



## Selected Proceedings from the 2001 annual conference of the International Leadership Association, November 1-4, Miami, Florida USA

### Exploring the Relationship Between the Perceived Leadership Style of Secondary Principals and the Professional Development Practices of Their Teachers

By Mary Persico, IHM, Ed.D.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the leadership style of secondary principals and the professional development practices of their teachers. The population of the study consisted of the Catholic high schools accredited by the Middle States Commission on Secondary Education. One hundred twenty-nine or 50.4% of the 256 eligible schools participated in the study. Two survey instruments were used. The first, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire or MLQ (Bass and Avolio, 1995), was scored by both leaders, the principals, and raters, a random sampling of one third of their professional staff. The 36 selected questions of the MLQ rate the principals as leaders with laissez-faire, transactional, or transformational leadership behaviors. The second instrument, the Models of Staff Development Survey or MSDS, was completed by the teacher respondents only. This survey looks for indications of each of the five models of staff development as proposed by Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989). These models are (a) Individually Guided staff development; (b) Observation and Assessment; (c) Involvement in the Development and Improvement process; (d) Training; and (e) Inquiry. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tests to explore the relationships being studied.

Correlations of the results of the leader and rater forms of the MLQ indicated the measure of agreement between principals and their teachers on nine subscales of the three factors laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational. The nine subscales include laissez-faire, which is both factor and subscale; contingent reward, management-by-exception active, and management-by-exception passive, all subscales of transactional leadership; idealized influence (attributed and behavioral), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, all subscales of transformational leadership. Frequencies tests on the leader and rater forms of the MLQ reported the number of times individual principals rated themselves higher than their teachers rated them on each of the subscales. They also showed

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the converse, the number of times teachers rated their principals higher than the principals rated themselves on each of the subscales.

Tests of multiple regression and correlations between the MLQ and the MSDS determined the degree to which teachers' perceptions of leadership style as transactional, transformational, or a combination of the two are predictive of their methods of developing themselves as effective teachers. Regression tests controlling for age, gender, number of years in teaching, and length of time with the current principal further illustrated the impact of leadership style on the professional development of teachers.

Of the 129 schools that participated in the study, 125 principals and 1001 teachers returned the surveys. These numbers yielded a response rate of 50.4%. Twenty-one additional schools declined to participate for varying reasons while the superintendent of more than 30 schools did not permit his principals and teachers to participate. Fifty-two percent of the principal respondents were women and 48% were men. Fifty-nine percent of the teacher respondents were women and 38.9 % were men. Twenty-one teachers were unidentified by gender.

#### **Analysis of Findings: Research Question One**

Part A of the first question explored the relationship between all principals' and their teachers' perceptions of the leadership style of the principals being studied. Only the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) leader and rater forms were used for the analysis of this question. The thirty-six questions addressed nine subscales: five transformational, three transactional, and the one known as laissez-faire. There was a positive statistically significant relationship noted for the transformational constructs of idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and for the transformational factor overall. The leadership factor idealized influence, also known as charisma, is the attribute in a leader, which inspires followers to possess high moral standards, vision, and a sense of purpose. Inspirational motivation is the leadership attribute which influences followers to commit themselves to the shared vision of an organization, while individual consideration is the leadership quality of listening, coaching, advising, and encouraging followers to grow. No significant relationship was found for the transformational construct of intellectual stimulation, the quality of leadership which supports the innovations and creativity of followers and challenges them to be actively involved in improving the organization. This finding is significant to the study because this leadership characteristic, when present or perceived as present in principals, is most closely allied to the cultivation of strong professional development practices among teachers. Also, there was no relationship found for the subscale idealized influence, when attributed to the intrinsic make-up of the leader, as contrasted with the aforementioned idealized influence, when found in the overt behaviors of the leader. Two of the three transactional characteristics and the factor transactional leadership overall revealed a significantly positive relationship. The two subscales are contingent reward, the practice by which leaders reward followers for their actions, and management-by-exception (passive), the practice in a leader of intervening in the work of a follower only after mistakes have been made. There was no relationship between principals' and teachers' perceptions regarding the subscale management-by-exception (active), the attribute which describes a leader who watches for the mistakes of followers and then takes corrective action. There was also no relationship between the perceptions of principals and teachers on the leadership factor laissez-faire, or the absence of leadership.

In summary, principals and teachers in this study believe that principals inspire their teachers to high standards, hold up a vision for the school community, and instill a sense of mission in their teachers. They also mutually agree that the principals encourage their teachers to share the vision of the school and offer them support as professionals. In terms of their work, there is agreement that principals reward teachers for the work they do and that principals, although they do not actively seek the mistakes of their teachers, do respond when performance is poor or inappropriate. Teachers do not perceive that they are motivated intellectually nor do they view their principals as active measurers of their mistakes. Both principals and teachers mutually perceive that there is no absence of leadership in the schools that participated in the study.

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Part B of the first question explored the extent to which principals and teachers in the 125 schools with both principal and teachers responding agreed on each of the subscales. Five out of eight times, the principals rated themselves higher than they were rated by their teachers. Four of these five scales were transformational. Principals rated themselves higher than their teachers 75.7% of the time on idealized influence (behavior), 59% of the time on inspirational motivation, 78.5% of the time on intellectual stimulation, and 75.2% of the time on individual consideration, all transformational indices. Principals also rated themselves higher on the transactional factor contingent reward 63.6% of the time. Teachers rated their principals higher than the principals rated themselves 51.2% of the time on the transformational factor, idealized influence (attributed), and on the transactional factors management-by-exception (active), 61.5% of the time, and management-by-exception (passive) 57% of the time. Although principals view themselves as transformational more often than do their teachers, analysis for the first part of this question indicates that the relationships between principals' and teachers' perceptions of leadership are statistically significant in three transformational areas. The greatest disparity is found in regard to the transformational construct intellectual stimulation, which fails to show any statistical significance. Also, principals give themselves higher scores than do their teachers in the area of intellectual stimulation 78.5% of the time. Teachers give their principals higher scores on this factor only 21.5% of the time. Findings resulting from the MLQ indicate that both principals and teachers agree on the leadership qualities of principals in general, particularly in terms of inspiring teachers with a vision for the school community and a sense of mission, and in offering them encouragement as professionals. Their primary disparity occurs in the area of intellectual stimulation. Although principals perceive themselves as strong in this domain, their teachers fail to recognize characteristics which would substantiate such claims.

#### **Research Questions Two and Three**

These next research questions explored the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their principals as highly transformational and the professional development practices of those teachers. The perceptions of leadership as transformational were measured using the results of the MLQ rater form. The five practices of professional development were studied both individually and collectively using the results of the MSDS. Of the 1001 teacher respondents, 458 or 45.8% rated their principals as highly transformational. Tests of multiple regression demonstrated statistical significance between perceptions of a transformational leadership style and two professional practices, and also between perceived transformational leadership and professional practices overall. The first of the two categories is Observation and Assessment, the component which refers to activities such as mentoring, peer coaching, classroom observation, and guided reflection about teaching methodology. The second category is Training, the element which refers to in-service programs and any aspect of teacher learning designed to improve or develop teachers' cognitive skills. These two classifications of teacher learning are traditionally associated with the principal as one who observes classroom teaching and provides in-service activities. These two elements are consistently strong throughout this study. Although findings illustrate statistical strength between perceptions of leadership as highly transformational and Observation and Assessment and Training, the raw data show that teachers who perceive their principals as transformational also do well in the area of Inquiry, the model which encourages research, seeking information from students, the use of technology, and any other tools which give insight into student learning. The modal score for the component of professional development classified as Inquiry for this group of 458 teachers was 6.18 out of a possible 8. This mean score is higher than any of the other four, including the two that were statistically significant. In addition to looking at only the respondents who rated their principals as highly transformational, the overall high scorers were studied. Of the 88 high scorers, with an overall mean score of 34.10 of a possible 40, 80.4% of these teachers fall into the category of perceiving their principals as highly transformational. Their mean scores on each of the factors were all higher than six on a scale of zero to eight, but were particularly high in the same

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areas of Observation and Assessment, Training, and Inquiry as the large group of teachers discussed in the preceding paragraph.

In answer to questions two and three, teachers with perceptions of a principal leadership style which is transformational are likely to demonstrate professional development practices which are strong, particularly in the areas of Observation and Assessment, Training, and Inquiry. This is also further established among high scorers on the MSDS, whose professional development practices are all strong both individually and collectively, and for whom more than 80% view their principals as highly transformational.

#### **Research Questions Four and Five**

These questions studied the relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals as highly transactional and the individual and collective professional development practices of these same teachers. Of the 1001 teacher respondents, only 22 categorized their principals as highly transactional. From a statistical point of view, this posed a limitation for the study in that no statistically significant results were found, except a negative relationship between perceived transactional leadership and the model Inquiry. The 22 teachers who perceived their principals as transactional had a mean score of 6.36 out of eight on the model Inquiry, a score indicative of a healthy pattern of seeking information about student learning.

Of the 88 high scorers, only six rated their principals as highly transactional. Because of the inconsequential number of teacher respondents having perceptions of leadership as highly transactional, it is difficult to answer research questions four and five. Since only 2% of the entire pool of respondents perceived their principals as highly transactional, it cannot be determined whether such perceptions are predictive of strong professional development practices. Inferences can be made, however, that since the 129 principals studied are not perceived as transactional by their teachers, and since 45.8% of all teacher participants and 80.4% of the highest scorers on the MSDS perceive their principals as transformational, then strong professional development practices are linked to perceptions of transformational rather than transactional leadership.

#### **Research Questions Six and Seven**

These two questions explored the relationship between perceptions of a strong combined transformational and transactional style and effective professional development practices among teachers. They asked if a perceived strong combined style is indicative of effective staff development practices for the teachers who hold these perceptions. One hundred eighty-five or 18.5% of the 1001 teachers who participated in the study rated their principals as having a strong combined style. There was no statistical significance observed between the scores on the MLQ regarding perceptions of leadership style and the scores on the MSDS regarding individual and collective staff development practices. The raw data do indicate, however, that a sense of strong combined style is indicative of effective professional development practices, both individually and collectively. The aggregate scores on the MSDS for these 185 teacher respondents is higher than the aggregate scores for both the respondents who perceive their principals as transformational and those few who perceive their principals as transactional. These teachers showed a particular strength in the elements Observation and Assessment and Inquiry. They were moderately to very strong in Individually Guided staff development and Training, and they were weak to moderately strong in the category Involvement in the Development and Improvement process.

Of the 88 high scorers, 46 or 52.2% of them perceive leadership as having a strong combined style. Thus, more than 50 % of teachers who demonstrate excellent professional development activities such as personal learning, reflection on the teaching process, continuing education, and seeking ways to improve student learning, perceive their principals as having a strong combined style of leadership. This finding answers the question that a sense of a strong combined leadership style is predictive of good professional development practices in particular and overall.

#### **Research Questions Eight, Nine, and Ten**

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### *Gender*

Correlations and regression tests controlling for gender for teachers with perceptions of leadership style which is highly transformational, transactional, or a strong combination of both indicated that gender plays little or no role in the development of tenable teaching practices. There is a weak positive correlation between evidence of good professional practices for teachers who perceive their principals as highly transformational in both men and women. Of this group, there were 182 identified males and 261 identified females.

### *Years of Teaching*

There is a relationship between perceptions of leadership style and professional practices of teachers for only those 458 teachers who perceive their principals as highly transformational. There are significant relationships among these respondents in teaching practices overall except in those with between six and ten years of teaching and for educators who have been teaching between 21 and 35 years. Again, the areas of Observation and Assessment and Training are most notable, particularly for teachers with between one and five years of experience.

### *Years with Current Principal*

The number of years spent with the current principal appears to be more important than gender or age for the purposes of this study. For years with the current principal, there is no relationship between perceptions of principals as transactional or as having a strong combination of both transformational and transactional leadership style and teaching practices of respondents. However, there is statistical significance among teachers who have been with their principals for five years or fewer for those who see their principals as transformational. For the first time in this study, the area of Involvement in the Development and Improvement process appears at a .01 level of significance. This finding has implications for future study and for the emergence of new methodologies among young teachers and/or new principals. There are no significant relationships in this area for any groups beyond five years with the current principal. Significance for the components Observation and Assessment and Training is noted among teachers with their principals for five years or fewer. These two areas are the strongest throughout the study. In general, a significant relationship exists for professional practices overall in teachers who have been with their principals for five years or fewer and who perceive their principals as highly transformational.

### *Age*

Teachers whose survey results on the MSDS indicated a relationship between perceptions of leadership style and effective professional practices are primarily between the ages of 40 and 49. This occurs for the respondents who view their principals as having a highly transformational leadership style; there are 134 teachers in this category. As has been the strand throughout this study, the strongest relationships are found in the areas of Observation and Assessment and Training, although the correlations became weaker for the Training model in older teachers. There were negative relationships in terms of age for the model Inquiry among the youngest and the oldest teachers.

## **Discussion**

### *Leader*

The findings of this study moderately reflect the expected trend that leadership, perceived as transformational, has a positive impact on the way teachers participate in their development as educators. The data further reflect the expected trend that perceptions of leadership as transactional have no bearing on the professional development of teachers. It is important that both teachers and principals rated the leadership styles of the principals studied. This expanded earlier studies such as that of Hoover, Petrosko and Schulz (1991), Sagor (1991), and Leithwood et al. (1991) in which data were collected from teachers only. This potential for one source bias was eliminated in the present study. It also clarified that, in general, principals and teachers in this study share mutual perceptions of the leadership style of principals.

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Hoover, Petrosko and Schulz (1991), having studied 45 headmasters in private secondary schools, noted that school leaders, according to their teachers, did not demonstrate the constructs emotional support and intellectual stimulation. Results of the current study conflict with the findings regarding emotional support but concur in the area of intellectual stimulation. There was no significant relationship between principals' and teachers' perceptions for the factor intellectual stimulation. Previous results reported by Podsakoff et al. (1990) and Lowe et al. (1996) indicate that the transformational factor intellectual stimulation is more prevalent in public than in private institutions. Results of the current study bear out those of previous studies that transformational leadership does not inspire intellectual stimulation in private organizations, including schools. This finding, in particular, has implications for the professional development of teachers in Catholic secondary schools. Proponents of transformational leadership place a particular emphasis on the idea of intellectual stimulation as a pivotal mark of true leadership. Bass (1988) insisted that transformational leadership should compel followers to be creative and productive. Lowe et al. (1996) claimed "A leader who is able to intellectually stimulate subordinates will not only foster the perceptions of effectiveness among subordinates, but will also amplify performance itself as gauged by independent measures of productivity" (p.415). The absence of intellectual stimulation in this study may partially explain why there is a significant albeit not overwhelmingly strong relationship between perceptions of leadership as transformational and the individual and total scores on the Models of Staff Development Survey. It may also point principals in the direction of seeking ways to provide intellectual stimulation and thereby strengthening the force of their leadership.

The transformational constructs that are perceived by both principals and teachers as present in this study are those which inspire commitment to the organization, a sense of purpose, and a vision for the future. These are the characteristics that were discovered by researchers such as Liethwood and Jantzi (1990), and Leithwood and Steinbach (1991), as instrumental in the development of positive school culture, the success of school-restructuring, and the increased role of teachers in the problem-solving and decision-making processes. The presence of factors such as inspirational motivation and individual consideration, combined with the absence of the factor intellectual stimulation, imply that leadership in the schools studied supports a strong sense of mission and commitment to the vision but fails to provide the tools needed for the accomplishment of the articulated goals. Only 22 of the 1001 teacher respondents rated their principals as highly transactional. Consequently, there were no reported significant relationships between perceptions of leadership as transactional and the professional practices of teachers, either as individual activities or considered in total. There were no significant relationships reported when considering age, gender, years of teaching experience, or length of time with the current principal. Although these findings are not surprising, given the small number who fell into the category, they do correspond with the results of earlier studies. Avolio and Bass (1988), Sergiovanni (1990), and Leithwood et al. (1991) all concluded that transactional leadership was not as strongly related to school restructuring outcomes and processes as was transformational leadership. Also, Stone (1992) linked transactional leadership to lower-order managerial objectives and transformational leadership to satisfaction and productivity among members of the teaching staff. Silins (1994) began supporting the idea that a combination of leadership styles is a way to achieve successful teacher performance. She noted that transformational leadership, while having a positive effect on certain aspects of school life such as climate, culture, and whole-school functioning, is not as effective as transactional leadership in the area of teacher outcomes. The descriptive statistics of the current study support these findings. When comparing the aggregate scores on the Models of Staff Development Survey, those who perceived their principals as having a strong combined style had a mean score of 28.56 out of a possible 40.00; those who rated their principals as highly transactional ranked next with a mean score of 28.32; and those who rated their principals as highly transformational ranked last with a mean score of 27.38. This finding is potentially compelling for school leaders. It claims that while transformational qualities are needed to inspire, encourage, and motivate

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teachers to commit themselves to the mission of the school, transactional leadership is needed for the development of professional practices which will result in successful teaching for educators and enduring learning for students. Tosi (1982), Waldman, Bass, and Yammarino (1988) called this paradigm the "augmentation hypothesis" which contends that transformational leadership is impractical without transactional behaviors. It further claims that Bass's performance beyond expectations does not occur unless transformational behaviors are built on transactional characteristics.

### **Staff Development**

The raw scores on the Models of Staff Development Survey indicated that taken as a group, the 1001 teacher respondents were weak in the areas of Involvement in the Development and Improvement process, Training, and Observation and Assessment, in that order. The element Involvement in the Development and Improvement process resulted in the lowest modal score for teachers who perceived their principals as highly transformational, highly transactional, and as having a strong combined style. Only the group of 88 high scorers rated in the high range for Involvement in the Development and Improvement process, although it was the lowest mean score of all five elements for high scorers. The elements Observation and Assessment (classroom observation) and Training (in-service programs) were statistically significant more often than any of the other factors, especially for teachers who view their principals as highly transformational. These are both conventional staff development practices and ones which are typically built into the scheduling of a school year. It is possible that the results related to these two factors are not necessarily reflective of leadership style but rather of tradition and routine.

Studies about school reform and student outcomes reinforce the idea that teachers must be involved in developing programs for renewal. Joyce et al. (1989) and Martin (2000) reported that the use of teacher study groups had a positive influence both on teachers' work and on student behavior. MacGilchrist et al. (1995) attributed the resolution of identified academic problems in four schools to changes made by teachers who developed and refined new teaching strategies. Cresswell (1996) found that teachers viewed their schools as innovative when they themselves shared in the responsibility for school successes. The findings of studies such as these help to explain that perceptions of transformational leadership alone do not insure performance beyond expectations, particularly when teachers, although inspired by their leaders, are not directly involved in crafting the learning processes together.

Early literature such as that of McPherson (1974) indicated that teachers wanted to be supported by principals yet allowed to be independent in their decisions about growing professionally. The findings of the current study suggest that principals do inspire and support their teachers while giving them the personal latitude to develop themselves academically as they will. However, the data also report that teachers don't work at their professional development independently. The findings further imply that teachers feel a lack of intellectual stimulation and a deficit in their academic behaviors in not working collaboratively with their principals and other teachers.

### **Summary of Conclusions and Limitations**

The dominant findings of this study are as follows:

- Principals and teachers agree in general on the leadership style of principals.
- Teachers view their principals as highly transformational more often than as having a strong combination of both transformational and transactional characteristics; they rarely view their principals as highly transactional.

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- Teachers who demonstrate stronger professional development practices than their colleagues view their principals as highly transformational or as having a strong combined style; they rarely rate their principals as highly transactional.
- Teachers who rate their principals as highly transformational are most likely to demonstrate strong professional development practices if they have been with their current principals between one and five years or if they are between the ages of 40 and 49.
- Viewing one's principal as transformational, transactional, or as having a strong combined style does not necessarily predict certain outcomes whereas demonstrating strong professional practices may be a predictor of one's perceptions of leadership.

This study has both strengths and limitations. One strength is the elimination of the one source bias that has been the case in previous studies using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire where only raters (here teachers) participated in the survey. A second strength is the fact that few prior studies explored the relationship between school leadership and the professional development of teachers. Another positive value of this work is the direction it provides for future study, especially in terms of the leadership style demonstrated by the principals of high scorers on the MSDS.

Among the limitations is the first time usage of the Models of Staff Development Survey. Perhaps the questions do not adequately address the intended concepts or should be re-worked for future study. A strong limitation is the small number of respondents who perceived their leaders as transactional. This negligible number reduced the statistical significance of the relationship between transactional leadership style and the models of staff development. Conversely, the large number of respondents who perceive their principals as transformational and who have been with their principals for five years or fewer may have accounted for the statistical significance for that group of teachers.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Quantitative research about leadership and staff development to date has not left clear mandates for principals. The findings of this study emphasize some areas of concentration which may help school leaders improve teaching methodologies in their schools. Some ideas resulting from the data found in this study are offered here.

- Principals should find ways to engage their teachers in the improvement and development processes of the school. This will involve a commitment of time, personnel, and financial resources.
- Teachers should be encouraged to develop professional practices such as personal reading about student learning, subscribing to professional academic organizations, experimenting with long-term non-conventional methodologies in the classroom, and focusing on the complexities of enduring learning.
- Principals should plan and implement strong staff development programs during the first five years of their tenure as principal.
- Teachers who are between the ages of 40 and 49 should be encouraged to mentor younger teachers and to become involved in plans for academic development and improvement programs.

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- Principals and teachers should work together to determine what aspects of leadership are missing that would intellectually motivate teachers.
- Principals should network with other principals in determining and perhaps jointly implementing programs of staff development that might enhance the teaching process in their schools. Such networking may also serve to mentor new principals in academic areas and to establish a model for collaboration among teachers.

#### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Results of the research begun here open avenues for further study in related areas. These include ways in which principals motivate teachers intellectually. They also indicate the most optimum times to accomplish their academic goals and among which teachers they are most likely to have the greatest effect. Some suggested ideas:

- Replicate this study in public schools of the same geographic area. These data could provide a perspective about the nature of leadership as similar to or different from leadership in Catholic schools.
- Replicate this study in Catholic secondary schools in other areas of the country. These data might help to determine if the nature of leadership in Catholic secondary schools nationwide is primarily perceived as transformational.
- Conduct a qualitative study observing principal leadership style and teacher professional practices in schools where respondents scored in the upper range of the Models of Staff Development Survey. The findings will help determine to what extent principal leadership style influences the professional practices of teachers.
- Conduct a study to discover the reasons for low scores in the area of Involvement in the Development and Improvement process. Results of this study may factor out leadership as the cause of poor scores and may attribute them to constraints of time, resources, and labor issues.
- Survey teachers who have been with their principals for five years or fewer to determine which leadership factors inspire them to grow in the development of professional practices. These data may help principals understand why the level of professional development is not sustained beyond the initial five years with a principal.
- Survey teachers who are between the ages of 40 and 49 to determine what factors inspire them to maintain a meaningful level of growth in the development of professional practices. These data may inform research about whether the leadership style of principals is related to a meaningful level of professional development among teachers of this age group.
- Survey principals and teachers about their understanding of the leadership factor intellectual stimulation. Findings may inform the literature about the things principals perceive they provide as intellectually stimulating and teachers perceive are missing.
- Survey the teachers who believe their principals are highly transactional to determine which of the leadership behaviors hinder

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and which encourage the professional development practices of teachers. The resulting data may help principals understand transactional leadership behaviors that would be helpful to their teacher.

- Conduct a study which tracks student outcomes for students whose teachers were high scorers on the Models of Staff Development Survey. The resulting data have the potential to link good teaching practices to improved student outcomes as well as a specific style of leadership to both good teaching practices and improved student outcomes.
- Study teachers with high scores on the Models of Staff Development Survey to determine their perspective on having ownership in the area of staff development and on the improved educational climate in their schools.

In summary, this research indicates that secondary school principals and their teachers agree on the leadership style of the principals except in the area of intellectual stimulation. The findings suggest to school principals that they search for ways to help their teachers develop into strong and viable educators in the areas of personal or individual development and in collaborative endeavors. This is especially true in the early years of a principal's tenure. It also reinforces the idea that a combined leadership style that is generally transformational and at specific times transactional provides the best model for the academic growth of teachers, particularly those who are between the ages of 40 and 49.

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