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## Principals' Empowering Leadership Behaviors and Collective Teacher Efficacy, What's the Relationship

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PRINCIPALS' EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS AND COLLECTIVE  
TEACHER EFFICACY, WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP?

By

Jennifer Langfeldt

A DISSERTATION

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Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Kay Keiser

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## ABSTRACT

### PRINCIPALS' EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS AND COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY, WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP?

Jennifer Langfeldt, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2021

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Collective teacher efficacy (CTE) has an enormous effect size ( $d = 1.57$ ) on student achievement. Building principals are a key player in generating, fostering, and growing CTE in their team of teachers. However, principals do not know what leadership behaviors have the most impact on CTE. Therefore, the purpose of this quantitative study was to determine what relationship exists between principals' empowering leadership behaviors and collective teacher efficacy.

This study sought to answer three questions: To what extent do first-year teachers perceive that their building principals exhibit empowering leadership behaviors? To what extent do first-year teachers perceive that they and their colleagues exhibit collective teacher efficacy? What is the relationship between first-year teachers' perceptions of their principals' empowering leadership behaviors and their perceptions of they and their colleagues' collective teacher efficacy?

Study participants completed two surveys: the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (Arnold et al., 2000) and the Collective Teacher Beliefs Survey (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Data collected from the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire indicates that the participants in this study perceive that their building

principals exhibit empowering leadership behaviors “most of the time” and sometimes “always.” Data collected from the Collective Teacher Beliefs Survey indicates that the participants in this study perceive that they and their colleagues can impact student instructional and behavioral outcomes “quite a bit.”

To explore the relationship between first-year teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ empowering leadership behaviors and they and their colleagues’ collective teacher efficacy, a series of Spearman’s rank-order correlations were conducted. All correlations calculated were positive and range from 0.176 (weak) to 0.506 (strong). Findings show that there is a strong relationship between the overall scores on the ELQ and CTBS with a Spearman’s  $r$  value of 0.506. Consequently, the findings of this study have implications for school districts and universities, but especially for current and aspiring school leaders. This study’s findings can help principals prioritize the many tasks and responsibilities they are charged with so that they can do what matters most when it comes to generating, fostering, and growing collective teacher efficacy in the team of teachers they lead.

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PREVIEW

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Historically in education teachers have worked in silos; they kept to themselves, stayed in their rooms, and did their work independently (Schleifer, Rinehart, & Yanisch, 2017). “However, a growing body of research shows that when teachers work more collaboratively, student outcomes can improve, teachers can be more satisfied with their jobs and teacher turnover can decrease” (p. 3). A study that analyzed two years of data from more than 9,000 teachers in 336 Miami-Dade County public schools showed that schools where teachers reported that their collaboration was “extensive” and “helpful” had higher student achievement gains in math and reading (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015).

Furthermore, researcher Matthew Ronfeldt (2015) discovered that teachers who student-taught in collaborative environments also successfully raised student achievement (in math) upon teaching in their own classrooms compared to their peers who student-taught in less collaborative environments. This finding is important and compelling for two reasons. First, first-year teachers, although brand new to the profession, are responsible for the same high-quality results as their veteran counterparts. Second, the difference between a highly effective and an ineffective teacher’s impact on student learning is significant. In fact, the difference can be equivalent to as much as an entire year’s worth of learning (Goodwin, 2010)! As such, it is imperative that there are highly effective teachers in every single classroom, every single year.

Recognizing that collaborative environments set teachers, both new and experienced, up for greater success, principals should be intentional about fostering them.

Evidence that such environments increase a first-year teacher's effectiveness is great news. First-year teachers are a distinct group of educators and therefore have unique perspectives that are valuable to know and understand. As new team members, they have the potential to see some things more clearly than individuals who are entrenched in the culture. First-year teachers are naturally curious and lack historical organizational context. So, they question things more readily. They want to know why things are the way they are and why things are done in a particular way. Team members already accustomed to the culture of an organization operate according to unwritten rules. Edgar Schein (2004) calls these unwritten rules "shared assumptions" and due to them, team members operate on autopilot because "how we do things here" have been internalized. New team members, on the other hand, must pay more attention and can often see what is missed or overlooked by others. To that end, the opinions and perceptions of first-year teachers are important to know, understand, and thoughtfully consider.

Fostering collaboration among teachers requires changing how schools have historically operated. Principals serve as the leading change agent in their building and as such they are a key player in making these changes a lasting reality. The role of a building principal is a significant one (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Fullan, 2014; Leadership Matters, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2013; Yoon, 2016). In fact, principals are "second only to the teacher in terms of impact on student learning" (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 5). When a principal does their job well, they provide "a stable, predictable, and supportive foundation for a high-performing school" (Blase, Blase, & Phillips, 2010, p. xxviii). Leaders are responsible for results and they guide a team to achieve those results (Scott, K., 2017). Therefore, it is the duty of

principals to set high expectations for all and create a high-performance culture within their building.

### **Problem Statement**

The role of the principal is crucial because principals possess the potential and responsibility to influence student learning (Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016). They are uniquely positioned and have an unparalleled opportunity to create and foster the conditions in which many variables come together and produce a significant impact on student learning (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Principals want to do well but are overwhelmed (Fullan, 2014) and do not have a clear sense of what tasks have the most impact on teachers and students because “the current concept of what principals should do is either confusing, too narrow, too tedious, or impossible” (Fullan, 2014, p. 6).

One way principals can maximize their impact on teachers and student outcomes is by intentionally fostering and building collective teacher efficacy. “Collective teacher efficacy refers to educators’ shared beliefs that through their combined efforts they can positively influence student outcomes, including those of students who are disengaged, unmotivated, and/or disadvantaged” (Donohoo, 2018, p. 324). John Hattie and his team (2017) found that collective teacher efficacy (CTE) has the largest effect size on student achievement out of over 250 influences! Hattie’s team determined that the effect size of CTE is  $d = 1.57$ . That is substantial considering it is more than twice the effect size of feedback ( $d = 0.70$ ) and is four and a half times larger than the effect size of classroom management ( $d = 0.35$ ).

Rachel Eells (2011) also conducted a meta-analysis in order to provide an overall effect size that quantified the correlation between CTE and student achievement. Her findings (2011) demonstrated a strong, positive relationship between CTE and achievement with an *ES* of 0.57. To understand effect size, it is important to understand relative strength. Cohen (1988) suggested general benchmarks for evaluating the strengths of effect sizes:  $d = 0.10$  is a small effect,  $d = 0.30$  is a medium effect, and  $d = 0.50$  is a large effect. According to Cohen's benchmarks, Eells' calculated *ES* for CTE ( $d = 0.57$ ) is large.

Hattie's (2017) and Eell's (2011) research is explicit: collective teacher efficacy has a very large impact on student achievement. In fact, it has been shown to have a greater impact than socioeconomic status and race. Chapter 2 explores this in greater detail. CTE, then, is an important key to what makes the difference between good and great schools, between teams of teachers who close the gap for some students and teams who close the gap for all students. Collective teacher efficacy is a vital property of highly effective teams of teachers who have a significant, positive impact on student achievement. Therefore, principals should be intentional about developing and growing CTE in their team of teachers.

### **Purpose Statement**

The problem is that it is not clear what leadership behaviors have the greatest impact on CTE and, thereby, student achievement. Principals would benefit from knowing how to maximize their impact on collective teacher efficacy within their team of

teachers. Because of this, the relationship between principal leadership behaviors and collective teacher efficacy is worthy of exploration.

Therefore, this study set out to explore the relationship between empowering leadership behaviors exhibited by school principals and collective teacher efficacy in teams of teachers. Donohoo (2018) stated that future research should examine what is known about the relationship between leadership and CTE and the goal of this study was to do just that. Furthermore, as far as the researcher was aware, a study has not been conducted that measured first-year teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership behaviors exhibited by their principal, nor they and their colleagues' collective teacher efficacy. Accordingly, the purpose of this quantitative study was to determine what relationship exists between specific empowering leadership behaviors and collective teacher efficacy.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do first-year teachers perceive that their building principals exhibit empowering leadership behaviors?
2. To what extent do first-year teachers perceive that they and their colleagues exhibit collective teacher efficacy?
3. What is the relationship between first-year teachers' perceptions of their principals' empowering leadership behaviors and their perceptions of they and their colleagues' collective teacher efficacy?



## **Conceptual Framework**

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) served as the conceptual framework for this study. SCT is "a view of human functioning that accords a central role to cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes in human adaptation and change. People are viewed as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating rather than as reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental forces or driven by concealed inner impulses" (Pajares, n.d., para. 2).

Efficacy lies at the center of SCT and therefore requires attention and understanding. Bandura defines self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1977, p.3). Efficacy is more than just "positive thinking;" it also includes agency, the capacity to act and effect change, along with action (Bandura, 1982, 1998, 2001). Individuals form their self-efficacy beliefs by interpreting information about their own capabilities. This information stems from four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura 1977, 1986, 1997). In other words, efficacy develops as people experience personal success, observe success modeled by others, receive encouragement and feedback from others, and monitor their physical states and emotions (Eells, 2011). See Figure 1.

| <b>Mastery Experiences</b><br>(Personal Success)  | <b>Vicarious Experiences</b><br>(Success Modeled by Others)  |
|---|--|
| <p>Mastery experiences are repeated, successful experiences. Once a person has persevered through a challenging task enough times, they come to believe that their sustained effort was worth it and their belief in their ability to succeed grows.</p> <p>Bandura states that these are the most significant source of efficacy because they are based on first-hand experiences.</p> | <p>Vicarious experiences are defined as “the process of learning behavior through observation rather than direct experience” (Donohoo &amp; Katz, 2020, p. 59).</p> <p>In other words, vicarious experiences are when people gain knowledge or skills by watching others.</p> <p>Bandura states that these experiences are the second most significant source of efficacy.</p> |
| <b>Social Persuasion</b><br>(Encouragement & Feedback)  | <b>Physiological and Affective States</b><br>(Physical States & Emotions)  |
| <p>When a person is told that they have what it takes to succeed, they are more likely to achieve success.</p> <p>While not as powerful as mastery or vicarious experiences, being told by someone we trust that we possess the capabilities to achieve our goals builds our efficacy.</p>  | <p>Our emotions, moods, and physical states influence how we judge our self-efficacy (Kavanagh &amp; Bower, 1985).</p> <p>According to Bandura (2008), it is harder to feel assured of our ability to succeed when we are under stress and/or worn down.</p>   |

Figure 1

*Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory's Four Sources of Efficacy*

“The choices we make, and the people we become are determined by the interactions among our beliefs and attitudes, our actions and experiences, and the information that we receive from those around us” (Eells, 2011, p. 15). Furthermore,

people's efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation. "When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions," however, "those who have a strong belief in [their] capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenge" (Bandura, 2000, p. 120).

In 1977, Bandura observed that a group's confidence in its abilities seemed to be associated with greater success. He called this collective efficacy and defined it as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 476).

Collective efficacy is predictive of group performance in a variety of settings (Bandura, 1993), including schools (Bandura, 1997). People working together can accomplish more than they can working separately and "collective efficacy helps people realize their shared destiny" (Eells, 2011, p. 51).

"Collective teacher efficacy refers to educators' shared beliefs that through their combined efforts they can positively influence student outcomes" (Donohoo, 2018, p. 324). In schools where the culture is characterized as having a high sense of collective efficacy, students achieve at higher levels (Waters & Cameron, 2007). As such it would be beneficial for principals to know what specific leadership behaviors positively impact collective teacher efficacy.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study have implications for school districts, universities, and current and aspiring school leaders. School districts may consider this study's findings when hiring and selecting principals, supporting and evaluating principals, as well as,

designing and implementing programs to develop future principals (i.e., a principal pipeline). Universities may examine the findings of this study when seeking to improve or evaluate their educational leadership courses and programs.

But, perhaps the most important implications this study has is for current building principals. A principal's impact on student achievement is second only to the classroom teacher (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010) and when a principal does their job well, they provide a foundation for a high-performing school (Blase et al., 2010). It is their responsibility to set high expectations for all and create a high-performance culture within their building.

No longer should teachers work in silos, behind closed classroom doors. The expectation is that they come together and collaborate to ensure that all students achieve at high levels. In education, some teams of teachers outperform others significantly. Collective teacher efficacy can mean the difference between a team of teachers who close the gap for some students and a team of teachers who close the gap for all students.

Hattie's (2017) and Eells' (2011) meta-analyses demand our attention and urge us to recognize collective teacher efficacy as a critical factor that significantly impacts student achievement. Building principals are the key player in generating, fostering, and growing CTE in their team of teachers. However, principals do not know what leadership behaviors have the most impact on CTE. This study was valuable and helps us understand what empowering leadership behaviors positively impact collective teacher efficacy. Knowing that collective teacher efficacy has the largest effect size on student achievement out of over 250 influences means that principals cannot afford to not know! This study's findings will help principals prioritize the many tasks and responsibilities

they are charged with so that they can do what matters most and ensure success for all of their students.

### **Outline of the Study**

A presentation of literature relevant to this study of principal leadership behaviors and collective teacher efficacy is presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes the study's design, research questions, participants, instruments used, data collection procedures employed, and data analysis that was used to carry out this study. Chapter 4 depicts the results of the statistical analyses, and Chapter 5 summarizes the findings through conclusions and a discussion.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Building principals are crucial. They are uniquely poised to cultivate the conditions in which many variables come together to positively influence student learning and outcomes (Sebastian, et al., 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Several studies have demonstrated that one of the most significant variables on student achievement is collective teacher efficacy (CTE) (Hattie, 2017; Eells, 2011). As such, principals would be wise to intentionally foster and build CTE in their team of teachers. Unfortunately, it is not clear what leadership behaviors have the greatest impact on CTE and, thereby, student achievement. If principals know how to maximize their impact on collective teacher efficacy, teachers will benefit, and student achievement would rise.

The main areas of literature reviewed in this chapter are: 1) leadership, 2) strategies and structures that impact teacher efficacy, 3) collective teacher efficacy, and 4) first-year teacher considerations. More specifically, the first section about leadership reviews literature around characteristics of effective leaders and the impact of building principals.

#### **Leadership**

Leadership matters (DeWitt, 2018; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Reeves, 2009; Waters, et al., 2004) and all leaders have the common challenge of getting the most out of their crew. Leaders must be willing to put the organization's performance ahead of their own agenda and create a climate that enables people to

unleash and realize their full potential. “Given the right environment, there are few limits to what people can achieve” (Abrashoff, 2012, p. 29).

Leadership has shifted in the last two decades from being autocratic to collaborative and from task-oriented to people-oriented (Marsh, 2020). At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, managers were the primary decision-makers and told their employees what to do. However, now, two decades later, leaders are taking a more collaborative approach and decisions are being made from within, rather than solely at “the top.”

In his book, *The Algorithmic Leader: How to be Smart When Machines are Smarter Than You*, Mike Walsh (2019) lays out principles that leaders need to thrive in the, present and future, Algorithmic Age. The world needs smart leaders. “Being smart is about knowing the right way to do things; avoiding unnecessary steps; not wasting time or resources; and being open to new approaches and fresh ideas. It is not about blindly following trends. It is about knowing how to take advantage of the latest thinking and applying it effectively to practical problems” (Walsh, 2019, p. 17). Mike also explains that in the future, thanks to algorithms, leaders will make fewer decisions. However, leaders will need to dedicate more time to thinking, imagining, designing, and refining.

“What qualifies people to be called ‘leaders’ is their capacity to influence others to change their behavior in order to achieve important results” (Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2013). Leadership, then, refers to the ability to influence, motivate, change the attitude and behavior of subordinates to agree to implement the programs and make changes to achieve organizational goals. It is no secret that “leadership is a complex, subtle, delicate, and dynamic concept” (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Pajardo, & Cunningham-Morris, 2015).

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins (2001) explains an in-depth research project that took 21 people five years to complete. Their research reveals a framework for those who desire to lead a mediocre organization into becoming a great one. The first idea of the framework is a concept called Level 5 leadership. Collins' team discovered that all the companies that successfully made the leap from good to great had Level 5 leadership in place during pivotal transition years. Level 5 leaders were ordinary people (self-effacing, quiet, reserved) who produced extraordinary results. The comparison companies had high-profile leaders with big personalities, a stark contrast to the Level 5 leaders referenced above, that were unsuccessful in leading their organizations to make the leap from good to great. Indeed, leadership matters. In reviewing literature pertinent to leadership, several characteristics of effective leaders emerged.

### ***Characteristics of Effective Leaders***

There are several existing studies that point to characteristics of effective leaders. *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* (Kouzes & Posner, 2003), Michael Fullan's *The Six Secrets of Change* (2008), Google's *Project Aristotle* (Rozovsky, 2015), and a study conducted by Dr. Sunnie Giles (2016), president of Quantum Leadership Group are explored below.

Sunnie Giles (2016) asked 195 leaders in 15 countries in over 30 global organizations to participate in a survey. Participants were asked to choose the 15 most important leadership competencies from a list of 74. Ten leadership competencies surfaced at the top and Giles grouped those into five themes: 1) strong ethics and safety, 2) self-organizing, 3) efficient learning, 4) nurtures growth, and 5) connection and belonging. These are displayed in Figure 2.



|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Strong Ethics and Safety | Has high ethical and moral standards<br>Clearly communicates expectations  |
| Self-organizing          | Provides goals and objectives with loose guidelines/directions   |
| Efficient Learning       | Has the flexibility to change opinions<br>Is open to new ideas and approaches<br>Provides safety for trial and error |
| Nurtures Growth          | Is committed to my ongoing training<br>Helps me grow into a next-generation leader                                   |
| Connection and Belonging | Communicates often and openly<br>Creates a feeling of succeeding and failing together                                |

Figure 2

*Giles' Top Ten Leadership Competences Grouped into Five Themes*

In 2012, Google embarked on a two-year study in which they observed 180 teams (Rozovsky, 2015). They were trying to find out what makes a high-performing team at Google. As a result of their study, they determined the top five factors in high-performing teams. These are displayed in Table 3 and are as follows, in order of importance: 1) psychological safety, 2) dependability, 3) structure and clarity, 4) meaning, and 5) impact. Although these are not necessarily characteristics of leaders, they are included here because leaders have the potential to create and foster these factors in the teams they lead.