex educational goals, diverse educational expectations, great accountability, changing curriculum, and demanding educational tasks. In order to meet these emerging challenges, continuous learning and self-improvement can help teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for making better judgments and taking more effective action in an ambiguous situation. This contributes to the provision of school education quality in the reform process.

Some of them proposed an action learning cycle that may characterize teachers' professional learning in school. It depicts the processes through which a teacher could increase his/her own knowledge and skills by either generating new mental sets or modifying old mental models and /or designs for actions. Also, it incorporates important conceptual ideas in other areas including individual learning (Piaget, 1978; Bandura, 1986; Schunck, 1996), organizational learning (Argyris, 1990, 1993), teacher education and learning (Elliott, 1993; Eraut, 1993; Korthagen and Lagerwerf, 1996), reflection (Day, 1993; Watkins and Shindell, 1994) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984).

Also, increasing organisational competitiveness and the need for the most effective use of human resources have led writers and researchers to a large body of work showing the positive effects of leadership, not only on subordinate behaviour, but also on organisational outcomes. These conceptions include transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1994), moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992), multidimensional leadership (Bolman and Heller, 1995), cultural leadership (Schein, 1992; Trice and Beyer, 1993), and leadership for self managing schools (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992) etc. Recently, research attention has shifted to investigating factors underlying transformational leadership behaviours and to ways that transformational leadership behaviours can be identified and developed (Barling et al., 2000; Kelloway and Barling, 2000; Sivanathan and Fekken, 2002; Sacharatos et al., 2000).

The most cursory review of the research on effective schools could not fail to identify a range of factors that appear to differentiate between schools on measures of academic achievement. A number of common characteristics have been identified in research on effective schools. A review of the UK effectiveness research (Reynolds et al., 1996) resulted in the identification of nine key factors associated with effective schools. They were:

- (1) professional leadership;
- (2) shared vision and goals;
- (3) a learning environment;
- (4) high quality teaching and learning;
- (5) high expectations;
- (6) positive reinforcement;

- (7) monitoring pupil progress;
- (8) pupil rights and responsibilities; and
- (9) purposeful teaching.

Furthermore, Mortimore's (1996) meta-analysis identified the same nine factors and added two more key characteristics of effective schools: home school partnership and a learning organisation (school-based staff development).

With regard to leadership, Bass and his associates (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1990; Bass and Waldman, 1987) put forward a two-factor theory using constructs of transformational and transactional leadership. Bass advocated transformational leadership for successful organisational change and improved performance.

Transactional leadership was described as engaging followers in an exchange relationship that focused on their basic needs and applied rewards and sanctions to achieve productivity and efficient management (Bass, 1985). Skills of planning, coordinating, scheduling and regularising were associated with transactional leadership and the concept of leader as manager (Crawford, 1988). Beare et al. (1989) noted that although much of the principal's role involved transactional leadership, if excellence was the goal, then transformational leadership practices should prevail. The concept of leadership has been thoroughly examined in the school context by Leithwood and his associates together with its effects on an array of student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 1996). These investigations have led to the development of a model of transformational leadership for improved school performance.

Over recent years there have been increasing demands for management educators to pay more attention to leadership development in their programmes. Schools in Greece have undergone significant changes in recent years. The main change among others, in October 2002, was on the role of principals' and decentralization policy of the Ministry of Education and Religion is shifting decision making from system-based to school-based, thus extending principals' authority, autonomy and discretion, and obliging them to assume leadership roles. But the system remains bureaucratic, that is, it values stability, career is secured by tenure, state or local authorities prescribe rules and so is principals' appointment. Thus, principals have come up with the leadership in modern bureaucracies: On the one hand, bureaucracy would seem to be the very distillation of leadership, since administrative means are carefully organized and carry out explicit ends; if some of the directives are anachronistic, principals have not the authority to change them. On the other hand, the classic stereotype of bureaucracy – rigidity, oligarchy, deference, impersonality, specialization, lack of reciprocal relationship of wants, needs and motives and values between leaders and school teachers– represent negation of leadership. To the extent that bureaucracy is in practice the simple application of authority from the top down, it is not leadership. To the extent that it exemplifies conflict, power, values and change in accordance with leader follower needs, it embodies leadership. (Burns, 1978, p. 299).

Indeed, the quality of school leadership is often considered to be the most important factor in the organisation's success or failure (Bass, 1990). It has often been suggested that one way in which school principals can play a critical role in the success of an educational institution is through their influence on teacher morale, job satisfaction and performance (Blase and Peggy, 1992; Evans, 1998, 1999; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Hoy and Miskel, 1996; Pashiardis, 1998; Saitis, 2000, 2002, Stravakou, 2003). The link between principals effectiveness and teacher job satisfaction suggests that the perceptions of teachers regarding the quality of school leadership can be used to assess the level of satisfaction with the workplace. Such perceptions can also provide

a measure of the effectiveness of the principal as a leader (Hoy and Miskel, 1996, Papanoum, 1995).

Until very recently, educational leadership has tended to be construed as associated with ascribed authority and position - for example, school administration or system directorship. The idea of educational leadership as involving practising teachers as central figures has been a seriously underdeveloped topic, although terms like superior-subordinate and leader-follower, which were once standard usage in educational administration texts, and which tend to cast teachers in positions of relative dependency and powerlessness, are now less commonly used.

These years, therefore, presents a “window of opportunity” for the Ministry of Education and Religion to select many talented new principals who can lead our nation’s schools into the twenty-first century. As a recent publication suggests: We must take this opportunity to fill our schools with dynamic, committed leaders, for they provide the key to effective schools where we will either win or lose the battle for excellence in education. Unfortunately, the means by which principals are selected, inducted, and evaluated are often ill suited to the development and of outstanding leaders.

Are outstanding school principals born or made? Most modern authorities, stressing nurture over nature, believe that major competencies of leadership can be learned. Nevertheless, school administrators have grappled for some time with identifying effective methods to prepare individuals to be successful principals. Traditional avenues to the principal ship, including teaching experience, coursework at a university, a practicum, and even a tour of duty as a vice-principal, have been found less than satisfactory. Practitioners complain the loudest, however, about their graduate training.

Further more research literature defines mentoring as an extended process of personal and professional growth. According to Johnson (1997), “mentoring means to facilitate, guide, and encourage continuous innovation, learning, and growth to prepare for the future” (p. 13). This growth occurs not only for those who are being mentored but also for those who are serving as mentors. Crow and Matthews (1998) claim, “a mentor is not only a teacher or coach who focuses primarily on the task and the results. Mentors focus on individuals and their development. They act as confidants willing to play part of an adversary if needed, to listen and to question so protégés can broaden their own view” (p. 27). The authors are not advocating a top down approach suggested by Crow and Matthews (1998). This definition, however, reflects a level of teaching and learning that occurs on both sides of the mentoring relationship. Engaging in this adversarial relationship may require mentors to go beyond their comfort zone and challenge their own values and beliefs. Mentoring requires a level of reflection that leads to personal growth for mentors as well as novice administrators. This should not be discounted as an important part of the mentoring process.

The study

This paper begins with an overview in the ten highlights of the new cross-thematic curriculum (F.E.K. 303/2003) for compulsory education including the concept of innovation that research examining.

a) Cross-thematic Approach to Curriculum. Although in the new curriculum for compulsory education the traditional school subjects are maintained, a holistic approach to content learning is followed, whereby cross-disciplinary connections and

relationships rather than delineations between academic disciplines are promoted. Moreover, emphasis is placed on the processes through which academic knowledge can be acquired as well as on the values and attitudes associated with academic learning and thinking.

b) Updating Core Knowledge and Skills. The content is updated and emphasis is placed on core knowledge and skills necessary for understanding the basic concepts and structures of each knowledge domain/subject area. Therefore, a spiral approach to core knowledge and skills is utilized, according to which core knowledge is first introduced at a basic level and then reintroduced at a middle and at a high level of abstraction, all the while building on pupils' prior knowledge and is organized around disciplinary and cross-disciplinary concepts. These help the curriculum to overcome fragmentation of content.

c) Eliminating Overlapping and Duplications. Eliminating overlapping and minimizing duplications saves time, which can be allocated to the in depth study of core knowledge and skills. Thus, pupils are better prepared to understand the interrelations between the different areas of knowledge/content areas.

d) A 'Flexible Zone' of Time for Student Projects. In the cross-thematic curriculum a period of 2-4 hours per week is established within which pupils implement collective projects on topics of their interest. Thus, it is expected that pupils will discover connections between school knowledge and their everyday experiences and that school in general will open its doors to the outside world.

e) Cross-thematic Projects within Each School Subject. Besides the projects of the 'Flexible Zone', at the end of each semester pupils are expected to work within each school subject on topics related to the content covered. These activities aim to deepen their understanding of school knowledge and develop their cognitive and social skills and attitudes, necessary for their active involvement in future life.

f). Pedagogical Enrichment of the School Context. The principles and the activities introduced in the new curriculum aim to develop critical and creative thinking abilities, imagination and positive attitudes towards learning through exploration and discovery. All these are necessary for individuals in order to become creative and contributing members of multicultural societies in times of dramatic changes.

g) New Technologies as a Means for Learning. New Information and Communication Technologies are introduced in the primary school curriculum as a means for learning and not as a separate subject.

h) New Approaches to Evaluation and Learning. Evaluation is seen as an organic part of teaching and learning and thus, many different approaches are suggested. All of them include self-evaluation procedures, which can improve dramatically metacognitive skills and meta-knowledge.

i) A Broad Spectrum of Literacies. Successful living in post-modern times presupposes that one is fully literate in many areas, such as reading, science, technology and mathematics.

j) New Educational Materials. The implementation of the main principles of the cross-thematic curriculum presupposes a variety of educational materials, such as schoolbooks, educational CD-ROMs, maps, posters etc.

Research methodology

The study originated through meetings and informal discussions of educational counsellor (σχολικοί σύμβουλοι) and school leaders, who had been responsible for monitoring education innovations projects (cross –curricular school programme).

The educational mentors had observed that some of the principals had achieved striking successes in working in socio-economically disadvantaged schools. What characteristics distinguish the work of a sample of principals who have achieved success in working in socio-economically disadvantaged schools? What forms of educational leadership are inherent in these characteristics?

The present study is part of a larger project aiming to investigate differences in the perceptions of school mentors and lead schoolteachers regarding aspects of educational administration, organisation and innovation in curriculum in compulsory education.

The views of the two groups are compared in order to determine the extent to which group have realistic expectations with regard to the qualities of their future work with the new school materials. The perceptions of the school mentors thus serve as a reference point in the attempt to assess the degree to which head teachers have formed a relatively accurate picture of the prevalent situation in the new curriculum reform in Greece. If the views of the two groups are found to converge, it is less likely that head teachers will experience major disappointments. If, on the other hand, they are found to have overly positive or negative perceptions of the effectiveness of their future work with the new school materials, they can be expected to face serious difficulties in their relationship with them.

A second aim of the present paper is the identification of problem areas with respect to the school heads, based on the relevant perceptions of both pre-service and in-service teachers. Even though the study focuses on the views of teachers regarding principals, it also examines the main concerns relevant to school mentors and their role in the educational system. The perceptions of subordinates are thus used in order to evaluate the effectiveness of school leaders and to pinpoint weaknesses and areas of improvement. Previous studies of teachers' views concerning the effectiveness of their principals (Papanaoum, 1995 Saitis, 2000, 2002, Stravakou, 2003, Pashiardis and Orphanou, 1999) have identified several areas of improvement for school leaders such as personnel management and professional development. Given that teachers constitute one of the most important publics of the school system, the on-going study of their views concerning the effectiveness of school leadership is considered extremely important.

As the country is administratively divided into 13 regions and 60 prefectures, and considering the wide distribution of primary schools across Greek prefectures, a large collection of data (questionnaires) was required. However, it would have been logistically impractical to select satisfactory primary data from all Greek prefectures. Hence a limited number of questionnaires (700) were distributed in the time available. The majority of principals agreed to answer the questionnaire, and this resulted in the completion of 604 usable questionnaires (a response rate of 86,2 per cent).

Since only a small sample was used in order to analyse the quantitative data, there may be many points where the necessary data for a particular prefecture were of limited use. Therefore, the data were not sufficiently rich to allow us to draw conclusions about all primary and secondary schools in Athens. These "gaps" of data in the research have partly determined the interpretation of the results.

The questionnaire included fixed-alternative and open-ended questions in order to provide both a quantitative and qualitative angle in the study. Respondents were asked to provide information on a number of background characteristics such as year of studies, gender, school and years of service. They were also asked to complete an eight-item self-report instrument used to measure the degree of satisfaction associated

with different aspects of the school principal's role. These aspects were selected to reflect characteristics linked with effective principal ship in the literature such as the equal treatment of subordinates by the principal and her initiative for school improvement.

The statistical analyses used included: a) Descriptive statistics (percentages), b) χ^2 tests on relevant data, b) Binary Logistic Regression Analysis. Under the binary logistic model, the estimated value of the dependent variable is interpreted as the probability that a primary school teacher will intend to participate in school administration as identified by the values of the explanatory independent variables. Thus the model allowed for the measurement of the effect of each variable on teachers' intentions to participate in school administration.

Results

Questionnaires were distributed to a sample of public primary schools principals, -in Greece February and May of the year 2004. Specifically, we select 604 questionnaire, 206 (34 per cent) are from school mentors and 398 (66 per cent) from head schoolteachers. Also 309 the respondent's 51,2 per cent had up to 10 years' experience as principals or school mentors in education, 32.0 per cent of them had 2 or 3 years. Finally 16,8 per cent had served for more than 30 years years' experience in (public primary and secondary schools) education.

Tree hundreds and twenty-one (321) of them, were male and two hundred eighty-three (283) were female. The vast majority (86 per cent) of school mentors were male. All were employed in public primary schools. The sample was designed to include principals with different service periods in the system. Also, an attempt was made to include principals from different schools, both urban and rural areas.

Only the 5,2 per cent had obtained a Master's degree or a PhD. None of them is in the field of educational administration, all are in a filed of teaching of in science education. The vast majority (57 per cent) had a university degree in a different field. Only 45 % of the respondents had attended the Maraslio Teacher Training College. The Maraslio Teacher Training College was established in 1972 (Law 1222 / 1972) with the aim of training teachers for senior posts in the profession. Each year, the Maraslio Teacher Training College trains only a limited number of teachers for managerial positions.

Also, 50% of the participants recorded written descriptions of their perceptions of, and educational responses to, specific situations involving socio-economic disadvantage as these occurred in their workplaces.

Previous studies of Greek principals views concerning the effectiveness of principals (Pashiardis, 1998; Saitis, 2000, 2002, Stravakou, 2003, Iordanidis 2003; Athanasoula – Reppa, 2001) have identified several areas of improvement for primary school principals such as personnel management and professional development. Given that teachers constitute one of the most important publics of the school system, the on-going study of their views concerning the effectiveness of school leadership is considered extremely important.

Those studies have identified several specific aspects of effective leadership such as the use of innovative programmes and the conviction that the principal can exert a great deal of influence from his/her position. So we decided to include only a small number of items in the questionnaire on which principals could be expected to have an opinion. Principals rated the extent of expected and actual satisfaction with each item using the following scale: 1 = extremely high level of satisfaction, 2 = high level

of satisfaction, 3 = average level of satisfaction, 2 = low level of satisfaction, 1 = no satisfaction. A “do not know” category was also included as it was considered possible that some of them had not yet formed satisfaction expectations on certain aspects of the principal’s role.

The qualitative aspect of the questionnaire consisted and a part of open-ended question. Specifically, respondents were asked to state and discuss the three most important organisational and administrative problems they expected to face or were facing in relation to the school system. The question was indirect in that it did not mention leadership problems in particular.

Leadership satisfaction rating of principals

What are the expectations of principals for teachers in schools?

These principals had high expectations of students and teachers and encouraged excellence in teaching and learning. They had a commitment to professionalism, a belief that all students could and should be given the opportunity to reach their potential and a commitment to improvement in teaching and learning. However, it was the actions of the principal, which communicated these expectations including the provision of support through opportunities for collaboration, professional development, policies, and structures that enabled the school community to achieve excellence. As the said: “ *The principal is a team player, our vision is to encourage student and teacher development but the principal does not only a teacher. The principal listens and, if there is weakness the principal will provide support . . . knows the staff and is an educator and guide but we work together.*”

What influence does effectiveness have in schools?

The responses to this question were somewhat perplexing and contradictory. School effectiveness was seen to be important by these principals. They described school effectiveness as the “vision” that held the school together, while most teachers described school vision as having a “positive” effect on a school. For example: “I actually think it is really important . . . it’s something that makes teachers have an ethos and if there are enough teachers sharing it and believing it, it makes for a healthy school environment”.

The responses of principals provided several possible explanations. First, individual vision had been translated into a shared sense of purpose in the school’s effectiveness. Some of them they were already implementing the school’s effectiveness in the classroom as exemplified “The effectiveness really depends on me because I want my colleagues to work to the best of their ability no matter what anyway.”

Finally, these principals seem to make links between school effectiveness, school structures, policy and classroom teaching practice. They were able to describe structures and policies in the school that reflected school effectiveness and how these had changed teaching practices, yet think that school effectiveness had an influence in the classroom as suggested: “*We have longer periods that has changed the way people teach and act in the classroom. If you have 75 minutes you have got to do different activities.*”

Demonstrating trust in teacher's innovation

Respondents reported that shared governance demonstrated between them for responsible involvement in both school-level decisions making. In terms of our study trust is considered the fundamental element to facilitating head teachers empowerment. This element appeared in all discussions. The terms trust, respect and confidence were used to describe how school mentors permitted and encouraged school leaders to use their professional judgements to make decisions and to implement actions related to innovation instructional areas of work: *"The school mentor conveys a deep sense of trust in my personal and professional judgment. I might suggest an unusual approach to a skill or concept and the response will likely be, "Do it." She always say: We tray to do it"*.

Encouraging and listening to individual input

The data indicate that school mentors' vigorous encouragement of input (formal and informal) from individual head teachers on a host of important school-wide and classroom issues and problems enhanced theirs' sense of empowerment relative with curriculum innovations.

School mentors encouraged input from teachers on routine matters, school improvement efforts and difficult and crisis situations. Listening often-meant being responsive to both the words and feelings of them. Indeed, willingness to listen openly to principals' input was central to the empowerment process: "[He] listens to what I am saying.. Even when he is unable to change the policy, rule or procedure, he hears my frustration and that in itself is a help" or "He listens to us [principals] and values our opinion, not claiming to have all the answers and support our ability to make good decisions".

Encouraging individual teacher autonomy

In all schools, both instructional and non-instructional classroom matters were defined, at least in part, by school principals and school policies. For example, such factors as official syllabuses and curriculum, standing school policies and rules, shared governance decisions, and principals' expectations, advice, and guidance circumscribed individual teacher autonomy. This issue refers to beliefs that new curriculum interest in promoting individual teacher decisional authority and autonomy. School mentors and head teachers tended that new curriculum encourage teacher's autonomy: *"Recently, I suggested an alternative assessment procedure. The new curriculum not only encourage me but provided additional materials for me."*

In some schools head teachers exercised what many called full autonomy in the classroom; they were largely in control of instructional and non-instructional areas of classroom life: *"We have the freedom to control as many aspects of our work as is possible without interferences."* This also meant that they determined the level of risk they were willing to assume in curricular and instructional innovation.

Encouraging innovation (creativity/risk taking)

In the context of questionnaires, the study respondents used the terms innovation, creativity and risk taking to convey similar meanings. School mentors and principals encouraged individual themselves to research and experiment with new teaching techniques, materials, curricula, and programmes to improve student learning. One principal stated: *"My school mentor's behaviour shows me that he believes in empowerment. He constantly allows as to empower themselves by doing their creative thing. I have done a Health Project for tree years that requires a lot of staff"*

coordination. He has always supported me down to his being there and speaking to the teachers, pupils and parents.”

School mentors and principals promoted innovation through formal decision-making structures (e.g. teams, committees), professional development structures (e.g. staff development, workshops), individual formal structures (e.g. conferences), and informal interactions that included conversations and impromptu school and classroom visits. According to our study data, they also reinforced their support for innovation by exhibiting trust, providing support (e.g. classroom resources, workshops) and demonstrating caring (i.e. sincere interest): *“As an individual it’s nice to have someone’s presence to show support. Not only does [the mentor] let us try things, she shows my parents and me that she supports our activities.”*

Characteristics of leadership in schools

A number of leadership characteristics became evident as the study progressed. First, there were differences in terms of the progress schools had made towards the development of an innovation programme. This suggested that school contexts were different and context may limit a principal’s ability to take the initiative in developing a innovation programme and build personal relationships.

As Conger (1999) suggest that the leader and the context influence each other and that the degree of this influence is dependent on the situation. He argued that contextual variables could be thought of in terms of an outer, environment beyond the organisation and an inner, organisational context, including culture, structure and power distribution. Several studies (Conger, 1989; Roberts and Bradley, 1988) have suggested that some situations are more receptive to transformational leadership.

Also, these principals displayed leadership behaviours that were transformational in the sense that they “raised (followers) to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 426).

Furthermore, these principals described leadership behaviours that included transactional leadership practices, such as ensuring that policies, teaching programs and teaching practices were meeting external requirements. For example, (Principal female): *“The school councillor, myself and teachers of the school spend time together with a kind of dialogue for several times a year”*.

This is consistent with other research as Leithwood and Jantzi (1997, p.314) argued that these types of management practices are required in schools because *“the right things need to be done and they need to be done right”*.

Finally, these principals demonstrated a relationship-oriented approach to leadership. *“I have spent a lot of time and have a lot of fun building relationships because I really like people and working with them, but that to me is the essence of what we called effective leader”* (Principal male).

In addition, these principals were able to provide support and encouragement or direction that was unique to each individual’s needs and development because they knew each person. In a participant opinion:

“The principal is a team player, our vision is to encourage my colleagues development. The principal listens, knows they strengths and if there is weakness, the principal will provide support . . . the principal knows the staff and is an educator and guide, but we work together”.

The perceptions of the principles regarding leadership problem's in primary schools

Even though respondents were not asked to comment on leadership issues in particular in the open-ended question, the majority mentioned such issues when asked to discuss the three most important problems they expected to face in Greek primary schools. Specifically, 67.2 per cent answered this question mentioned leadership problems. In about half the cases, the leadership problem was mentioned as the most important problem, while the remaining responses were almost equally divided between second and third positions. Of the 205 respondents that mentioned leadership problems, 76 per cent gave the principal expressly as the source of the problem. The remaining referred to problems with school counsellors, who, as already mentioned, undertake one part of leadership responsibilities: namely, the mentoring, teaching methodologies and the lost evaluation of teachers. A few respondents mentioned problems with "superiors".

In the cases where schools counsellors were given as the source of problem, respondents commented on the limitations of inspectors in mentoring. School counsellors were not considered to have the necessary training and/or disposition to carry out this task effectively. Principals were especially critical of the fact that school counsellors acted as judges rather than counsellors.

As regards principals, a large number of potential problems were mentioned with the two most common ones being bad communication and conflict with teachers or superiors, the inability of the principal to act as a capable and effective leader.

A second major limitation associated with principals was their expected inability to manage schools effectively. A male principal attributed this limitation to the lack of specialised training for the position of the principal: "Principals are usually promoted without taking into account the degree of their success in administrative duties".

Other respondents mentioned that they faced difficulties working with the principal. They were also critical of the perceived inability of the principal to deal effectively with the parents. In a few cases, they believed that the principal must have a vision for the school.

Another problem area mentioned by respondents in relation to the effectiveness of school leadership was the lack of teacher participation in decision-making as a result of the principal's autocratic and controlling behaviour. A female principal with more than 25 years of experience said: "The principal makes decisions on his own in most cases, without receiving feedback or help from the teachers through a democratic vote."

Overall, the three most important problems they faced were all leadership related.

Limitations of the study

The present study is part of a larger project aiming to investigate the perceptions of principals regarding aspects of administration and educational evaluation in compulsory education. The main limitation of the study is the small sample. These findings should be validated with another larger sample of schools, principals and teachers.

Conclusions

As noted earlier, most studies of effective schools and effective school leadership published during the 1980s were conducted in traditional school organizations. This

spate of research produced images of strong leaders who, among other things, were visionaries, strategic planners, disciplinarians, problem solvers, evaluators and supervisors of instruction (Blase, 1991; Blumberg and Greenfield, 1986; Edmonds, 1979). In general, these lines of research point to the prominence of a control orientation or power-over approach to teachers. On the whole, traditional principals work to elicit teacher compliance to a wide range of policies, programmes, rules, and regulations developed by others (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1993; Dunlap and Goldman, 1991; Kreisberg, 1992).

Comparisons of these and other research suggest that effective traditional and effective school leadership promote schoolwork through the use of both tangible (e.g. funds, time, materials) and intangible (e.g. authority, autonomy, respect, trust) strategies and through supportive personal characteristics (e.g. caring, honesty). More recently, however, a handful of studies have produced some data, about the characteristics of facilitative leadership. Encouraging innovation and making available professional literature are two examples used by shared governance principals to facilitate critique.

According to the findings of the present study, school principal's perceptions in regarding the effectiveness of school leadership. Bad communication, for instance, was a major concern. Moreover, they likely to focus on the weaknesses of the principals which resulted from the relevant limitations of the educational system. Consequently, it appears that respondents tended to exaggerate behaviour and personality problems in the principals effectiveness. Consequently, the findings reported in the present study point to the need for better preparation of school principals for their responsibility and work environment. At present, there isn't practical preparation of school principals. While teaching practice provides valuable classroom experience, does not prepare for the organisational aspects of the workplace. It appears that there is a need for school leaders to receive training on educational administration and management before their appointment. As suggested some researchers (Saitis, 2002; Stravakou, 2003; Iordanidis, 2003; Pashiardis and Orphanou, 1999; Athanasoula – Reppa, 2001 et al.), a training programme can be used to provide future principals with the necessary knowledge and skills. Such a programme can also legitimise the authority of the school leaders, if subordinates consider their superior to be well qualified in educational administration and management, they are more likely to form a positive opinion of him/her. So we believe that further research may be necessary to improve the validity of the findings and test the emerging framework and critical success factors.

Finally, educational planners and policy makers must institute changes in the educational system that will afford principals with greater autonomy and decision-making power and allow them to undertake major initiatives for the improvement of their schools. In such situation, the principal would be in a position to transfer greater responsibility to teachers, thus enhancing their work. In conclusion, the finding of our study suggests, the need for the following: better preparation for teacher and school leaders before their appointments, and organisational changes that will have a positive impact on personnel satisfaction and morale and of course the improvement and effectiveness of educational system.

The main aim of general education should be ensure the balanced development of humanistic /social and scientific/ technical areas of the curriculum, assisting thus the balanced physical, mental, moral, aesthetic and emotional development of pupils.

Furthermore, given the radical developments in technology with the continuously increasing exploitation of its applications in personal and working life, school education should enable pupils to understand the role of new technologies and use them accordingly, continuously improving their access skills and the new situation brings out an urgent need to provide high quality school education. It has to be recognized that, within our educational systems, there is an obvious lack in the provision of an education compatible with real needs in the context of continuous adaptation to change. We desperately need to change the process of learning itself. Knowing about the world should not be an end in itself; knowing the tools that might make this world better is what matters.

We have to change the passive acquisition of knowledge into the active application of this knowledge. The 'human factor', the main differentiating factor has to be taken into consideration in a new, quality-appreciative learning culture. This learning culture can be taught. Theories and successful case studies do exist, waiting to be taught. In other words, it is all down to education again; a never-ending cycle of educating the educators so that they can educate better. Moreover, recent educational legislation, policies and mandates have often confused rather than clarified.

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