

Chapter 7

African American Urban School Principal Servant Leadership

Wafa Hozien

Virginia State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the characteristics of African American school principals and the obstacles they experience on their path to the principalship. A secondary purpose, but very important as well, is to analyze critically the experiences of successful African American male principals to help inform the preparation of principals who lead organizations of diverse demographics. Investigating this area also contributes to the much-needed educational discourse of African American principal attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences of principals in education today, and how they are meeting the needs of a growing multicultural population. The principals are the primary units of analysis, and it is the intent of this chapter to delve into the lives of the participants to gain a better understanding of the barriers and obstacles they have to overcome to become principals.

INTRODUCTION

School administrators are confronted with more issues and higher standards due to increased accountability than ever before (Li, 2012; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Successful leadership includes not only daily administrative duties but impacting student learning. In order for this to happen, leaders must be able to set directions and goals for students and staff members. Leaders must be able to develop people to take on leadership roles which require the school leader to articulate a vision and create high performance standards (Covey, 2002; Leithwood, Louis, An-

derson, & Walstrom, 2004, Taylor, 2007). School leaders have to change their way of thinking to better meet the demands for student accountability, instructional leadership, and day-to-day operations of the school. The requirements of school leadership continues to change by now requiring school leaders to provide focus and direction to curriculum and teaching, as well as manage the organization efficiently to support student and adult learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Sergiovanni, 2006). Leaders are required to know and understand curriculum, assessment, instruction, legal issues, personnel issues, professional development, and much more (Hoy & Miskel,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5840-0.ch007

2009). No Child Left Behind (2002) is an Act of Congress that supports standards based education reform based on assessment, has added pressure to school leaders since funding is affected by the performance of the students on the state assessments. This directly relates to the leadership in the building and the role of the building principal.

Servant leadership is a leadership model that has been successfully applied in some business, religious, and education contexts (Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 1995; Taylor, 2007; Wong & Davey, 2007). This framework ensures that “other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (Greenleaf, 2002, p.13). Servant leadership describes great leaders as those who serve first (Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 1998). The servant leader’s principles, values, and beliefs are the motivational sources for the leader’s behavior (Greenleaf, 2002; Spears 1995). Due to the growing popularity of servant leadership, and the fact that it is recognized by organizations the world over in its timeless embrace, it is imperative to take steps to explore its meaning and to examine the effectiveness this leadership provides in schools.

This qualitative study focused on African American principals and the leadership qualities and competencies they bring to an urban school setting. The purpose of this chapter was to explore the lived experiences of African American principals and examine the influence of this past experience, identify common threads among these African American principals to see their perceptions as to what competencies a leader needs to bring to a school, and to determine if African American principals have specific leadership characteristics in urban schools. The data for this qualitative study were collected from a demographic survey, one-on-one interviews and observations of ten African American principals in New Jersey.

The purpose of this paper was to determine if servant leadership was present in the urban school setting with selected demographic and professional variables, and the perceptions and professional practices of servant leadership among

school leaders. The participants consisted of school administrators in academically and financially challenged urban schools in New Jersey.

BACKGROUND

Servant Leadership in Schools

Leaders have been described as the driving force of their organizations (Brunner & Schumaker, 1998). There are many different types of leadership styles and behaviors leaders’ exhibit (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 2000). Servant leadership emphasizes the relationship with others and the desire to serve (Greenleaf, 2002). A leader controls the culture of the organization, which includes the decision making, communication, and the symbolic nature of the organization (Tierney, 1988).

By examining extensive research studies, Hallinger and Heck (1999) found leadership does enhance school effectiveness. Leadership is pivotal in determining the effectiveness and success of an organization (1999). Servant leadership has gained popularity over the past decade and is increasingly being studied for its effectiveness in a variety of organizations (Black, 2007; Bowman, 1997; Russell & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Recent studies have found servant leadership to be an effective form of leadership in schools (Dennis, 2005; Taylor, 2007).

Good school leaders have a distinct leadership style and focus on achievement in schools (Li, 2012; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Miller, 2003; Reback, 2009). School leadership becomes even more important as leaders are being held accountable for the success of each student. Given the increasing interest in the servant leadership characteristics of African American principals in urban poor schools and the critical importance of student achievement provide meaningful results for servant leadership theorists and school leaders. Recent research on servant leadership has focused on the constructs

26 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/african-american-urban-school-principal-servant-leadership/106109

Related Content

How Knowledge Management Will Affect the Start Up's Performance in Ethiopia With Mediation of Competitive Advantage

Shashi Kantand Metasebia Adula (2025). *Leveraging Human Capital in Entrepreneurial Strategies* (pp. 109-146).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/how-knowledge-management-will-affect-the-start-ups-performance-in-ethiopia-with-mediation-of-competitive-advantage/376501

Implications for Places of Remote Working

Anne E. Greenand Rebecca Riley (2021). *Handbook of Research on Remote Work and Worker Well-Being in the Post-COVID-19 Era* (pp. 161-180).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/implications-for-places-of-remote-working/275122

Teacher Professional Development: Remote Podcasting and Metacognitive Strategies

Tsung-Jui Tsaiand Ya-Chun Shih (2016). *Professional Development and Workplace Learning: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 2045-2074).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/teacher-professional-development/137294

Whistle Blowing

(2015). *Business Ethics and Diversity in the Modern Workplace* (pp. 152-161).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/whistle-blowing/122700

Project Managers' Competence Identification

Heli Aramo-Immonen, Andrea Bikfalvi, N ria Manceboand Hannu Vanharanta (2011). *International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals* (pp. 33-47).

www.irma-international.org/article/project-managers-competence-identification/51356