

School District Superintendents as Transformational Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The educational reform movement in the United States (1983-2024) presented school district superintendents with a wide array of challenges and opportunities. Initially, state and federal policymakers' called for draconian school and district level accountability and endorsed the notion of top-down management. However, the reality of implementing district-wide, systemic changes focused on improving student learning outcomes influenced a shift in superintendents' role from manager to teacher-scholar. During the last decade, researchers examined the role of superintendents in Instructionally Effective School Districts (IESD) and reported that they used their managerial prerogatives to initiate and sustain district-wide instructional improvement (Bjork, 2024). Research findings suggest that their involvement hiring and supervising teachers, evaluating principals, clearly articulating instructional and curricular goals, monitoring instructional improvement and, engaging in long-term financial planning for instruction indirectly influence the quality of learning and teaching. Findings from this longitudinal case study extend our understanding of how superintendents' enact their role as teacher-scholar help to explain their success. Key elements of Transformational Leadership including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and, individual consideration provided considerable insight into how they enacted their role. In addition, findings suggest that over time followers at different levels of the school district's organization (teachers, principals and central office staffs) adopted Transformational Leadership dispositions and practices suggesting that it may be viewed as being both multidimensional and multi-directional. These findings may expand our understanding of how superintendents' transformational leadership may influence the development of professional cultures and enhance student learning.

Keywords: Superintendent, Transformational, Leadership, Reform, Instruction School District Superintendents as Transformational Leaders.

INTRODUCTION

During the past several decades the rise of the global economy heightened public concern for the capacity of American public schools to prepare the next generation of workers. Education reform reports (1983-2024) not only called for draconian accountability measures but also stimulated a wide-array of state and national policy initiatives focused on improving student learning. During the first decade of education reform the reality of implementing district-wide, systemic reforms shifted the national conversation that initially focused on blaming teachers for failing the nation and its children to viewing them as indispensable in improving schools. This shift also contributed to redefining the nature and direction of school and district leadership. They shifted the focus of improving student learning from teachers to principals

and then to school district superintendents. This shift was accompanied by a call for nurturing teacher professionalism, re-culturing schools, enhancing teacher engagement and creating professional learning communities. In these new circumstances, teachers, principals, central office staffs and superintendents were viewed as both learners and leaders who are mutually engaged in real change (Bjork, 2018). Analysis of three nation-wide, decennial reports released by the American Association of School Administrators between 2000-2020 (Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski, et al., 2011; Tienken, 2021), suggest an important trend in superintendents' role expectations shifting from a traditional management to an emphasis on serving as a teacher scholar (i.e. instructional leader). In addition, understanding how superintendents who serve in Instructionally Effective School Districts (IESD) strategically use their managerial prerogatives to support change provided considerable insight into how superintendents used their managerial prerogatives as levers to enact their instructional leadership role. Although scholars understand that instructionally effective superintendents use these levers to improve instruction (Bjork, 2024), the notion of Transformational Leadership helps to explain how they accomplish this in practice.

Educational Reform in the USA: Implications for Superintendents' Leadership Role

The release of the *Nation at Risk* report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) reflected "widespread concern for the quality of public education launched what arguably is the most intense, comprehensive and sustained effort improve education in America's history" (Björk, 2001, p. 19). It and subsequent reports were highly critical of the condition of public education and claimed that if schools were not fundamentally improved, they would compromise the capacity of the nation to compete in the global economy. Four successive waves of educational reform (1983-2024) challenged conventional assumptions about the nature of teaching, learning and leadership (Björk, 2024). In retrospect these reform initiatives influenced shifts in superintendents' responsibilities and lay the foundation for reconfiguring how they enacted their leadership roles. Educational reform reports released in four consecutive waves over four decades (1982-2024). Although reports released in each wave had a singular focus, several cross-cutting themes provided a sense of coherency (Björk, Kowalski, & Young, 2005). For example, the first wave (1982-1986) focused on improving student academic performance and introduced an era of high stakes accountability. They advocated for increasing high school graduation requirements, lengthening the school day, increasing teacher-licensure requirements and decentralizing decision-making authority to the school-level. This gave principals and teachers more voice and agency in how to improve learning and teaching. This shift was accompanied by adoption of building-level, team-leadership approaches and implementation of transformational leadership styles that enhanced teachers' influence on changes in learning and teaching. Reports released during the second wave of education reform (1985-1989) emphasized the use of standardized tests, higher-order thinking skills, collaboration, problem-based learning, and computer literacy but importantly, underscored the importance of improving learning outcomes for all students. Critics viewed several of these recommendations as being unduly prescriptive, test-oriented and focused more on leadership and decision-making than on student learning outcomes. The third wave of education reform reports (1989-2003) called for re-centering initiatives to emphasize student learning. At this juncture, policy analysts note that during this era teachers and principals were empowered to make decisions at the building level however policy-making authority shifted from local school boards to state legislatures. Although reports released during the fourth wave of education reform (2004-2024) reiterated the importance of student

learning, policy makers, professors and practitioners criticized the regressive themes expressed in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002) that emphasized top-down authority in schools and districts, coercive mandates and test-based, high-stakes accountability.

Although fourth wave reports and subsequent state legislation embraced a view of leading change that contradicted research findings, passage of *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) corrected many objectionable provisions of the NCLB (2002). Superintendents continued efforts to decentralize decision-making by taking action in several strategic areas including: (1) Improving administrative coherency through the creation of district-level leadership teams that aligned infrastructure, improved operational efficiency and emphasized student learning (Anderson & Young, 2018); (2) Modeling districtwide administrative teamwork for launching and sustaining change; (3) Building the capacity of principals and teachers to improve classroom-level learning and teaching (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno & Kowalski, 2018); and, (4) Institutionalizing data-informed decision making to ensure that all students learn (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Potterton, 2019). It is evident that superintendents recognized the changing reality of work, the shifting locus of leadership and the importance of teamwork for accomplishing district-wide educational reforms. The process of school district decentralization contributed to redefining the roles of teachers, principals and superintendents and provides insight into the emergence of superintendents as transformational leaders (Bjork, 2024; Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Potterton, 2019).

Superintendent Role Characteristics

Analysis of historical discourse and empirical findings on superintendents' work have contributed to identifying five role characterizations. Callahan (1962) described four roles including: (1) teacher-scholar, (2) organizational manager, (3) democratic leader, and (4) applied social scientist. A fifth role, communicator was added by Kowalski & Bjork (2005) who recognized that effective communication was embedded throughout superintendent's work. Although some roles like teacher-scholar may be traced back to the founding of the position in the 1850s, others have emerged as school district contexts changed and the nature of work evolved. Scholars concur that although some roles may appear more important at times, none are irrelevant (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2018). Although each role characterization may be presented as being distinct, superintendents tend to move within and across roles to accomplish their work. Each will be briefly discussed to facilitate understanding the complexity and relevancy to their work.

Teacher-Scholar Role

The purpose of establishing the position of the superintendence in the middle of the 19th century was to serve as a master teacher and provide oversight of curriculum and instruction in urban school districts. The rise of industrialization, immigration, demographic shifts and urbanization increased the size and complexity of schools. These circumstances influenced a shift towards managerial responsibilities, they continued to enact their role as teacher-scholar and provided oversight of state-mandated curricula and evaluated teacher performance (Callahan, 1962). The release of *A Nation at Risk* (1984) heightened public concern for the decline in students' academic performance and once again brought their role as teacher-scholar into sharp focus. At this juncture, improving learning and teaching became a critical dimension of superintendents' work. Kowalski & Björk (2005) observed that they synchronously enacted their roles as manager and teacher-scholar to enhance student learning (Bjork, 2024).

Organizational Manager Role

Despite the increasing size and complexity of urban school districts in the late 1800s, local school boards expressed reservations about the capacity of superintendents to serve both as a master teacher and manager (Björk & Gurley, 2005). Despite these concerns, local school boards adopted a corporate management model in which superintendents were held responsible for budgeting, personnel, facility management, and public relations (Bjork, Kowalski & Browne-Ferrigno, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2011). By the early 20th century urban school districts mimicked successful corporations in defining their governance roles, management responsibilities, and establishing hierarchical organizational structures (i.e. bureaucracies). They also defined the role of superintendents as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) responsible for managing school districts affairs. Although they continued provide broad oversight of curriculum, learning and teaching these responsibilities were typically delegated to central office staffs. However, education reform initiatives launched in 1982-2024 heightened interest how superintendents could lead systemic reforms focused on improving students' academic performance. Scholars examined how they enacted their roles in Instructionally Effective School Districts (IESD). It was evident that they used their managerial prerogatives (i.e. organizational space) to enhance learning and teaching including: (1) Recruiting and hiring teachers and principals; (2) Supervising and evaluating them; (3) Clearly articulating instructional and curricular goals; (4) Monitoring student learning and curricular improvement initiatives and, (5) Financial Planning for instruction. Although these findings provided an important framework for understanding how some IESD superintendents leveraged their management prerogatives to enhance learning, few studies explored the nature of superintendents' leadership (Bjork, 2024; Björk, Browne-Ferrigno & Kowalski, 2018).

Democratic-Political Leader Role

Historically, schools have been viewed as an integral part of local communities. Consequently, educators view engaging parents and citizens in discussions about the education of their children as an essential part of their work. As the nation shifted from an agricultural to an industrial and then to a post-industrial era, the influx of immigrants, shifting demographics, and the changing nature of work increased the complexity and intensity of these discussions. In current contexts, superintendents are expected to galvanize public support for education across a wide array of interest groups, lobby state legislatures for adequate budget appropriations, negotiate local tax rates and help to pass school bond issues. In accomplishing these tasks they work closely with school board members, interest groups and professional organizations (Björk & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Although there are differences in how superintendents engage interest groups in different community settings, their success depends on having political acuity to maintain relationships and work with and through others. The question facing superintendents in these contexts is not whether they have a political role but rather how they enact it (Björk & Gurley, 2005).

Social Scientist Role

Educators concur that changes in the nation's social, economic, and political context has a considerable influence on schools and districts as well as their capacity to educate each child every day. Historically superintendents have understood the need for having more sensitivity to social issues facing the nation and using interdisciplinary, social science approaches to find equitable solutions to seemingly persistent problems. Callahan (1962) affirmed the value of social science research findings and argued persuasively that superintendents should use

relevant data in both understanding changes in the nation, local communities, and school neighborhoods and making decisions. Consequently, it became best practice for superintendents and principals to review data on students' demographic characteristics, academic performance, student achievement gaps as well as on staff performance and program effectiveness. The education reform movement accelerated the use of social science data and importantly enabled classroom teachers to understand and meet the education needs of all children (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002) in the long-term contribute to the melioration of social injustices (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005).

Communicator Role

Communication permeates every aspect of superintendents' work. It has evolved over time as school district contexts and the nature and scope of their work changed and citizens' expectations for public schools shifted. For example, concurrent with school districts' implementation of corporate-oriented management practices during the late 1800's superintendents used a communication style characterized by Thayer (1961) as being "top-down and impersonal, intended narrowing for informing, instructing (or directing), evaluating and influencing" (p. 4). However, the Depression of the 1930s changed the social, economic, and political context of schooling in of the nation in several important ways including: (1) Challenging the corporate orientation of school district administration; (2) Demanding greater voice of community citizens in education policy and decision-making and (3) Articulating the need for more personal communication patterns that facilitate community engagement. In addition, education scholars reported research findings that the top-down communication patterns lowered morale, decreased job satisfaction and reduced organizational effectiveness (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne Ferrigno, 2014). The release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) report not only heightened community concern for the condition of schools but also increased parental engagement. Unprecedented state and federal appropriations for school reform not only expanded the number and influence of school district professional staffs and but also increased the size of bureaucracies (Björk, 2001). This contributed to a more dynamic organizational environment and communication challenges. Schlechty (1990) argued "that the way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn" (p. 134). In sum, effective superintendents adopted more relational, two-way and symmetrical communication patterns (Kowalski et al., 2011). These shifts were viewed as an integral part of changing the districts' organizational culture and accomplishing long-term, systemic reforms. In sum, these research findings suggest that communication patterns of effective superintendents were often reciprocal and aligned with collaborative ways of accomplishing work in professional organizations (Kowalski & Keedy, 2005).

Superintendents' role characterizations provide a framework for understanding the changing nature and complexity of their work as well as how they may be used independently or in combination to manage and lead school districts. Although scholars note that IESD superintendents may use their transactional management prerogatives as levers for improving learning and teaching, there is a paucity of research findings on how they enact this role in practice. The notion of Transformational Leadership provides a promising literature that may help explain how superintendents translate traditional management-oriented tasks in leading school districts.

REVIEW OF TRANSACTIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP LITERATURE

Transactional leadership is associated with industrial era organizations and is defined by Rost (1991) “an authority relationship between a least one manager and one subordinate who coordinate their activities to produce and sell particular goods and/or services” (p. 145). In this regard, transactional leaders tend to focus on the transaction between leader and follower involving an exchange of a reward for their service (Bass, 1997). The characteristics of transactional leaders encompasses elements most closely associated with conventional, top-down management characterized by efficiency, production and oversight of key functions including planning, organizing, budgeting, hiring and, evaluating production. On the other hand, Burns (1978) notes that in practice, Transformational Leadership redefines the roles of both leaders and followers. He observes that, “The function of leadership is to engage followers, not merely to activate them, to commingle needs and aspirations and goals in a common enterprise, and in the process to make better citizens of both leaders and followers” (p. 461). Rost (1991), extended the work of Burns (1978) in proposing a new school of leadership that fit post-industrial contexts. In doing so, he defined transformational leadership as, “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 102). Bass (1999) Building on these ideas, Bass (1999) and Bass & Avolio (1994) describe Transformational Leadership as occurring “when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (p. 21). In retrospect, the notion of transformational leadership reflected a fundamental change both in the nature of work and leadership during the post-industrial era.

The concept of Transformational Leadership developed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1990, 1999) was recently refined by Northouse (2022) and includes four key factors: Individualized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individual Consideration. These factors provide a framework for understanding how transformational leaders work in context. **Idealized Influence**, originally described as charisma by Bass (1990), reflects the leader's ability to serve as role model for followers that exemplified a sense of vision and mission of the organization, instilled pride and increased both respect and trust. These leadership qualities motivated followers to identify, emulate and pursue a shared vision (Northouse, 2022). **Inspirational Motivation** implies a leader's ability to motivate followers to pursue and accomplish shared vision that is greater than themselves and in common interest with others in the organization (Northouse, 2022). Bass (1990) observes that leaders enact inspirational motivation through communicating high expectations using language as well as symbols that unambiguously express important goals and align followers efforts and organization purposes (Bass, 1990). **Intellectual Stimulation** involves the leader's ability to articulate past and present conditions as well as speculate on the future state of affairs of the organization in a highly intelligent and rational manner that contributes to problem-solving (Bass, 1990, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994). In these circumstances, intellectual leaders engage and challenge their followers to develop new problem solving approaches and strategies. These leadership attributes serve as a catalyst for group creativity and innovation as well as promote agency and originality of thought (Northouse, 2022). Transformational leaders who employ **Individual Consideration** is characterized as providing personal attention to each employee as well as offers individual coaching and advice (Bass, 1990). By giving individual attention to

each follower, leaders demonstrate an authentic interest in and value each person and provides a supportive professional development environment (Northouse, 2022).

Research findings suggest that superintendents serving in Instructionally Effective School Districts (IESD) view principals and teachers, those closet to classroom instruction, as the engines of education reform and used their managerial prerogatives to create the circumstances in which they may enhance their instructional effectiveness. Preliminary analysis of IESD superintendents indicate that superintendents were involved hiring competent staffs (teachers and principals), nurtured their development, supported teamwork, collaborated with staffs in formulating district goals and expectations and evaluated staff performance and student learning outcomes as an integral part of their work (Browne-Ferrigno & Björk, 2018). These instructional-oriented characteristics suggest that superintendents may be viewed as transformational leaders.

RESEARCH METHODS

This longitudinal case study used methods associated with qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of how one school district superintendent enacted their role in creating a new, instructionally effective high school. The researcher selected a medium-sized public school district in a state recognized for its early educational reform initiatives and recognized for its commitment to serving the needs of all students. The school district was characterized as serving students drawn for rural, suburban and urban parts of the county. The district was typical of many in the nation both in size, social, economic and political diversity. The use of qualitative methods in conducting this longitudinal case study was appropriate for understanding superintendents transformative leadership over time and enabled the researcher to develop "analytical, conceptual, and categorical components from the data itself" (Filstead, 1979, p. 33). Informal and semi-structured interviews (Cresswell, 2008, 2023) of key individuals including the superintendent, the principal, assistant principals, and teachers. In addition to interviews and observations, analysis of official documents (memoranda, letters and district-level reports) were used to develop a contextually rich descriptive narrative of events during a ten-year period (2013-2023) (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Analysis proceeded concurrently with the collection of data employing a reiterative cycle of definition, data collection, analysis, and subsequent redefinition (Creswell, 2008, 2023). In addition, researchers used a constant comparative approach using extant literature (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) to enhance the researcher's ability to refine analytical, conceptual, and categorical components as they emerged from data (Miles, & Huberman, 2020). Triangulation of data enhanced the validity and reliability of the descriptive narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Kirk & Miller, 1986). These data collection methods enabled the researcher to obtain first hand, contextually rich understanding of events as well as participant perceptions of reality, meaning and behavior. These data provided insight into the nature and direction of the superintendent's leadership role in creating a new high school and nurturing a learning focused culture (Miles & Huberman, 2020). The identity of individuals, dates and places have been masked to ensure anonymity.

FINDINGS

The Superintendent as a Transactional and Transformational Leader

Bass (1998) and Rost (1991) note that transactional leaders have formal authority in an organization and efficiently manage its affairs using traditional, top-down approaches

including planning, organizing, directing, budgeting, hiring and, evaluating production. On the other hand, Burns (1978) notes that transformational leaders accomplish their managerial responsibilities by engaging followers, broadening their interests, involving them in defining organizational goals and creating a sense of mutual purpose in accomplishing real changes (Rost, 1991). Findings reported in this longitudinal case study of the Jackson County School District (JCSD) superintendent indicate that they exhibited transformative leadership characteristics in accomplishing management-oriented tasks. For example, the superintendent advocated and gained support of the school board for increasing teacher salaries and raising qualifications for employment. In addition, they were personally involved in recruiting and hiring highly qualified teachers and principals whose dispositions aligned with district-wide expectations for student learning and professional collaboration. This approach contributed to the long-term goal of establishing and sustaining a collaborative work environment in the district. The superintendent frequently articulated instructional and curricular goals of the JCSD in wide-array of community, district and school venues. The superintendent's efforts reflected the district's commitment to improving learning and teaching as well as underscored the urgency of its work. These goals also served as the foundation for evaluating teacher and principal performance and lent a sense of coherence to staff evaluation processes. They were formative in nature and the district provided professional development support for staff that aligned with individual needs. Although policy makers often used summative data on student test scores as district performance indicators, the JCSD superintendent supported the disaggregation of student tests scores by school, by grade level and by classroom as well as monitored results. This aligned closely with the district's guiding principal that it should serve every child, every day. The notion of long-term financial planning was key to continuous improvement in the district. Budgets were scrutinized to ensure that schools could provide an adequate and equitable education for children and enabled the district to plan for salary increases and new staff as well as provide for their long-term professional development. In sum, the superintendent enacted their role in a manner similar to those reported in the Instructionally Effective School District (IESD) literature (Bjork, 2024; Björk, Browne-Ferrigno & Kowalski, 2018). These findings suggest that superintendent leadership may closely align with key tenets of Transformational Leadership. Case study findings affirm Rost's (1991) notion that transactional and transformational leadership are not mutually exclusive but complimentary dimensions of effective management and leadership. In other words, highly effective superintendents enact their transactional management role in ways that reflect several of the basic tenets of transformational leadership including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and, individual consideration. These several dimensions of Transformational Leadership are used to analyze longitudinal case study findings.

Idealized Influence

Idealized influence is central tenet of Transformational Leadership theory and Bass (1990) posits that it has three sub-components including: Projecting a vision and sense of mission of the organization, demonstrate high moral and ethical standards that engenders trust and respect, and serve as a role model that may be emulated by followers. Importantly, in all of their work they should strive to build trust as a leader by being who they say they are (Covey, 2022) or simply put, walk the talk. In the context of ever increasing demands for education reform and high stakes accountability, school board members, community leaders and parents realized that change was necessary and made important commitments to support it both in principal

and in practice. The JCSD superintendent was the most visible and constant advocate for student learning in the community. The superintendent articulated a shared vision and mission for improving schools that reflected a personal, moral stance about the importance of serving every child, every day. The superintendent's actions also reflected a commitment to the ethical treatment teachers and principals. In this regard, the superintendent created the circumstances in which they had a voice in decisions, agency in team decisions, collaborated in analyzing student test data as well as benefitted from formative evaluations and professional development services. The notion of idealized influence was evident in how the superintendent enacted their role in working with the community, classroom teachers and school principals.

Inspirational Motivation

Bass (1990) viewed inspirational motivation as a leader's ability to inspire and motivate followers by using both verbal communicating and symbols to convey high expectations. He also noted the importance of the leader's ability to foster a climate in which followers may identify with the organizations goals as well as motivate them to pursue a shared vision that is in common interest with others in the organization (Northouse, 2022). Case study events suggest that the JCSD superintendent conveyed high expectations for teachers, principals and administrative staffs in a manner that not only motivated them participate in real reform but also offered them a unique opportunity accomplish this work as a professional community in which everyone was a learner. Over time, an interesting development emerged. As followers at all levels of the school district organization engaged in collaborative work, followers mimicked the inspirational motivation typically attributed to organizational leaders. In this regard, inspirational motivation was observed as being multidimensional and multi-directional. Consequently leadership as an influence pattern was simultaneously a top down, bottom up, and lateral. Although the superintendent used inspirational motivation to initiate a change in the culture of work, as it changed the nature of leadership also expanded exponentially. This phenomena may be explained in part by Senge's (2000) observation that effective leadership emerges from formal and informal leaders in a professional learning community and that to sustain continuous and meaningful improvement, leadership must emerge from a wide array of followers including teachers, principals, central office staffs (program-level coordinators and directors).

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leaders who exhibit intellectual stimulation not only encourage creativity and innovation amongst organization followers (Northouse, 2022) but also place a high value on rationality and problem solving (Bass, 1990). The JCSD superintendent had a sound grasp of the direction and scope of educational reforms facing the nation, states and school districts and was able to convey its importance and relevancy to the community, district, and schools. It was a daunting scenario. But, the superintendent unpacked it and explained that it was a doable task if given time, expertise and commitment of teachers, principals and central office staffs to change the nature of learning and teaching. It was evident that emphasis on state accountability in the near-term made standardized tests an incontestable measure of both student learning and district success. However, in the long-term the superintendent recognized that teaching to the test didn't align with the district's long-term goal of improving student learning. The superintendent viewed deeper-learning that emphasized the application of knowledge to problem solving and creativity was both consequential and achievable. Scholars note that leaders draw upon the knowledge and expertise of others at every level of the district or school

and is an important characteristic of their effectiveness (Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2002). Senge (2000) concurs that intellectual stimulation may be a key dimension of transformational leadership but that in professional learning communities this influence pattern may be shared among formal and informal leaders and is key to sustaining continuous change.

Individual Consideration

The notion of individualized consideration is an integral part of Transformational Leadership and is expressed in concern for the general well-being of each follower as well as providing advice and coaching to enhance their capacity to do work (Northouse, 2022; Bass, 1990). Having an authentic concern for people is an important characteristic of effective organizational leaders. Evidence suggests that individualized consideration was an important dimension of the JCSD superintendent's leadership approach in launching and sustaining district-wide change initiatives. Recognition that teachers and principals were key to improving learning and teaching was expressed through demonstrating concern for individuals both on a personal and professional level. The superintendent used formative performance evaluations to define the needs of teachers and principals as well as providing professional development services, advice and coaching to enhance their effectiveness. Findings suggest that over time, individual consideration initially expressed by the superintendent (formal leader) was also adopted by principals and teachers (informal leaders) who shared a common interest in accomplishing important goals and created a culture of learning and caring. This suggests that individualized consideration may be viewed as being a multilevel, multidimensional and multidirectional aspect of transformational leadership.

CONCLUSION

Launching and sustaining systemic educational reform remains a national, state and community priority. For over four decades, it has continued to be one of the most challenging aspects of school district superintendents' leadership. Scholars have defined superintendents' role characterizations including teacher-scholar, organizational manager, democratic leader, applied social scientist and, communicator and while the importance of each may shift, all remain relevant. Recent scholarly work examined the role of superintendents in Instructionally Effective School Districts (IESD) note that they use managerial prerogatives as levers to launch and sustain district-wide improvement of learning and teaching (Bjork, 2024). Several strategic managerial responsibilities that indirectly influenced the quality of learning and teaching include being closely involved in recruiting and hiring and supervising teachers, evaluating teachers and principals, articulating instructional and curricular goals, monitoring instructional improvement and, engaging in long-term financial planning. Although these findings lay an important foundation for understanding how school district superintendents may enact their role as teacher-scholar, understanding the nature of their leadership remained in question. Findings from this longitudinal case study provide important insights into how superintendents enact their role to improve learning and teaching. The notion of Transformational Leadership helps to explain their success and may add to the knowledge base in the field as well as inform veteran and aspiring superintendents. Several dimensions of Transformational Leadership including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and, individual consideration were used to understand and explain their success. Findings reported both affirm their respective relevance and extend the notion of Transformational Leadership in creating and sustaining professional communities. Findings also suggest that when superintendents enact Transformational Leadership over time,

followers at different levels in the district organization (central office staffs, principals and teachers) may embrace transformational leadership practices. In this regard, transformational leadership may be viewed as a being multilevel, multidimensional and multi-directional. This emerging perspective may enhance our understanding of the long-term implications of transformational leadership and provides a promising direction for future research.

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