TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CLASSROOM: ANY EVIDENCE?

DENNIS L. TRESLAN

FOR THOSE INVOLVED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER IN THE DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL services, there is little doubt that teacher leadership (albeit underrated) does exist in our schools and that it significantly impacts on school effectiveness. It has even been suggested that this activity contributes to improved organizational memory by using the power of teaching to shape meaning for students, which in turn produces an enhanced life quality. Yet despite this justification, minimal attention is given to the significant leadership contribution of teachers fulfilling their professional responsibilities as administrators of the learning process, perhaps due in part to a lingering bureaucratic expectation or traditional belief that teacher leadership is at best peripheral to teaching effectiveness (and school governance). However the classroom, with its many social interactions, can be an ideal setting for teachers to hone their leadership skills and transform traditional teacher-student relationships. This article will provide evidence that teachers currently practice cutting edge transformational leadership in their student-teacher interactions and confirm that such evidence can be detected in the process of effective teaching.

CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP

To reinforce the importance of classroom leadership, one can begin with a simple definition: leadership connotes the actions of an individual acting in a group which has common interests, purposes, or goals, and who influences the efforts of the group in the achievement of its goals. In other words, leadership is a relationship between an individual and a group built around some common interest. Substituting educational phraseology, we can create in simple terms the description of classroom leadership, where leadership connotes the actions of a teacher interacting with students to facilitate their attainment of personal and group goals. This particular view of teaching suggests that relationships are indeed central to the people-oriented processes of leadership and teaching through which trust, mutual respect, expectation, and honesty form the bases of long-term partnerships.

Classroom observation reveals the presence of additional critical leadership conditions, including a social influence process; influence exertion; structuring of activities; positional attributes; unique personal characteristics; and categories of leadership behaviour. Lessons delivered, grade levels maintained, and/or administrative protocols engaged in serve as indicators of common interests, purposes, or goals. Teaching-learning relationships can be seen as influence transactions, while the situational goal constitutes student understanding of concepts taught.

There is no difficulty making the case for teacher leadership, despite an ever present bureaucratic presence defining leadership in terms of superior-subordinate relationships. That the twenty-first century contains clear expectations for educator leadership generally, and teacher leadership in particular, is clearly reflected in the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium Standards.

IF WE TRULY BELIEVE THAT OUR SCHOOLS ARE CAPABLE OF FUNCTIONING AS INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS, THEN WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE NEED FOR NEW AND CRITICAL LEADERSHIP BOTH IN THE SCHOOL AND IN THE CLASSROOM. DOING SO MIGHT AFFECT NOT ONLY OUR PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT LEARNING, BUT OUR CURRENT LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS AS WELL.
both in the school and in the classroom. Doing so might affect not only our preconceived notions about learning, but our current leadership paradigms as well.

**TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Transformational leadership – embracing participatory decision making, reflection, and self-awareness – represents a paradigm shift in leadership understanding. This is driven by the belief that people want to feel empowered. As Lambert asks, who could be in a more opportune position than teachers to confirm that leadership is a reciprocal learning process? That it is not based solely on traits? That it results in constructive change? That it involves shared decision making, collaboration, sacred trust, and empowerment? Obviously this conceptualization of leadership differs from the more traditional, hierarchical view in the sense that leaders are viewed as managers of meaning, exhibiting inspirational, visionary and symbolic aspects of behaviour.

It is important to understand that transformational leadership is what a leader accomplishes rather than an emphasis on personal characteristics and interpersonal relationships – as important as these are. Applied to the classroom, this definition calls into focus the working relationship between effective teachers and their students. Such teachers are concerned with moving students beyond their self-interests and toward the good of the whole school. Here transformations would include raising students’ awareness levels, helping them search for self-fulfillment, understanding the need for change, and building trust.

And what about the attributes of teachers who demon-

strate transformational leadership? One can assume that these teachers are charismatic; capable of creating a clear class vision; devoted to encouraging personal development; dedicated to practising empowerment; innovative; and capable of leading by example. They easily engage students to make learning a fun experience, and students in turn become motivated by an enthusiastic belief that what their teacher is conveying is critical to their education. Interestingly, this setting also lends itself to effective classroom management – a much sought after “pedagogical grail” based on shared core values between teacher and students! These core values may well be manifested through the following actions: leadership in identifying organizational vision; fostering acceptance of group goals; conveying high performance expectations; being an appropriate role model; providing intellectual stimulation; and dedication to developing a strong school culture.

Six critical values interact to comprise what is commonly understood as transformational leadership. These values are crucial to the entire school organization, as well as to the individual classroom setting. They include purpose, empowerment, power to accomplish, quality control, outrage and moral action. Of particular interest here is the degree to which these values are embodied in displays of effective teaching within our classrooms.

Purpose relates to those leadership activities through which a leader brings about clarity, consensus and commitment to organizational goals. Teachers express this value when they clarify concepts covered in a lesson, respond to class questions, and strive for agreement in student understanding. This goes far beyond textbook teaching and mere lecture to reveal evidence of pedagogical and curricular constructivism, which themselves are accepted indicators of effective teaching.

Empowerment addresses the shared sense of ownership on the part of leader and followers (e.g., teacher and students) and, as such, is a critical component of effective classroom management. Interestingly, a growing number of teachers are striving to replace the more traditional superior-subordinate relationship between themselves and their students with what can be referred to as “power investment”, where the encouragement of student empowerment reaps huge dividends in terms of classroom control and positive student-teacher relationships.
relations. Yet, for this to occur, teachers themselves need to experience this same relationship with colleagues and superiors – a real challenge for some school administrators!

The effectiveness of a teacher’s classroom role stems in part from a transformational leadership value known as power to accomplish. We commonly consider power as a form of control because it involves the capacity or potential to exert influence, usually through sanction, persuasion, or physical coercion. (Is there a student who cannot recall horror stories relating to teacher dominance, control, or deal making?) The essence of transformational leadership implies obtaining follower response by moving beyond a “carrot and stick” mentality to the practice of “power to” in lieu of “power over”.

Students are quick to recognize the effectiveness of a teacher who helps them acquire and accomplish what students themselves believe to be important in the classroom experience – being less concerned with what students are doing and more concerned with what students are actually accomplishing.

Quality control pertains to situations where people strive to transcend self-interest and aim for the greater good. As such, this value is considered to reside in people’s hearts and minds. Can we find evidence of this value in an effective classroom? Of course we can! Given the opportunity, effective teachers display this value in their relationships and interactions with students. Visualize professional teachers manifesting their conscience of craft. From a transformational perspective, these teachers recognize the importance of classroom scheduling, prescribing, programming, monitoring, testing, etc., but these same teachers also derive immeasurable classroom assistance and satisfaction from what they believe in, their role identification, and their personal pride.

Outrage constitutes a fifth value of transformational leadership with a focus on real toughness. The old adage “When the going gets tough the tough get going” is particularly apropos here because experience informs us that real toughness is principled and value-based. As transformational leaders, teachers strive to display, and instill in their students, honesty, integrity, responsibility, and concern for others – becoming outraged when they witness these core value components violated either by students themselves or, worse still, by the very environment of which these students are a part, namely, the school. In a manner of speaking, these elements are non-negotiables, comprising the cultural strands and covenant of school life. In fact research indicates that teachers espousing transformational leadership prefer their classrooms and schools to be “both tightly and loosely structured – tight on values and loose on how these values are embodied in the practice of teaching and administration.” Is this not an example of effective teaching? Surely such actions become the essence of transforming school values from mere abstractions to real-life cultural imperatives, bonding students and teachers together in a shared covenant.

One final transformational leadership value, moral action, is the most challenging of all values, yet it is a distinguishing component of pedagogical effectiveness. The exercising of transformational leadership skills in the classroom, the incentives for dealing with values, covenants, and shared purposes, require teachers to act rather than pay mere lip service when confronting real issues. Within effective teaching, moral action is unavoidable. For these teachers, emphasis shifts from “means” values such as honesty, fairness, loyalty, patience, openness, and being above board to what Burns calls “ends” values. In other words what happens in these classrooms is but a reflection of larger purposes – justice, community, freedom, and equality – where the emphasis reflects doing the right thing rather than doing things right.

**EFFECTIVE TEACHING**

Throughout the preceding discussion of transformational leadership, classroom examples have been used to demonstrate that effective teachers rely extensively on essential values of transformational leadership to maximize the effectiveness of their student-teacher interactions. Proof of this relationship can be observed in the commonality of elements when comparing transformational leadership values with the domains of effective teaching proposed by Parkay, Standford, Vaillancourt and Stephens (Figure 1). While there may well be a need for further study of the exact nature of the transformational leadership value/effective teaching domain correlation, examination of the
### FIGURE 1: Comparison of Transformational Leadership Values with Effective Teaching Domains – Component Similarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Transformational Leadership Components</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Preparation</td>
<td>• Demonstrates content and pedagogical knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Demonstrates student knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Selects instructional goals&lt;br&gt;• Demonstrates resource knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Designs coherent instruction&lt;br&gt;• Assesses student learning</td>
<td>• Goal clarification&lt;br&gt;• Goal consensus&lt;br&gt;• Goal commitment</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>• Creates environment of respect and rapport&lt;br&gt;• Establishes a learning culture&lt;br&gt;• Manages classroom procedures&lt;br&gt;• Manages student behaviours&lt;br&gt;• Organizes physical space</td>
<td>• “Power to” in lieu of “power over”&lt;br&gt;• Attaining self-set goals&lt;br&gt;• Focus on accomplishment&lt;br&gt;• Instilling honesty and integrity&lt;br&gt;• Instilling responsibility and concern for others&lt;br&gt;• Decision making flexibility&lt;br&gt;• Revising at violation of above</td>
<td>Power to Accomplish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>• Communicates clearly and accurately&lt;br&gt;• Use of questioning and discussion techniques&lt;br&gt;• Engaging students in learning&lt;br&gt;• Providing student feedback&lt;br&gt;• Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness</td>
<td>• Shared ownership&lt;br&gt;• Encouraging empowerment</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Responsibilities</td>
<td>• Reflects on teaching&lt;br&gt;• Maintains accurate records&lt;br&gt;• Communicates with families&lt;br&gt;• Contributes to school/district growth&lt;br&gt;• Professional growth and development&lt;br&gt;• Demonstrates professionalism</td>
<td>• Transcending self-interest&lt;br&gt;• Professional perspective&lt;br&gt;• Role identification&lt;br&gt;• Personal satisfaction&lt;br&gt;• Personal pride&lt;br&gt;• Stressing justice, freedom, community and equality&lt;br&gt;• Doing the right things&lt;br&gt;• Confronting real issues</td>
<td>Quality Control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FIGURE 2: Similarity in Classroom Activity Relative to Transformational Leadership Values and Effective Teaching Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Classroom Activity</th>
<th>Transformational Leadership Classroom Activity</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Preparation</td>
<td>• Knowledge of effective teaching strategies&lt;br&gt;• Stressing importance of personal experience and practical concept application&lt;br&gt;• Addressing varied learning styles, interests, experiences of students in lesson planning and communication&lt;br&gt;• Creating attainable standards</td>
<td>• Clarifying concepts&lt;br&gt;• Responding to group questions&lt;br&gt;• Dealing with student questions&lt;br&gt;• Application of pedagogical and curricular constructivism</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>• Realizing intended outcomes&lt;br&gt;• Earning student respect rather than commanding it&lt;br&gt;• Placing best interests of students first&lt;br&gt;• Creating a learning environment&lt;br&gt;• Working with stakeholders for benefit of students</td>
<td>• Avoiding dominance, control, and deal making&lt;br&gt;• Assisting students in achievement of self-identified goals&lt;br&gt;• Concern for what people are accomplishing rather than doing&lt;br&gt;• Practicing “real” toughness&lt;br&gt;• Demonstrating honesty, integrity, and concern for others&lt;br&gt;• Freedom to decide what to teach&lt;br&gt;• Helping students experience school bonding values</td>
<td>Power to Accomplish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>• Maintaining a collaborative sense of power&lt;br&gt;• Possessing efficacy</td>
<td>• Minimizing superior-subordinate relationships&lt;br&gt;• Encouraging student involvement in the learning experience</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Responsibilities</td>
<td>• Allowing belief system to inform decision making process&lt;br&gt;• Maintaining a professional image&lt;br&gt;• Teaching viewed as a lifelong experience&lt;br&gt;• Using reinforcement, praise and criticism wisely&lt;br&gt;• Confronting challenges&lt;br&gt;• Personal emphasis on honor, benevolence, inspiration, and consistency in student treatment</td>
<td>• Exercising a conscience of craft&lt;br&gt;• Accepting the need for a situational structure&lt;br&gt;• Striving for the “larger good”&lt;br&gt;• Building working relationships with students&lt;br&gt;• Demonstrating justice, freedom and equality in decision making&lt;br&gt;• Being heard; speaking out&lt;br&gt;• Honesty, fairness, loyalty and openness as ends – not means&lt;br&gt;• Classroom emphasis on “doing right things”</td>
<td>Quality Control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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components comprising this correlation suggests the “value”/“domain” associations illustrated in Figure 1.

Further proof of these associations can be detected in the similarity of classroom activity associated with the values of transformational leadership and the domains of effective teaching. (Figure 2) Examples of the former are drawn from the writings of Sergiovanni along with my own experiential background, while examples of the latter reflect in part the characteristics of effective teaching studied in an undergraduate teacher preparation course dealing with effective teaching.14

CONCLUSION
The similarity of core practices in transformational leadership and effective teaching comes as no surprise to those who visualize teaching as administration of the learning process. However, the ideal conditions for expanding this important bond are frequently constrained by a lingering hierarchical view of leadership stressing superior-subordinate relationships. What can be concluded is that when the right conditions are in place, evidence of transformational leadership by teachers does exist in classrooms where effective teaching is routinely practiced. Since teacher leadership is a sleeping giant in many schools, efforts should be undertaken to assist teachers in the attainment of effective teaching practice as a vehicle for providing benefits associated with transformational leadership.15 Under examination, the evidence clearly indicates that a growing number of teachers currently practise cutting edge transformational leadership in their student-teacher interactions, and confirmation of this practice can be found in the exercise of effective teaching itself. The evidence exists – the challenge is ours to pursue.1

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Notes
1 F. Crowther et al, Developing Teacher Leaders (Thousand Oaks: Corwin, 2002).
6 K. Leithwood, Understanding Schools as Intelligence Systems (Stanford: Jai, 2000).
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
13 Sergiovanni.
14 T. Johnson. Personal correspondence. Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 2005.
15 Crowther et al.