

University of Saskatchewan

Education 892
Leadership and Followership Theory
Professor: Keith Walker

Executive Book Summary of Viviane Robinson's Student-Centered Leadership

By: Dayle Emond

WHY STUDENT-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

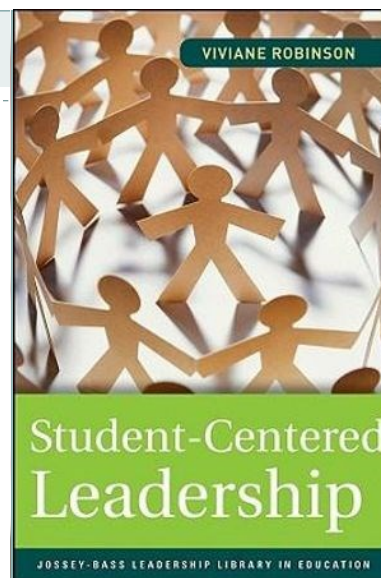
"No one has conducted a more thorough and deeply insightful examination of the role of school leaders than Viviane Robinson. Student-Centered Leadership shines with clarity and practical, powerful ideas. Three big capabilities and five key dimensions provide a comprehensive and accessible framework for any leader or those working with other leaders. Add this book to your leadership library." - Michael Fullan

"How refreshing it is to read a book on leadership that moves us away from rhetoric and empty clichés toward the actual behaviors and strategies that can be used to improve outcomes for students. Viviane Robinson's compelling book is both evidence based and profoundly practical. Student-Centered Leadership is a must read for school leaders who want to make a difference." - Steve Munby

"Viviane Robinson's experience in bringing research to bear on problems of school development and leadership is reflected in every chapter of this book. I found her highly readable synthesis a motivating counterpoint both to dense leadership texts and frothy summaries. It will be an equally important resource for individual school leaders, professional developers, and administrator-preparation programs. There will be two copies on my shelf- one to loan and one for my own reference." - Karen Seashore Louis

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Viviane Robinson is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the university of Auckland in New Zealand and academic director of its Centre for Educational Leadership. She is the author of numerous articles and five books.



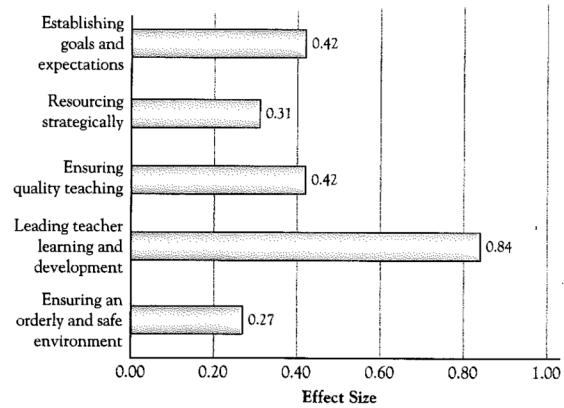
INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- The "What" and the "How" of Student-Centered Leadership .2
- Three Capabilities for Student-Centered Leadership3
- Establishing Goals and Expectations4
- Resourcing Strategically5
- Ensuring Quality Teaching.....6
- Leading Teacher Learning and Development.....7
- Ensuring an Orderly and Safe Environment.....8
- Evaluation of Book8

THE “WHAT” OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe did a meta-analysis of around 30 studies on educational leadership and were able to sort 199 surveyed leadership measurements into five leadership dimensions and calculate the effect size for each dimension. This effect size statistic is able to tell us the average impact of that leadership dimension on student outcomes. An effect of 0.2 is usually considered small, 0.40 a moderate effect, and 0.60 and above a large effect. Using this data as a backbone, Robinson’s student-centered leadership “sets clear goals for student learning, provides resources for those goals, and works closely with teachers to plan, coordinate, and monitor how they are achieved. Through such oversight, they are likely to learn that goal achievement requires increased teacher capacity. Leaders’ close involvement in building such capacity gives them a clear understanding of the conditions and the support teachers need to learn more effective instructional practice. These four types

of leadership are enabled by, and contribute to, an orderly and safe school environment” (p.10).



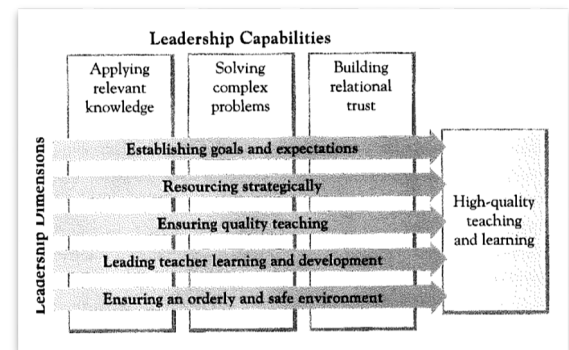
“The more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater will be their influence on student outcomes” (p. 15)

LEADERSHIP IN CHALLENGING TIMES

We live in an age where the expectations for today’s school leaders have never been more ambitious. We are working in systems that expect schools to “enable *all* students to succeed with intellectually challenging curricula” (p. 3). Leaders are scrambling to achieve this lofty goal and very few are able to achieve it. These high expectations also come at a time when the diversity of our student population is rapidly increasing. Students join our communities without the cognitive and linguistic skills that enable them to successfully engage with the school curriculum. Schools must undergo major changes to business as usual in order to achieve the goal of success for *all* students. The newest research on educational leadership has shown that the quality of leadership can have a substantial impact on the achievement of students. In this book, the ruler for judging the effectiveness of educational leadership is its impact on the learning and achievement of students for whom the leader is responsible.

THE “HOW” OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

“Although the five dimensions tell leaders *what* to focus on to make a bigger impact on students, they say little about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to make the dimensions work in a particular school context” (p. 16). The knowledge and skills needed to engage confidently in these five dimensions are described in three broad leadership capabilities: applying relevant knowledge, solving complex problems, and building relational trust.



Student-centered leadership involves applying relevant knowledge to your leadership practices. Applying relevant knowledge means using knowledge about effective teaching, teacher learning, and school organization to make high-quality administrative decisions. Student-centered leadership also required skill in solving complex problems. Being able to identify what the challenges to your strategies are and crafting solutions that adequately address them is what Robinson identifies as solving complex problem. The third capacity required by leaders to engage in student-centered leadership is the capacity to build relational trust. If leaders cannot develop trust among leaders, teachers, parents, and students they will have great difficulty effectively practicing student-centered leadership.

THREE CAPABILITIES FOR STUDENT-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

APPLYING RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE

“Leaders need to have access to up-to-date, evidence based knowledge of how students learn and of how teaching promotes that learning in diverse classroom contexts” (p. 23)

When a leader is making administrative decisions that will impact students’ learning and wellbeing, they must be able to use their comprehensive knowledge and apply it to their context. Without an understanding of the knowledge necessary for teachers to excel (content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, content specific pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, and knowledge of learners), school leaders will limited effectiveness in their roles.

SOLVING COMPLEX PROBLEMS

In order for leaders to implement positive change, they must be able to use their problem solving skills to resolve the challenges within their context. In order for anything to get done in a school, the staff must have the collective capability to solve complex problems. The first step of collectively problem solving in schools is to be able to articulate what the problem is and what conditions must be met in order to solve the problem. Once this is done, staff can brainstorm solutions which, as far as possible, meet the conditions which much be met. “Effective leadership requires ownership of the whole problem, disclosure of one’s own view while remaining open to alternatives, and attention to the consequences of proposed solutions for wider school values and purposes.” (p. 33)

EXPERT PRINCIPALS ARE MORE LIKELY TO...

Problem Formulation

1. Explicitly check own assumptions about problem.
2. Actively seek the interpretations of others.
3. Relate the problem to the wider mission of the school.
4. Give a clear statement of their own interpretation of the problem, with reasons.
5. Develop goals that are widely shared.
6. Make value statements, especially those concerned with participation.
7. Anticipate obstacles and how they could be overcome.

Problem-Solving Process

1. Carefully plan a collaborative problem-solving process.
2. Openly disclose own view without foreclosing or restraining other views.
3. Overtly manage meeting process, for example, summarizing and synthesizing staff views.
4. Experience and express little or no negative emotion and frustration.

“Student-centered leadership requires being knowledgeable about how to align administrative procedures to important learning outcomes, being skilled in using that knowledge to solve important school problems, and doing both of these things in ways that build relational trust in the school community.”

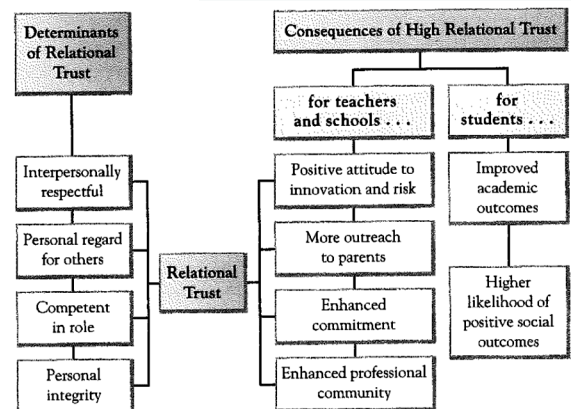
BUILDING RELATIONAL TRUST

“The level of trust among members of a school community makes an important difference to the way they work together and to the social and academic progress of students.” (p.34)

As you can see from the figure to the right, the consequences of high relational trust for teachers, students, and schools are quite significant. School leaders can build relational trust amongst their staff by modeling and expecting the four determinants on which trust is based.

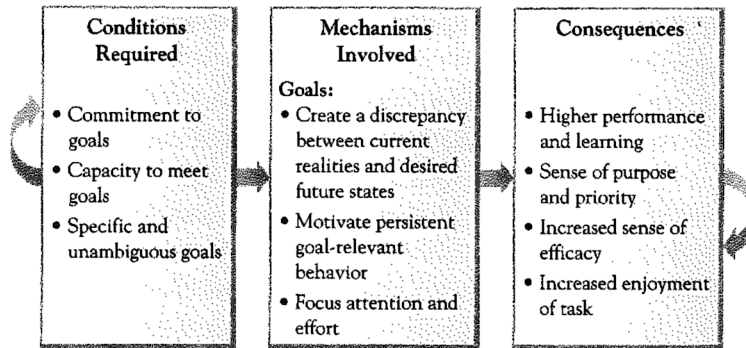
Building trust by being interpersonally respectful occurs primarily by valuing the ideas of all staff. You can build trust by caring about the personal and professional lives of your colleagues. Simply knowing that a staff member cares about your well-

being reduces your sense of vulnerability, increases social affiliation, and invites reciprocal regard. Staff often judge a leaders’ competence based on how they deal with the perceived incompetence of their colleagues. If someone believes you are competent, they are more likely to trust what you have to say. Finally, staff judge each other by whether or not they walk the talk, keep their word, and resolve difficult conflicts in a principled and even-handed way.



ESTABLISHING GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Leaders can increase the performance of their staff, provide staff with a sense of purpose and priority, increase their sense of efficacy and increase their job satisfaction by establishing goals and expectations. This can only happen, however, if three vital conditions have been met. Specific and unambiguous goals must be set, commitment to these goals must be attained, and staff must believe they have the capacity to meet designated learning or performance targets. If these three conditions are met, then goal setting can be powerful by focusing effort an attention of staff and enabling them to adjust their effort and strategies in response to feedback given to them about their progress towards the goals.



In order to gain commitment to goals, a goal needs to provide people with the opportunity to achieve something they value, and people need to accept that a sufficient gap exists between the collective vision and the current reality. This goal setting will only work if staff believe they have the capacity to achieve the goal. People don't commit to goals they believe they cannot achieve. The goals set should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound.

Challenges to Goal Setting

- People lack the skills and knowledge to achieve the goal.
- Individuals' goals may be in conflict with each other.
- Failure to achieve goals is seen as a risk.
- Accountability for goal attainment can produce biased and inaccurate reporting.
- Successful goal attainment can reinforce old strategies that are inappropriate in a changing environment.
- Important outcomes that are not set as goals may be ignored.

Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

- Set relevant learning rather than performance goals.
- Set team or overarching goals.
- Encourage and reward learning from mistakes.
- Reward learning from mistakes, model and expect ethical practice, and consistently confront unethical practice.
- Invite robust critique and review of goals and strategies for reaching them.
- Set more inclusive goals. Monitor all critical outcomes while selecting a few for goal setting.

Reflective Questions: How effectively does [insert the name of your school leader] ensure that...

1. There is agreement in this school, department, or team about the importance of the current learning goals?
2. There is clear alignment between overarching school goals and the goals set by middle leaders for subjects and year levels?
3. Teachers are clear about the learning goals for which they are responsible?
4. Teachers feel personally committed to achieving the goals for which they are responsible?
5. Teachers have the knowledge and skills they need to achieve the goals for which they are responsible?
6. Teachers have the resources needed to achieve the goals for which they are responsible?

PERFORMANCE GOALS VS. LEARNING GOALS

Performance goals are about achieving a specific outcome. When setting performance goals leaders assume that those responsible for meeting the targets have the skills and abilities needed to achieve the goal and that performance will be increased by motivating them to apply that knowledge to the specific task.

A learning goal, by contrast, focuses on the discovery of the strategies, processes, or procedures to perform the task efficiently. Attention is directed to learning how to do the task rather than achieving a specific outcome.

If leaders set challenging goals on complex tasks without considering teachers' capacity to achieve them, they are likely to raise counterproductive levels of anxiety and resentment, especially if those goals are accompanied by incentives and sanctions. They are also likely to create the very conditions under which teachers manipulate the targets rather than focus on the educational processes that the targets are intended to represent. When the required capacity is insufficient, leaders should set learning rather than performance goals.

LEARNING GOALS



Learner is motivated by learning / acquiring new knowledge and expertise in a given area.

ACHIEVEMENT GOALS



Learner is focused on the end point - i.e. a grade in a course





REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS ABOUT RESOURCING STRATEGICALLY

- Do school leaders challenge the assumption that improved learning requires additional resources?
- How open are school leaders to rethinking traditional patterns of allocating time, staffing, and money?
- Is staff recruitment based on analysis of the match between student needs and current staff capacity?
- What emphasis is given by school and district leaders in the selection of instructional programs and resources to rigorous evaluations of their effectiveness?
- Have leaders responsible for creating a timetable analyzed the consequences of their decisions for the amount of instruction students receive in their areas of highest need?
- Does support for struggling students begin with expert help for their classroom teachers?

RESOURCING STRATEGICALLY

Leaders who take a strategic approach to resourcing ensure that money, time, and people are used in ways that increases the chance that the smart performance or learning goals of the school are achieved.

A schools leadership needs to make informed decisions about the type of staffing and instructional resources that are most likely to help the school achieve its goals.

The leadership needs to critically evaluate the current patterns of resource allocation in order to determine that these patterns are in alignment with the schools priorities and are evidence-informed.

The leadership team needs to have very good relational skills to be able to work through the human side of this process. Resource allocation and reallocation has a large impact on people’s jobs and the leadership needs to have the courage to face the inevitable emo-

tional reactions to change.

“Any significant change in the use of resources means teacher and other staff jobs *will* be affected. Using school resources more effectively takes courage because it means setting priorities and being strong enough to say that some things are simply more important than others—even when these priorities demand ending a cherished program” (p. 63).



“The quality of teaching is the most powerful school-level influence on student achievement. Indeed, there is new evidence that teacher quality has cumulative effects.” (p. 64)

Students who experience consistent high-quality teaching will outperform initially similar students. Conversely, students who experience below-average teaching over several years will struggle to catch up. For this reason, a leadership team’s approach to recruitment, retention, and replacement of staff can significantly improve the quality of teaching and student achievement. High-quality teachers need access to high-quality instructional resources. An investment in instructional resources which include structured professional learning components are far more effective than investing in the instructional technology or new curricula alone.



Establishing a school culture in which instructional time is treated as a strategic resource is a fundamental responsibility of the school leadership. Student achievement is a function of both the amount and the quality of instruction. If a school does not have quality teachers, increased time spent on any given subject is ineffective. If a school has quality teachers, however, in-

creased time spent on a subject with this expert teacher will raise achievement. Protecting instructional time means minimizing disruption to classes through special events, announcements, pull-out programs, special events, etc.



ENSURING QUALITY TEACHING

The purpose of instructional leadership is to improve teaching and learning through the coordination and evaluation of the instructional program. Contrary to popular belief, instructional leadership should be performed by all teachers who have some responsibility, beyond their own classrooms, for the quality of teaching and learning in their school. In this shared instructional leadership format, the principal is an instructional leader, and also a leader of instructional leaders.

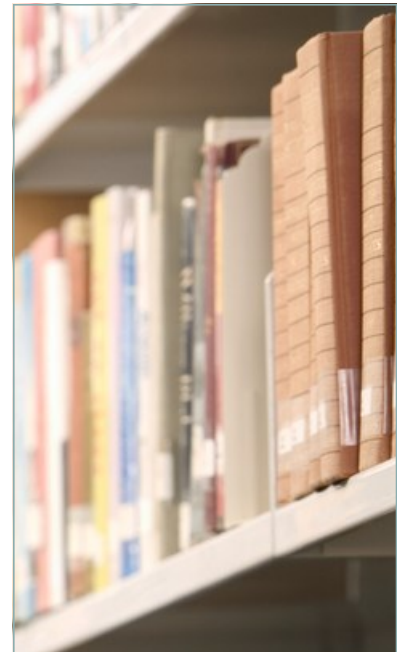
4 WAYS TO ENSURE QUALITY TEACHING

- ⇒ Leadership should have active oversight and coordination of the instructional program. A coherent instructional program should have: (1) an instructional framework, comprising curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessments, that is coordinated within and between grade levels; (2) a culture which supports and requires the use of the framework; (3) resources which support the sustained use of the instructional framework. “A common instructional framework means that teachers reinforce the same ideas, use similar vocabulary for communicating those ideas, know how to make links with what has gone before, and are guided in their efforts by common assessments. If students’ learning opportunities are integrated and cumulative, rather than fragmented and rushed, students are more likely to be engaged and successful.” (p. 85)
- ⇒ Leaders should be actively involved in collegial discussions about instruction and how instruction affects student achievement.
- ⇒ Leaders should be engaged in regular classroom observations and provide feedback to teachers focused on growth and learning. Teachers in high performing schools report that their leaders set and adhere to clear performance standards for teaching, make regular classroom observations, and provide feedback that helps them improve.
- ⇒ Leaders should ensure that staff systematically monitor student progress and that this data is used to improve the instructional program.



Questions for Inquiry into the Quality of Teaching

- The importance of the outcomes being pursued. What are the intended learning outcomes for this lesson or unit of work? Why are they important for these students at this time?
- Alignment of the activities and resources with the outcomes. How are these resources or activities intended to help the students achieve the anticipated outcomes?
- The behavioral and cognitive engagement of students? How did these materials and activities build on the relevant and prior knowledge, interests, and experience of these groups or individual students? How well were the students focused on the big ideas in the lesson?
- The students’ success on the outcomes. What do you know about how the students understood the big ideas? What information do you have about how they achieved the intended learning outcomes? What are their remaining misunderstandings?



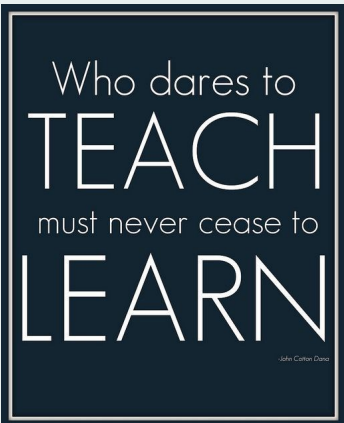
REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ENSURING QUALITY TEACHING

- To what extent is the teaching of [specify subject] coordinated both within and across grade levels in my school?
- To what extent is the teaching of [specify subject] informed by a common instructional framework?
- Do teachers and the leadership group have shared views about effective teaching and learning? What research or other evidence are those views based on?
- What proportion of our assessments are measuring things that teachers really value?
- How much data do we collect that are not used? Can we use such data in instructionally productive ways?
- What are the barriers our teachers experience to using assessment data for instructional purposes? What are leaders doing to reduce these barriers?
- How effective is our leadership team in using the ladder of inference to test and check our important assumptions?

**REFLECTIVE
QUESTIONS ABOUT
LEADING TEACHER
LEARNING AND
DEVELOPMENT**

In your school or division:

- To what extent is the research on the characteristics of effective professional learning used in the design and selection of teacher professional learning?
- To what extent does teacher collaborative learning focus on understanding the relationship between what has been taught and what students have learned?
- Is school professional development planning systematically linked to an analysis of students' learning needs?
- To what extent are teachers' individual learning and development plans related to student learning needs?
- How effectively does the school identify teachers with the expertise needed to help colleagues address specific teaching problems?
- Is the impact on students used as an important indicator of the effectiveness of professional learning opportunities?



LEADING TEACHER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

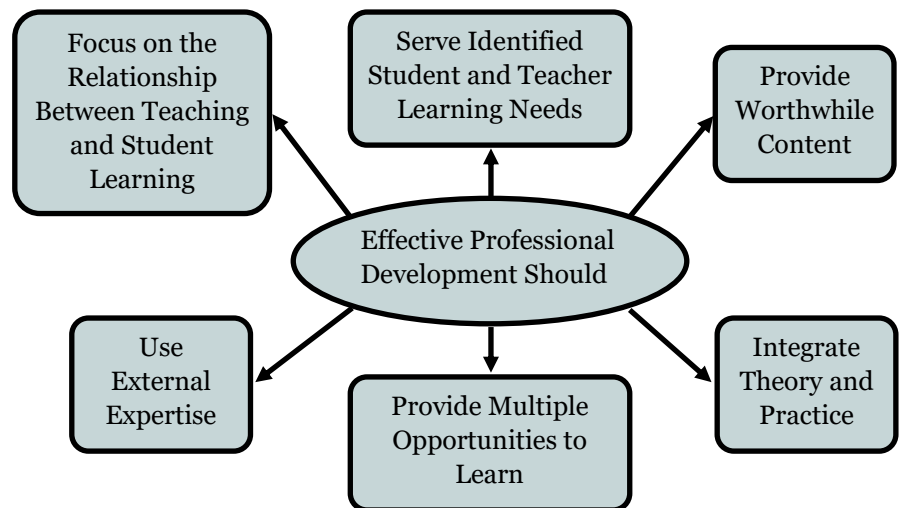
“The most powerful way that school leaders can make a difference to the learning of their students is by promoting and participating in the professional learning and development of their teachers.” (p. 104)

If, as previous chapters suggest, leaders increase the accountability of teachers in their school they must match this with increased commitment on their part to build the capacity required to meet the new performance expectations they set. Leaders should seek out opportunities to both promote and participate in teacher learning. In schools where teachers reported more frequent or more effective leader involvement, students achieved more than in similar schools in which teachers reported the opposite. Teachers

in high achieving schools are also more likely to discuss teaching with their principals and seek them out as a source of instructional advice. Leaders who participate with their staff in their professional development are able to join in their professional discussions and learn in detail about the challenges the learning presents and the conditions that their teachers require to succeed. This knowledge allows the leader to ensure these conditions for success are in place.

“Effective professional development is a collective rather than individual endeavor because the work of teaching all students to succeed is a collective endeavor.” (p. 106)

What a teacher is able to achieve with their students is critically depending on the teaching quality of their colleagues in previous years. For this reason alone, teachers should take a collective responsibility for their students, helping each other learn how to reach shared goals. A well functioning professional learning community (PLC) will have a diversity of thought to analyze and resolve the teaching problems experienced by its members. PLC's should focus on increasing the instructional program coherence so that professional learning opportunities are likely to be more effective. If everyone teaches differently and there are few standards for judging effectiveness, teachers would struggle to help each other because they don't know enough about the strategies their colleagues are using. As teachers work together, they develop a shared understanding of the level of effort, commitment, and professionalism that they expect of one another.



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ENSURING AN ORDERLY AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

In my school or school division:

- Are students surveyed regularly about their attitudes toward the school and their learning?
- How thoroughly are the results of such surveys used for the purpose of improvement?
- Are student management policies explicitly linked to broader social values about a well-functioning community?
- How well does school leadership support teachers in using relevant community resources in their teaching?
- To what extent are parent-involvement efforts focused on increasing parental engagement with the educational work of the school?

Executive Book Summary of
Viviane Robinson's
Student-Centered Leadership
By: Dayle Emond



University of Saskatchewan
Education 892
Leadership and Followership Theory
Professor: Keith Walker

ENSURING AN ORDERLY AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to leadership action, ensuring an orderly and safe environment should come first. If students and staff do not feel physically and psychologically safe then little progress is likely to happen in the improvement of teaching and learning.

“If student management policies and procedures are disconnected from the quality of curriculum and instruction, the result is likely to be the increasing use of external incentives and sanctions to get students to engage in school and classroom activities from which they feel alienated. If, however, leaders understand such things as how students experience particular classes, how trust develops between teachers and students, and how good teaching fosters students; engagement and success, then student management policies and processes are more likely to serve educational values.” (p. 126)

In a school that students believe is safe, students behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement will increase and will be associated with strong student learning. This is primarily accomplished by meeting their needs for caring relationships and for control over and success in their learning. A student's attendance to school and their engagement with it is strongly affected by whether or not they perceive their school to be physically and psychologically safe and whether or not they feel that the majority of their teachers care about them. Attendance and engagement levels are also influenced by the strength of parental and community engagement. School leaders who take the time to develop relationships between parents and teachers and to build trust between them will increase the engagement of all students.

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BOOK

Viviane Robinson's *Student Centered Leadership* is a book I recommend for a full read through by any educator. I have already recommended it to many of my colleagues and family members who are active in the field of education and specifically educational leadership. Viviane Robinson's five dimensions and three capabilities of student-centered leadership provide a detailed and evidence-based guide for how educational leaders can improve the learning and achievement of their students. Much of the research I have done throughout the course of my masters degree supports the conclusions that Viviane Robinson has come to in her book. A clear vision is vital for the collaborative construction of educational goals to guide the improvement of teaching and learning in the school. The establishing of goals and expectations can help focus staff effort and attention on the needs of the teachers and students in order to close the gap between the current state of affairs and the shared vision. Once a staff is united around these shared goals, leaders can make strategic decisions about how they allocate the schools resources so that teachers can do the vital work with the tools they need for success. As a leader of instructional leaders, principals must create a culture of collaboration and trust that is focused on professional growth and the development of high quality teaching. Ensuring the quality of teaching is the job of all instructional leaders in the school, including subject specialists, department heads, curriculum coaches, and anyone else who has a responsibility for the learning happening in the school (all teachers). Increasing the professional capacity of the staff then, becomes the focus of the entire staff. Leaders must participate in the professional learning of their teachers and the professional learning should be a collective endeavor. None of this, of course, is possible without creating a safe an orderly environment where teachers and students feel comfortable taking risks and innovating.

CITATION

Robinson, V. (2011). *Student-Centered Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.