

Chapter 15

Transformational Leadership and Principals' Innovativeness: Are They the “Keys” for the Research and Innovation Oriented School?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an empirical investigation on aspects of leadership that may predict a school climate promoting research and innovativeness in Greek primary schools. Specifically, the authors examine principals' innovativeness and dimensions of transformational leadership as possible predictors of innovative school climate and teachers' attitudes towards research. Self-administered questionnaires were completed by 190 primary school teachers. The questionnaire included inventories measuring a) principals' innovativeness, b) three dimensions of transformational leadership style (vision building, individual consideration, intellectual stimulation), c) innovative school climate, and d) different aspects of teachers' attitudes towards educational research. Results demonstrate that principals' innovativeness tends to coexist with a leadership style that is transformational. Moreover, an innovative school climate is very likely to be established if the school principal not only provides stimulation and personalized care for teachers but also s/he acts as a model of innovativeness in school. Nevertheless, principals' innovativeness and a transformative leadership does not also ensure a research orientation in school.

INTRODUCTION

School improvement in a rapidly and radically changing societal and educational context is undoubtedly linked with school changes. Such

changes require reforming leadership styles and staff roles so that schools turn into learning organizations, that is organizations that function as learning communities where both teachers and students learn together (Voulalas & Sharpe,

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2005; MacBeath & Mortimore 2001). Learning schools are organizations which improve their quality consistently with social changes, that is, they enhance their effectiveness by continually and collectively reflecting on and enquiring their practice. On the other hand any attempt of school change should be based on evidence; therefore it is important that research is incorporated into plans for school development (Wikeley, 1998; Hewitt & Little, 2005). As a result, current discussions on education put research and innovation at the heart of school change as key characteristics of a school climate promoting educational changes that lead to school improvement (Fullan, 2002; OECD, 2008b; Ferrari, Cachia & Punie, 2009; Fleith, 2000). School climate refers to the observable patterns of behavior, attitudes and feelings that characterize school life while school culture concerns the deeper and more enduring norms and shared values (Isaksen & Lawer, 2002). Schools are, more and more, called to have a research orientation embedded in their culture so that a) the development of learning communities can be effectively promoted and b) decision making can be evidence based. Despite the rich bibliography describing the characteristics of learning schools (Fullan, 1995; Isaacson and Bamberg, 1992; Geijsel, Van den Berg & Slegers, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1994; Silins, Zarins, Mulford, 2002), there is little empirical evidence on how this can be realized.

There is a growing body of research showing that a research culture is more easily developed within an innovative environment (Carpenter, 2007; Ebbutt, 2002; Worall, 2004), while innovations should be introduced on the basis of research evidence and should also be scientifically evaluated. Therefore, both school innovativeness and a research culture are required in order to ensure effectiveness of school changes. Unless schools value educational research it is not likely that they can make use of it for evidence based

changes. However, several empirical studies still point to the gap between educational research and school practice (Vanderlinde & Van Braak, 2010; Broekkamp & Van – Hout Walters, 2007), despite the fact that the use of research for school improvement is considered fundamental.

To this end, the role of school leadership is crucial. Many authors have stressed the link between transformational leadership and the cultivation of a climate facilitating change and innovation (Geijsel, Van den Berg & Slegers, 1999; Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood & Jantzi, 2003; Moolenaar et al, 2010). According to Jung & Avolio (2000) as cited by Moolenaar et al. (2010, p. 628) “Transformational leaders aim to motivate followers to accomplish and even exceed their initial achievement expectations”. Despite the fact that transformational leadership has been found to be positively correlated with an innovative school climate (Moolenaar et al, 2010; Geijsel, Van den Berg & Slegers, 1999; Tajasom & Ahmad, 2011; Geijsel et al., 2001; Geijsel et al., 2003; Van den Berg & Slegers, 1996), it is not known whether such a leadership also promotes a school climate where teachers see themselves as learners and make use of research to evaluate their novel practices. Even if a school has a transformative and innovative leader, helping in establishing a school culture that values openness to new ideas thus promoting an innovative school climate, this does not necessarily mean that research engagement is also encouraged, so that innovations are evidence based. Whether innovative schools are characterized by transformational leadership and a school climate promoting teachers' engagement with research is still an underexplored issue. This chapter presents results of an empirical study investigating aspects of school leadership as possible predictors of a school climate promoting research and innovativeness.

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