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*Corresponding author: Barbara N. Martin, Educational Leadership, University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, MO 64093, USA
E-mail: bmartin@ucmo.edu

Reviewing editor:
Sammy Hui, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

Additional information is available at the end of the article

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

What leadership behaviors were demonstrated by the principal in a high poverty, high achieving elementary school?

E. Hayet J. Woods¹ and Barbara N. Martin^{2*}

Abstract: Examined through the lens of leadership, were the behaviors of a principal as perceived by stakeholders. The following themes emerged: (1) Educating the Whole Child, with the subthemes: (a) providing basic needs; (b) academic interventions based on achievement data; (c) an emphasis on reading; (d) extended academic time; and (e) relationships; and (2) Synergy of Expectations, with the subthemes: (a) consistent student expectations; (b) increased staff accountability; and (c) community involvement. The researchers found that the principal by demonstrating behaviors as a change agent, a creator of vision, and a provider of necessary support and strategies, rather than adopting numerous programs, the school personnel were able to increase and sustain academic achievement of the students of poverty as well as their peers. Implications for principal practices, along with leadership preparatory programs are significant.

Subjects: Educational Change & School Reform; School Leadership, Management & Administration; Sustainability Education, Training & Leadership

Keywords: leadership; principal; student learning; high poverty

1. Introduction

Boyd-Zaharias and Pate-Bain (2008) postulated that low achievement and high dropout rates among poor students continue to “plague” (p. 40) public schools in the United States; and elaborated further by stating, “our nation will profit by or pay for whatever they become” (p. 40). Further,

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

E. Hayet J. Woods received her EdD from the University of Missouri in Leadership and Policy Analysis. Currently, she is a principal in the Hickman Mills School District in Kansas City, Missouri. She has research interest in understanding high poverty and high achieving schools.

Barbara N. Martin received her EdD from the University of Missouri in Leadership and Policy Analysis. Currently, she is a professor in Educational Leadership at the University of Central Missouri and works with the collaborative doctorate from the University of Missouri-Columbia and UCMO. She has been a classroom teacher, a Director of Special Education, and a building level principal. She has an active research agenda in social justice leadership, technology in education and critical theories.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

With the high stake accountability efforts framed through NCLB and ESSA, principals are being challenged to meet the needs of all students. Adding to this challenge is the increase in poverty of many students within school districts. This article describes one rural school elementary principals' leadership that transformed a high poverty school into a high achieving one. It was found that by providing not only basic needs, but academic interventions with an emphasis on reading, this principal's behavior enhanced the learning environment. Coupled with this emphasis on education the whole child was a climate of high expectations on teachers, students, and community members. By examining these leadership behaviors, leadership preparatory programs can increase the skill sets for aspiring leaders.

Chenoweth (2009a, 2009b), postulated that as the country continues to move forward with a myriad of reform efforts the achievement gap between poor students and their non-poor peers does not tend to close, rather it widens. Therefore, while reform movements have been the process for begetting change in schools, they have not brought about the change needed for poor students (Haycock, 2006). Even *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), which altered the reform process so that educators were forced to examine and adjust how they taught in order to increase student achievement (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2007), linking for the first time student academic achievement directly to school funding (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2005), has not provided the needed improvement for students in poverty (Chenoweth, 2009a).

Nonetheless, according to Haycock (2006), NCLB has put an emphasis on poor and minority students' learning, referring to them as "invisible children" (p. 38). The challenge for educators is to find effective teaching pedagogy that brings continued improvement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, & Easton, 2010; Chenoweth, 2009a; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Accordingly, the purpose of this research was to explore possible connections between the leadership behavior of the principal and the sustained high achievement by all students, regardless of social economic status in one elementary school setting. The following overarching question guided the inquiry: what leadership behaviors do stakeholders perceive the principal has demonstrated that has led to an increase in academic achievement of students from poverty?

2. Conceptual framework

Smallwood, Ulrich, and Sweetman (2008) stated, "Beyond our personal awareness, research has shown that the quality of leadership helps meet the expectations of investors, customers, and employees" (p. 1). Similarly closely related to leadership theory is the effective functioning of complex organizations (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). However, considering the vast importance of the role of the leader within an organization, there has not been a substantial amount of research on school leadership as related to sustaining high student achievement (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008) with students of poverty. The analysis of research by Marzano et al. (2005), found over five thousand articles and studies that address school leadership, "but only 69 that actually examine the quantitative relationship between building leadership and academic achievement of students" (p. 6).

Simultaneously, the broad topic of increasing and sustaining high achievement narrows considerably when placing the focus upon the type of leadership behavior found in successful schools (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Schools with such achievement have leaders with distinctive leadership that demonstrate specific leadership behaviors (Marzano et al., 2005; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Fullan (2001) indicated leadership is about solving complex problems such as how to meet AYP by raising achievement for all students and thus closing, and hopefully eliminating, the achievement gap. Chenoweth (2009a) argued, "All schools could learn something from the qualities shared by schools that have been successful in educating poor and minority students to high levels" (p. 38). In fact, effective leaders have as one of their highest priorities to learn from the best practices of high-performing schools (Carter, 2000). However, the achievement gap continues to widen between the students of poverty (Chenoweth, 2009a; Haycock, 2006) and other students. Thus, in an effort to avoid reinventing the wheel the behaviors of leaders within successful schools of poverty need to be examined (Chenoweth, 2009a, 2009b). And Dufour and Marzano (2011) warned that if the educational gaps remain, the workforce will display an abrupt decrease in the number of workers with high school diplomas and college degrees over the next 15 years. Furthermore, Cawelti (2004) advised "no significant increase in student achievement will be forthcoming unless students receive higher quality and more focused instruction in their classrooms on a day-to-day basis" (p. 10). Thus, while researchers have identified a positive correlation between the leadership of the building principal and increased student achievement (Cotton, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Yukl, 2009), it is important in this time of high accountability to understand the specific leadership behaviors that effect student achievement within a high poverty setting.

Narrowing the focus to the specific leadership behaviors successful leaders implement in order to effect change and increase student achievement is needed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge (Chenoweth, 2009a, 2009b; Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Haycock, 2006; Reeves, 2009). During the literature review three leadership behaviors emerged: Leader as a Change Agent, Leader as the Vision Creator, and Leader as a Supporter of Strategies. As a result, the first leadership construct to be examined was that of the leader as a change agent.

2.1. Leader as a change agent

In times of significant change, for example the mandates of NCLB and ESSA, the leader must be flexible and adapt to the ever-changing climate in order to provide what is needed by whom and when (Fullan, 2010). To effect change, school leaders must assume diversified roles (Bernhardt, 2004; Fullan, 2010). Diverse roles include, but are not limited to: thinker; believer; resource acquirer; leader; supporter; delegator; and information provider (Gorton & Snowden, 1998, p. 11). According to Yukl (2009) principals leading change, referred to as change agents, create a viable vision and work with the stakeholders to establish and work toward a shared vision by building leadership capacity within the stakeholders (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Lambert, 2003). Fullan (2001) confirmed the leader must influence teachers to realize the need for change through data analysis of student achievement on standardized tests. Once teachers see that a deficit exists within student achievement, the change process is embraced and implemented more effectively, according to Fullan (2001). Further, Reeves (2009) stated that the effective change leader puts the change in perspective by identifying what will *not* be changing, as opposed to focusing on what must be changed. The process of cultivating dialog that teachers can understand and internalize, will help facilitate the change process. Fullan (2010) described this process of “capacity-building” in which teachers and students can “clearly articulate their learning targets, success criteria, and instructional actions” (p. 14).

2.2. Leader as the vision creator

Another behavior of an effective leader is the importance of creating the vision of the organization, while supporting staff members (Blase & Blase, 2004; Lambert, 2003). An effective leader will motivate members of the school to seek a worthy vision because it promotes learning and growth for all (Yukl, 2009), thus gaining buy-in from the staff as all are committed to the collectively created vision. When all members of an organization share a vision of student and adult learning, it becomes the learning culture of the organization (Lambert, 2003; Yukl, 2009).

Support of the vision may be accomplished through many avenues: observation; feedback; reflection; resources; professional growth opportunities; and through developing skill sets (Bush, 2003). McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) shared that creating a visionary culture of a school will not occur without the principal. Further, the principal is the creator of culture, either intentionally or not (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Nurturing professional dialog by the principal is essential to empowering teachers and instructional improvement within the vision (Blase & Blase, 2004). Dufour and Marzano (2011) argued “the more skilled the building principal, the more learning can be expected among students” and that “powerful school leadership by the principal has a positive effect on student achievement” (p. 48). Similarly, Griffith (2004) noted the increase in student achievement comes through the actions of the leader regarding the school conditions, data analysis and interventions, which motivates teachers and students to achieve more. Griffith (2004) further discovered that achievement gaps tended to be the smallest when teachers viewed their principal as an effective leader. Further research documented that a positive school environment had a constructive impact on schools with high percentages of socioeconomically-disadvantaged students (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). Specifically schools with high achievement and high poverty have benefited from the clarity of purpose grounded in a set of shared beliefs and core values (Llamas-Sanchez & Lopez-Martin, 2006; Williams, 2006) supported by the leader.

2.3. Leader as a supporter of strategies

Through the examination of effective leadership behaviors on student achievement, researchers (Kannapel and Clements, 2005; Pollard-Durodola, 2003) have found that there are principals who

are making a difference with student achievement in high poverty schools. The principals who are making the difference in high-performing, high poverty schools have implemented various successful strategies, organizational structures, and programs within their schools (Mosenthal, Lipson, Torncello, Russ, & Mekkelsen, 2004). Chenoweth (2009a) found several low socioeconomic schools defying the odds because they “ruthlessly organize themselves around one thing: helping students learn a great deal” (p. 39). These leaders examined students in the learning environment and then created structures that supported learning for all (Reeves, 2009). Principals from successful schools recognized that while children learn at different paces, it is their responsibility to ensure that all children master key subjects, especially reading, math, and fluency in the English language (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

Overall, effective leaders in high achieving schools with high poverty did not implement one or two things and obtain the results, but they focused on a number of things simultaneously. This is what Cawelti (2004) referred to as “a sustained focus on multiple factors” (p. 2) and what Fullan (2010) called the “skinny of change—focusing on a small number of key things done with relentless consistency” (p. 12). In order to achieve the critical mass necessary to affect change, schools of poverty that created large enough gains in student performance to be deemed successful must engage in “systemic change” (Cawelti, 2004, p. 2) that resulted in a school that embraced change and had a collective focused vision on learning.

3. Methodology

This narrative case study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003) allowed the researchers to explore in-depth how individuals interact within the social environment and the meaning and perceptions they have (Merriam, 1998) while examining those perceptions in regard to the leadership behaviors. The case was identified through a series of filters in order to collect open-ended data (Creswell) by “captur[ing] multiple realities that are not easily quantifiable ... [through a] holistic approach to information collection in [a] natural setting” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 72). Each participant was purposefully selected in order to ensure a variety of grade levels (teachers) and socioeconomic levels (parents) were represented with the purpose of collecting data representative of all stakeholders.

3.1. The setting

The site for this narrative case study was a rural elementary school in Missouri, which was one of three school buildings in the School District. The elementary school is a PK-5 school of approximately 250 students. The student population had over 70% of students qualifying for free or reduced meals. Within that subgroup, over 65% achieved at the top two levels of achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP).

The school district sits in a 300 square mile area serving five counties in the heart of Missouri. The district had been consolidated from four smaller districts into one larger district serving fewer than seven hundred students. Families moved to this district with the hope of providing a solid educational foundation for their children. However, the enrollment had been on the decline due to the length of the commute many parents had to make in order to find employment in nearby cities. Due to the school being a significant distance from any residential settings, all students are transported to and from school by buses provided by the district. Employment opportunities, other than farming, lie outside the county of the school. The school, located on a rural highway, is connected via a covered exterior walkway, to the middle and high schools. A fence surrounds the playground area due to the proximity to the busy highway. The main building had been built in 1980, had additions added in 2000. The facilities are well maintained and clean. The principal gave the researchers a tour of the premises providing an explanation of when each addition was built and how the space was repurposed to maximize learning for all.

3.2. Participants

This elementary school was purposefully selected based on three criterion: (1) A high incidence of poverty with 70% or more of the students qualifying to receive free or reduced meals; (2) The

meeting AYP the last three years with 65%+ of students from poverty achieving in the highest two levels of achievement: proficient and advanced; (3) A principal, who had held that position, for a minimum of five years.

In addition, purposeful sampling of the 12 participants took place to ensure an accurate representation of stakeholders in the organization (Creswell, 2007). Without a purposeful selection, valuable input from the staff might not be represented, as is the possibility with a random selection. Therefore, the selection of the five teaching staff was designed to represent those teachers who taught in grades three through five because their students are given the state standardized test each year. In addition each of the five teachers had worked with the principal for over five years. The principal was instrumental in selecting a small group of five parents using the criteria of parents who had had students in the building for more than one year, and who came from a variety of socioeconomic levels, thus adding insight that was invaluable to the study. This selected process resulted in the following participants: one principal, one superintendent, five teachers, and five parents.

The first participant was the principal at the elementary school. In addition to serving currently as the building principal, he also served as the director of transportation. He was in his fourteenth year of education, and all but three years were served as elementary building principal at the school. The second participant was the superintendent in the school district. He was in his twenty-second year of education, and the last seven years were served in the current school district. Of the teachers, two taught third grade, one taught fourth grade, and two taught fifth grade. The first parent participant had one child attending the elementary school and one child at the middle school. She was born and raised in the community. The second parent participant had two children attending the school and had moved to the community when she married her husband, whom she met during her first (and only) semester of college. Her husband grew up attending the schools and returned when college did not work out. The third parent had three children attending the elementary school. He taught math at the high school which was located on the campus with the elementary and middle schools. He was also a graduate of the school district. The fourth parent had two children attending the elementary school, along with one attending the middle school and one at the high school. He owned the local gas station and was fortunate to be able to be close to his children rather than having an hour commute. And the fifth parent had one child attending the elementary and one in the high school and had moved to the community two years ago.

3.3. Instrumentation

Utilized to collect data were interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. Completed individually with the principal and superintendent, followed by a day of observation, was a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately one hour each. Follow-up phone interviews were scheduled with each administrator when further clarification was needed as the researchers transcribed the interviews. Next, the researchers facilitated focus groups with the selected five teachers and five parents on two different days with each followed by a day of observation. Also included in the data collection were documents to supplement the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), such as student achievement data, school improvement plans, minutes of faculty meetings, and examples of parental letters.

The 15 semi-structured questions for both the interview protocols and the focus group protocols were designed to gain the perspectives of the stakeholders of the building and district regarding the leadership behavior of the principal, the transformational leadership processes that have been demonstrated that have led to the increase in the academic achievement of students from poverty, and what the principal considers about his or her own leadership behavior and the impact it has had on increasing achievement for students from poverty.

During the interviews and focus groups, the researchers used audio recording to capture the dialog while taking notes of body language, gestures, and interactions between colleagues. This process proved valuable as the transcription of the audio recording would have been more difficult had

notes not been available to what cannot be captured on audio tapes. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) explained the purpose of the field notes during interviews and focus groups is to allow for the reactions of the participant to be recorded by the researcher to serve as visual cues and aid the transcription process.

Following the interviews and focus groups, the researchers transcribed the audio tapes. Member-checking was conducted to verify the accuracy of the transcripts and confirmed by each participant to increase the content validity (Creswell, 2007). The participants were given instructions to contact the researcher to make necessary corrections within the prearranged time frame. The use of coding prior to publication aided in confidentiality and increased the confidence of the participants in the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Protecting the participants also enhanced the frankness of the participants' statements.

Four full day visits to the site provided ample time for the researchers to obtain a clear picture of how the school operates on a daily basis. Specifically, the researchers observed principal, teacher interactions, classrooms, and departmental meetings. Field notes from observations were utilized as a design control in this study to balance the effects of researcher bias. Additionally, field notes provided specific documentation of the actual observations, thoughts, and impressions made during each step in the research process (Emerson et al., 1995). Though observations were not the primary data collection technique, they were used to enhance the overall picture the researchers intended to create.

3.4. Data analysis

The concurrent nested model allowed the researchers to examine multiple levels (Creswell, 2007, p. 221) so that the interview data, observation data, and document analysis were collected separately but the analysis and interpretation were combined to “seek convergence among the results” (p. 222). Analysis was conducted via an iterative process that identified common themes and triangulated multiple data sources (Huberman & Miles, 2002).

The ethnographic field note process outlined by Emerson et al. (1995) provided a process for each document and transcript (interview and focus group) to be numbered in a concise manner for more accurate coding. Through the process of the transcription of the interviews and focus groups the researcher identified each participant by a code, along with a code for each question in order to assist with accuracy in the data analysis (Creswell, 2007).

4. Findings and discussion

Viewed through the lens of leadership, the researchers analyzed the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the leadership behavior of the principal, examining what he did and how he did it, thus providing useful information for schools failing to meet such high levels of academic success for their students from poverty. Using the data-set and the predetermined codes, the following two themes emerged: (1) *Educating the Whole Child*; and (2) *Synergy of Expectations* and supported the notion that this principal practiced transformational leadership.

4.1. Educating the whole child

Many stories emerged of a leader whose ability to identify the basic and higher order needs of the children had a profound impact on student attitude and effort at school. Teachers and parents noted that this principal understood that before a child could be successful in academics, his or her basic needs such as clothing, nutrition, and health needed to be addressed, thus educating the whole child emphasis. Credited with finding strategical and individualized ways to shape student attitudes, behavior and increase academic success for all students was the principals' focus. Not only did this principal focus on academic success for each student, but he made sure that the students' basic needs like clothing, dental hygiene, and nutrition were provided. As the superintendent noted, “If a child needs dental work, medical attention, or other needs the school cannot provide, the principal reaches out to a community member for assistance. He said he has yet to be turned down.”

Within the conceptual framework of the effective leadership, the leader as a change agent was evident by teachers and students wanting to do their best for the principal. As noted by Yukl (2009) principals leading change, work closely with the teachers to establish and work toward a shared vision of needed change by building leadership capacity within the stakeholders (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Lambert, 2003). Bass (1999) argued this is being demonstrated when the leader as a change agent envisions a desirable future, articulates how it can be reached, serves as a role model for colleagues, sets high expectations, and displays confidence. As one teacher stated, “The kids don’t want to let him down.” A parent shared that, “He is a hands-on principal. He knows all of the kids, their names, and their needs, both in school and out. He also knows his teachers personally, and they know and understand his expectations.”

A clear perception of the principal was that of a goal focused leader who trusted those with whom he works. Regarding how the teachers taught, the principal shared, “I allow the teachers to teach the way they want to teach. I know the results.” He is in each classroom daily discussing student data with teachers and students. As the principal put it, “Teachers want to do their best for the students, the kids are their motivation.” Teachers have responded to this trust, and feel they are valued. As one noted, “His expectations are high for all of us, especially the teachers, however he is much aware of the stress that could bring, and daily he lets us know how appreciative he is of our work.”

Furthermore, leader as a change agent was identified, when the teachers said the principal motivated struggling students with individual time in his office, where they read to him or he worked with them one to one. As noted by Fullan (2010), it is the effective instructional leader that can create a change in instruction through a collective vision, ultimately providing the best effective learning environment for all students. Through this principal’s behaviors he demonstrated how to motivate effectively students and teachers toward a collective vision.

To further illustrate, when students accomplished their goals they were rewarded with a trip to his office to share their success and to select prizes from a treasure chest in his office. As one teacher noted, “If a child reaches a goal, the first question they ask is ‘When do I get to go to the principal’s office?’ if it gets them reading, I support it!” Another teacher pointed out, “It really isn’t the prize that motivates them, it is the fact that he [principal] wants to celebrate their successes.”

Revealed as well was the leader as a supporter of strategies for both teachers and students. By creating the structure of an extended academic time of an hour at the end of each school day, the students were able to continue working on areas of weakness in a safe place with a snack and a caring adult. As one teacher described the support of the principal when the extended academic hour begins, “He walks the halls, thanks the kids and teachers for our hard work, and even sits with kids he knows do not prefer to spend their afternoons with us but need to be there.” The superintendent agreed that the principal provides the intellectual stimulation for students, but also for teachers, “We have standards and he is very efficient in ensuring that is covered. He is in and out of classrooms all the time, he knows what is going on and if something is ‘off’ he questions it and will stick with it if it isn’t what is best for kids.” One parent described how the principal imparts intellectual stimulation to assist students, when noting, “If he see kids who are not performing as they are capable of he will talk with them, encourage them, and find out if something is going on with them that is causing this to happen.” Again focusing on the whole child, both academically and on other needs.

Still another illustration of the leader as a supporter of the use of a variety of strategies was noted within the subtheme of providing needed resources under the larger theme of *Educating the Whole Child*. The teachers and the superintendent stated in a variety of ways that the principal knows the students, their needs, their families. “He does what it takes to ensure learning can take place,” said the superintendent. A parent concurred by sharing, “If he knows something is wrong, he is going to fix it.” The principal visits the homes of students often and will take a teacher along with him to give them the perspective of the homes. As one teacher reflected, “He cares about the kids and their

families. I don't know how he does it all, but he does." As another teacher noted, "This principal has done more for the whole well-being of the kids than ever happened before. He pays attention to their needs; he takes care of them..." As another teacher continued:

He really cares about those kids. When I think of the teeth he has pulled, the toothbrushes he has provided, the haircuts he has given... [laughs] he couldn't fix a parent's dog clipper cut, but he cuts a lot of hair. If he knows something is wrong, he is going to fix it.

While the importance of relationships may seem obvious, but for children living in poverty, "it's a make or break factor" (Jensen, 2009, p. 93). Jensen elaborated on the significance of relationships:

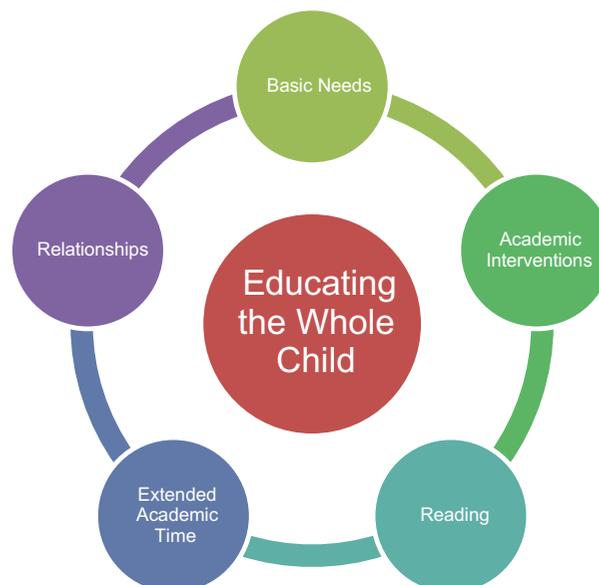
Many schools rely on power and authority rather than positive relationships to get students to behave or perform well. The problem with the coercion approach is simple: the weaker the relationships, the more resources and authority you need to get the same job done ... People will do more, and do it more willingly, for people they respect and enjoy being around (p. 93).

Strong, secure, safe relationships help stabilize children's behavior and provide the core guidance that children need to build successful social skills (Jensen). Perhaps the most important reason to foster relationships was presented by Pianta and Stuhlman (2004), "Disadvantaged elementary students who felt connected with their teachers showed improvements in their reading and vocabulary abilities" (p. 88). The students of this elementary school have strong connections with their teachers because of the emphasis of knowing each child well set forth by the principal and embraced by the staff members. Illustrated in Figure 1 are the manifestation of *Educating the Whole Child* based on the leadership practices of providing for basic needs, academic interventions, reading, extended academic time, and relationships.

4.2. Synergy of expectations

High Expectations of Stakeholders emerged as the second overarching theme identified through the data analysis. Three subthemes were also identified as essential components of the theme *High Expectations of Stakeholders*: (1) consistent expectations of students; (2) increased staff accountability; and (3) community involvement. The three subthemes were intentional, according to the principal. The students must be willing to live up to the consistent expectations placed upon them by the teachers, the staff must be willing to implement the high expectations expected of them, and the community must be willing to come in and do what is needed by the school at any given time.

Figure 1. Educating the whole child via the synergy of basic needs, academic interventions, reading, extended academic time, and relationships.



The teachers and principal do not treat students of poverty different in regard to academics. When the researcher asked how the teachers were addressing the achievement gap between children of poverty and their peers, one responded, “We do not see them as kids of poverty. We only see the gap as high/low, but not the gap of poverty.” Another added, “We do a lot of intervention and differentiation. The kids do not even see each other as kids of poverty; they do not bully or call names. Even though we push, the kids still want to be here.” That was evident through the researchers’ observations of the students in both the regular academic day and the extended academic day. The teachers know the students will work for incentives, so often rewards for reaching a certain reading goal or academic accomplishment are given.

According to a third teacher, “Some kids are intrinsically motivated, and others will work to earn rewards. If our kids are at a certain reading level, we will offer a special treat. I feed kids. Look, I give them food!” This seemed to be a commonality among the teachers, feeding students or giving them other incentives for academic successes. As the researchers observed lunch, the students who had a drink or snack from the principal’s office were proudly showing off their prizes.

The expectations of teachers have been much higher under this principal than the previous administrator, according to the perceptions of the teachers, but they appeared to appreciate the added expectations. While the principal acknowledged his expectations are high, he also noted that he cares about the work his teachers do each day, as he noted, “I want them to show up each morning and be ready to teach. I want them to work as hard as they can for the kids. I want them to go home tired, but I want them to go home feeling like they have been successful.”

He does not ask teachers to write and submit lesson plans; he would rather walk around to each classroom daily and discuss what is happening in the classroom, regarding student engagement and learning with teachers. He also takes time at each faculty meeting for teachers to share best practices with each other. He makes a concerted effort to visit socially with his teachers daily to discuss their family, ask about the ball game from the previous evening, basically letting his teachers know that while he has high expectations, he also knows they are human and have a family to go home to each night. They do go home tired, as one stated, “Sometimes you feel like you have been hit by a Mack truck; the next day you are ready to come back and teach!”

The final group of stakeholders with high expectations placed upon them by the principal is the community. The principal has created a volunteer program and has volunteers in the school daily to listen to students read. He knows it makes a difference when children have an audience when reading. Another program created by the principal is the *No Child Left Behind at Christmas* project. Each year the community provides presents and food to families. As discussed by the principal:

Basically we asked businesses and folks around town to donate money for the cause. We sent a letter to our neediest families asking for clothing sizes. I assumed we might get \$1,000 ... that first year we got \$5,400, and it has pretty much stayed there each year for the past seven years. We buy for about 100 kids spending \$50–\$60 per kid. Five to seven teachers and I take our shopping list to the outlet mall. We buy mostly clothes and one toy per child. We bring everything back and teachers come by on their plan or any free time they have and wrap and bag the gifts. Parents come by discreetly and get them and take them home. The kids think it’s either Santa or the parents. This just goes to show the support of the community.

As the principal further noted, “I do ask a lot of the community, but they give generously each and every year.” The principals’ hard work pays off, according to the superintendent, “We are very fortunate. Our patrons have passed the last three bond issues by a 78–80% passage. We communicate with our community so there are no surprises.”

It is one thing to indicate high expectations are in place, it is another to actually observe a school where that is the norm. The overarching theme of *High Expectations of Stakeholders* was evident

Figure 2. High expectations via the synergy of consistent student expectations, increased staff accountability, and community involvement.



according to the researchers' field notes of the observations. The fact that the administration of the school district changed the teacher evaluation tool to include standardized student test scores speaks volumes of the high expectations that exist. Through high expectations for all stakeholders, identified through the subthemes of (1) consistent expectations for students, (2) increased accountability for teachers, and (3) community involvement, students have the odds for success weighted in their favor, this synergy, of expectations, like the cogs on wheels, are depicted in Figure 2.

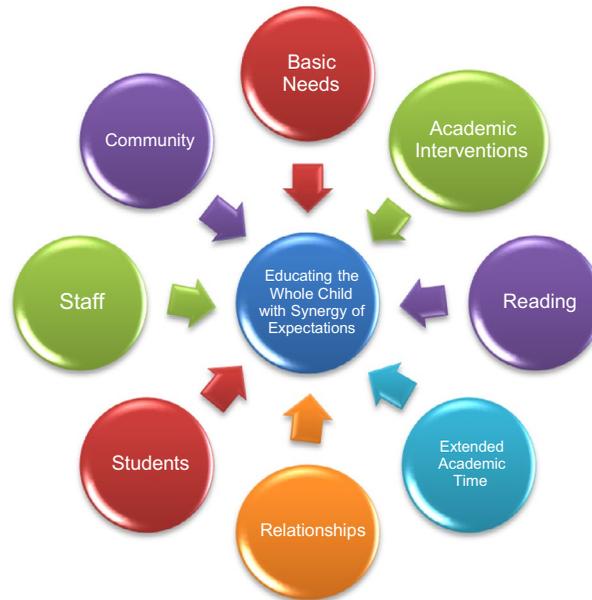
5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the overarching question guiding this study, what leadership behaviors do stakeholders perceive the principal has demonstrated that has led to an increase in academic achievement of students from poverty? was answered. The findings of this inquiry identified the need for two overarching themes to be present in a school: Educating the Whole Child and having High Expectations of Stakeholders. The leadership behaviors demonstrated by this leader were "transforming" (Burns, 1978) because they not only raised the level of positive human interaction between the leader and the students, but also the affirming interaction between the teachers, students, and the community. As Burns (1978) argued, "it [transformational leadership] raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of leader and led, and thus has a transforming effect on both" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Through the analysis of the perceptions of stakeholders, it became clear that this principal demonstrated effective leadership behaviors of a change agent, a vision creator and supporter, and a provider of whatever support and strategies it takes to make students of poverty successful. Furthermore, he expected all educators within the school to work with not only the academics but all aspects of the child in order to assure success in academic achievement. By demonstrating leadership behaviors, this principal created an environment of learning, whereby all students could be successful.

While demonstrating these behaviors, this principal highlighted the need for "educating the whole child." The data gathered from interviews, focus groups, and observations clearly highlighted the necessity for a principal to build relationships with students, teachers, and the community. By doing so the principal was able to understand what students needed to be successful in school. Even with high expectations, this principal nurtured relationships, changing the school environment into one where all students are successful.

This concept of educating the whole child coupled with "synergy of expectations" has been noted in the literature. As Jensen (2009) emphasized the concept of educating the whole child as a "360-degree wraparound student support system" (p. 70). Equally Jensen highlighted administrators should work to have high expectations from the school board, district, and community to enable them to move quickly and decisively, which is how all stakeholders viewed the way this principal operated. This principals' partnership with a myriad of community agencies emulates his understanding of this transforming concept. This principal believed to get students to focus on academic achievement, the school needed to remove the real-world concerns that are constantly in the minds

Figure 3. The wrap around components of educating the whole child with synergy of expectations.



of those from poverty (Jensen, 2009). As a teacher shared, “Our kids have so many things lacking in their home life, but they know when they walk through the doors they walk into a caring environment that has the most considerate adults they will ever know.” This supportive climate is a direct result of the vision of this effective leader. If all educational leaders took the time to invest in each student’s unique needs, perhaps the level of success would be much higher for each and every student, and no child would be left behind.

Ultimately, the combination of the overarching themes came together to wrap around the whole child in what Jensen (2009) called “360-degree wraparound student support system” (p. 70). The behaviors and actions the principal perceived as integral to the success of the students are depicted in Figure 3.

6. Implications

These effective leadership behaviors, of change agent, vision creator, and supporter of strategies, when practiced by this principal created synergy to sustain a learning environment for students that allowed a majority of them to be successful. Therefore, one implication for practice is for principal preparatory programs to include in their curriculum, activities and strategies that enhance individuals’ understanding of the theory of effective leadership. Furthermore, within the coursework, there should be ample opportunity to review and discuss the literature that reveals how effective leadership demonstrated by principals can have a significant impact on student learning. Another implication for principal preparatory programs and professional development opportunities for principals is to incorporate understandings and activities that highlight the need to understand the value of relationship building within schools with teachers and students. This community building should also extend to the community, including parents and beyond. A third implication of practice is for leadership training to include curriculum that emphasizes not only academic strategies, but strategies that will help the principal assess his or her school community, both individually and in its entirety, so that programs can be created to meet identified needs.

Principals of today are faced with numerous challenges, not the least of which are the accountability mandates of reform initiatives. Educating children coming from a myriad of backgrounds requires leadership skills that allow educators to provide a transforming learning environment that allows students to succeed. Learning from high-performing schools with high incidences of poverty gives hope to educators who are struggling to have all students successful regardless of economic status.

From this research three recommendations for future investigations are suggested. The first would be conducting a multi-case study analysis of several high-performing schools with a high incidence of poverty. Creswell (2007) espoused that a multi-case study allows for the research to explore multiple site and processes that are “bounded by time and activity” (p. 15). A second recommendation would be to focus the research on a different subgroup that might consistently struggles to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) such as English limited learners. A final recommendation would be to investigate a cohort group within a high-performing school with a high incidence of poverty, referred to as a longitudinal study (Creswell, 2007). This would allow a researcher to study one set of students as they moved through their school years, recording data over time.

The take away from this inquiry is that regardless of the poverty level of students within a school setting, high achievement can happen for all students. But it takes a principal who has an understanding of the change process, has created a shared vision, and one who emulates the behaviors of effective leadership. This principal by demonstrating behaviors, that enhanced the change process, which inspirationally motivated a collective vision, and provided a myriad of effective learning strategies, created a transforming effect on students, teachers, and parents. The results indicated that student needs, within and outside of the classroom were met, along with the principal having high expectations for all. This combination of educating the whole child and requiring high expectations resulted in a high poverty school having high student achievement, an aim worthy of pursuing for all principals.

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Author details

E. Hayet J. Woods¹

E-mail: hayetw@hickmanmills.org

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5086-4286>

Barbara N. Martin²

E-mail: bmartin@ucmo.edu

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9782-2534>

¹ Smith-Hale Middle School, Hickman Mills School District, Kansas City, MO, USA.

² Educational Leadership, University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, MO 64093, USA.

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