Perceptions of Effective Leadership in Schools for Students with Visual
Impairments: A National Study

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Abstract: This study investigated the effectiveness of the leadership of
principals and superintendents of schools for students who are visually impaired
from their teachers' perspectives. The findings indicated that these school
leaders fell short of the teachers' expectations on various aspects of
leadership.

Residential schools for students who are visually impaired have a history that
goes back over 170 years, and these schools have traditionally served as the
main institution of academic and social learning for visually impaired students.
However, since the passage of P.L. 92-142, the Education for All Handicapped
Children Act, in 1975, updated to the Individuals with Disabilities Education
Act (IDEA), 1990 and 1997, affirming that students with disabilities have the
right to the same educational opportunities as those with no disabilities,
enrollment has significantly decreased in many of these residential schools
because a high proportion of visually impaired students have chosen to attend
neighborhood schools (Reinhard, 1998; Shafer & Shafer, 1998; Wolf, 2004;
Rodriguez, 2004; and Regents to study future of blind school, 2004).

The passage of the 1975 and 1997 acts, coupled with the declining enrollment in
the residential schools, have led these schools to restructure their services
and programs (Baker, 1993). In addition to outreach services (DeMario & Caruso,
2001; Miller, 1993), these schools now offer diverse programs for all their
students, including students with multiple disabilities (Baker, 1993). They
offer orientation and mobility programs, technology assistance, adaptive
physical education, life-competence-skills programs, functional academics,
vocational training, and community-based instruction and supervised employment
opportunities (Baker, 1993). In addition, many residential schools have had to
make changes in response to the changing demographics of their students (such as
the rapid increase in students with multiple disabilities), federal legislation
that emphasizes mainstreaming, and the drive toward full inclusion (Geruschat,
1993).

Despite the residential schools' decline in enrollment, and given their expanded
services and programs, their role in educating students remains valid. As Bina
(1999) noted, throughout the country, these schools have become a legitimate
placement option in response to steadily increasing demands from local districts
and have demonstrated that they are not a substitute for public school programs,
but an important complementary option. Hatlen (2001) stated that these schools
should be the center of services for all students who are visually impaired.
Similarly, Stenehjem (1993, p. 211) stated that "no other place in most states
has as much knowledge, expertise, and resources to share as residential
schools."

The roles of the leaders of schools for students who are visually impaired also
appear to be changing with the changing responsibilities of their schools.
According to Whitaker (1998), principals' roles change frequently. Some of the
changes include the emergence of expectations that the principal should act as a

community leader, share decision-making power with teachers, decentralize authority, and manage the changing demographics of the students. Whitaker added that although additional expectations may be added to the roles of the principal, few expectations are ever removed. For some principals, this situation has resulted in role overload and stress. Since more time is needed for managerial responsibilities, less time is available for instructional leadership (Whitaker, 1998). In spite of their role overload, principals must make hundreds of decisions each day, and there is no room for error. Their day is fragmented, leaving them little time for reflection and the opportunity to focus on students' learning and instructional leadership (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001).

Given the expanding responsibilities of these schools for their students, their leadership and administration appear to be critical to the future of education for students who are visually impaired. According to Mamer (2001), there is a critical need for active leaders in the field, and there is a shortage of personnel in Canada and the United States. What is worse, university programs that prepare certified teachers of visually impaired students have low enrollments (Spungin, 2003), and many of the professional leaders are within 10 years of retirement (Mamer, 2001). Mamer's claims are consistent with Moore's (2003, p. 387) statement that "at no time in our history is the issue of effective leadership more important than it is in today's political and economic environment."

Previous studies

School leadership has been the focus of many studies. Black (1998), for example, summarized three main styles of educational leadership: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and facilitative leadership. Instructional leadership is an implicitly hierarchical leadership style in which the principal rules with authority and expects the teachers to follow his or her orders regarding curriculum and instruction. In transformational leadership, the principal motivates, inspires, and unites the staff as they work toward a common goal. In facilitative leadership, the principal does team building; that is, he or she helps those around him or her to make decisions and solve problems. Black also stated that good leaders make strategic choices and suggested that they should become familiar with various leadership styles and establish a repertoire of strategies to use according to three principles: (1) using the strategies flexibly, (2) choosing the strategies according to short- or long-term needs, and (3) choosing strategies that best serve the school and the students.

Gardner (1990) identified the characteristics of effective educational leaders as the ability to think long term; to emphasize vision, values, and motivation; to understand the larger organization of which the leaders are a part; to reach beyond jurisdictional boundaries; to have the political skills to deal with multiple constituencies; and to deal with ever-changing realities. Similarly, Walker (1990) discussed the skills of exemplary principals that were identified in a project of the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Assessment Center. He indicated that among their key skills, successful principals are sensitive to the people who are around them, know the demographics of their communities, are good problem solvers, can make good judgments of situations, have good organizational skills, are articulate orally and in writing, are decisive, and develop goals and initiate visible actions.

Ediger (2002), who studied how the effectiveness of school principals could be assessed, suggested certain criteria for evaluation, including students' test scores (a measure of what students have achieved); professional portfolios (a way to demonstrate the principal's professional achievements); the quality of discussions with teachers; the ability to relate to the relevant tenets of educational psychology to help support opportunities for students to learn;

effectiveness when working with teachers and parents; staying abreast of new developments and trends, including technology; and understanding the school's curriculum. Like Ediger, Kowalski (1998) favored the use of standard assessment criteria to assess the effectiveness of school leaders. Kowalski indicated that the administrative evaluations of school superintendents should be linked to specific formal objectives, ethics, and improvements in school districts.

Despite the many studies on school leadership in general, few studies (such as Bina, 1982; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Latham & Holloway, 1999; Oyinlade, Gellhaus, & Darboe, 2003) have focused on leadership in schools for students with visual impairments. Among the few studies, Bina (1982) examined the levels of morale of certified teachers of visually impaired students and discussed their implications for administrators of these teachers. He explained that morale could be enhanced by certain practices of the administrators, including a higher frequency of supervision, democratic leadership in which teachers are involved in decision making, and congruent perceptions of reality between principals and teachers (to reduce discrepancies in communication between them).

The standards for best practice for leaders of schools for visually impaired students were highlighted by Latham and Holloway (1999) through a series of systematic procedures that derived information about school superintendents' knowledge, skills, abilities, and tasks. The job domain categories that Latham and Holloway ranked as the most important were fostering school board relations; developing and maintaining an effective school and school district staff; facilitating learning by students; collaborating with and involving the community; providing organization, resources, and operations; developing, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum and instruction; providing professional development for school and district staff; maintaining group processes; and understanding and responding to the larger political issues. The Council of Chief State School Officers (1996) defined six best-practice standards for school superintendents as facilitating the development of a shared vision with the school community; sustaining a school culture and an instructional program that is conducive to the students' learning and the staff's professional growth; ensuring a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; collaborating with families and the community; acting with integrity and fairness and in an ethical manner; and understanding and responding to the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts of the school district.

Oyinlade et al. (2003) identified the top 10 essential behavioral leadership qualities (EBLQs) that are necessary for effective leadership by principals and superintendents in schools for students with visual impairments. They concluded that the faculty, principals, and superintendents of these schools thought that transformational qualities were more essential than were transactional qualities for effective leadership by both principals and superintendents.

The current study

Focus and research questions

This study was an extension of Oyinlade et al.'s (2003) study of effective leadership in schools for students who are visually impaired. We analyzed the principals' and superintendents' effectiveness in relation to the levels of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQs that were identified by Oyindale et al. solely from the perceptions of the teachers in these schools. The teachers' perceptions were used to measure the effectiveness of both the principals and superintendents because the goal of this study was to measure the effectiveness of these school leaders from the perceptions of their subordinates (teachers).

Given the focus of this study, answers were sought to four research questions that were related to teachers' perceptions of the principals and superintendents:

1. Is there a significant difference between the levels of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQs and the levels of effectiveness of the principals on these items ?

2. What is the rate of effective leadership of the principals on the top 10 EBLQs?

3. Is there a significant difference between the levels of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQs and the levels of effectiveness of the superintendents on these items?

4. What is the rate of leadership effectiveness of the superintendents on the top 10 EBLQs?

The answers to these questions demonstrated the extent to which the teachers at the schools perceived their principals and superintendents to be effective on the EBLQs that they (the teachers) perceived to be essential.

Method

Instrument

As Oyinlade et al. (2003) indicated, 10 people in the field of visual impairment (4 principals, 4 teachers, and 2 superintendents) from 10 states served as judges for the construction of the questionnaire that was used to collect the data. Each judge described, in an open-ended format on separate forms, the behavioral qualities that he or she perceived to be essential for effective leadership for a principal and for a superintendent, respectively, at schools for students with visual impairments. Their responses were summarized, coded, and analyzed for frequency. All items with a minimum frequency of 5 (cited by at least 50% of the judges) were deemed to be acceptable for inclusion in the effectiveness scale. This process yielded 18 essential items (see the operational definitions in the following section) that were the same for both principals and superintendents.

Each item was operationalized from the general descriptions and narratives used by the judges. These items and their accompanying definitions were used to construct two 7-point Likert-type scales (extremely unessential, very unessential, unessential, somewhat essential, essential, very essential, and extremely essential), one for gathering information on superintendents and the other for gathering information on principals, of the essential characteristics for effective leadership. The higher the value obtained on an item, the greater the essentiality of the item. Face validity was used to ensure the validity of each item on the questionnaire, and Cronbach's alpha established the reliability at alpha =.94 for the scale of essential qualities of superintendents and.92 for the scale of essential qualities of principals.

The respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their current (1998) principals and superintendents on a range of 1 (low) to 7 (high) on each of the 18 EBLQs.

Operational definitions

The 18 EBLQs were operationalized on the questionnaire as follows:

* Having good listening skills: listening carefully and without prejudgment and empathizing with the speaker and trying to understand the speaker's point of

view

* Having good presentation skills: communicating ideas and intentions to others
clearly without being misunderstood (good communication skills)

* Having a participative decision-making style: soliciting and using others'
input in decision making and working with subordinates through leadership by
example

* Being a motivator: creating a work environment in which subordinates are happy
and eager to work and to achieve needed goals

* Being honest and ethical: always being truthful and trustworthy and abiding by
a high standard of right and wrong

* Having organizational knowledge: knowing how the school system for schools for
students with visual impairments works and the hows and whys of the
instructional curriculum and being well informed on current issues related to
schools for students with visual impairments

* Having good interpersonal skills: being friendly, humorous, cordial, and
polite; treating people with respect and dignity; and relating well to others

* Having fiscal efficiency: being able to prepare good financial budgets and to
spend wisely

* Having knowledge of policies: being familiar with local, state, and federal
laws and policies regarding schools for students with visual impairments

* Having a vision for the future: having ideas, goals, and objectives for the
future of the school; doing long-range planning to meet these goals and
objectives; and being able to meet the school's present needs

* Delegating authority: sharing responsibilities with and giving adequate
authority to subordinates to perform tasks

* Providing support: readily guiding and supporting the activities of
subordinates and helping subordinates to grow and succeed in attaining their
goals

* Being fair: treating people equally and appropriating resources evenly among
various constituencies without bias or favoritism

* Being courageous and firm: willing to make tough and unpopular but necessary
decisions and sticking to them

* Being creative: being open to new ways of doing things and using new ideas to
do things differently

* Being hardworking: being committed to spending long hours and making the best-
possible efforts to accomplish goals efficiently and effectively

* Having good prioritizing skills: being able to establish priorities among
tasks and to ensure that the most-essential tasks are performed before the less-
essential ones

* Having problem-solving skills: having an interest in and the ability to solve
a variety of problems and being able to compromise as well as assist others in
solving problems

Sampling procedures

The sampling procedure was the same as in Oyinlade et al. (2003), since this study was a continuation of that study. In 1998, random sampling was used to select 28 of the 47 schools that were on the 1997-98 membership list of the Council of Schools for the Blind. Twenty-eight schools were selected with the hope of obtaining participation from 23, roughly half the schools in the council nationwide. Nonparticipation was anticipated to be less than 5 on the basis of intuition and one author's general familiarity with the interests of some of the officials of these schools.

Of the 28 schools that were contacted, 25, in 25 states, agreed to participate. No responses were obtained from 3 schools, but the participation rate was higher than anticipated, so the 3 schools were not asked again to participate. Because of the lack of direct access to the names of the faculty and administrators of each school for the purpose of random sampling, a general survey of the teachers, principals, and superintendents was conducted. Adequate copies of the research questionnaire in regular print, large print, and braille, covering the number of teachers and administrators in each reading medium, were sent to the contact official of each school for distribution to all the faculty and administrators in his or her school. Of the approximately 900 questionnaires that were mailed, 294 were sufficiently completed and returned, for a return rate of 32%.

Women accounted for 75% of the respondents, and the average combined years of the respondents' teaching and administrative experience (regardless of gender) was 14 years, with a maximum of 44 years. The average combined years of teaching and administrative experience (henceforth referred to as experience) of the sample was the highest for the male superintendents (19 years), who made up 2.2 % of the sample, followed closely by the male principals (18.9 years of experience, 3.2% of the sample) and the female superintendents (18 years of experience, 0.72% of the sample). The rest of the sample consisted of male teachers (16 years of experience, 19.4% of the sample), female principals (16 years of experience, 4.7% of the sample), and female teachers (12.2 years of experience, 69.8% of the sample).

Results

Two measures of central tendency (mean score and mean rate) and an inferential statistic (paired t-test, alpha =.05) were appropriately used to answer the research questions. The paired t-test rather than a nonparametric test (such as the Wilcoxon test), was performed (on the ordinal data), owing to the convention of treating ordinal data as interval, as well as the expected greater ease of interpretation of results by readers. This procedure is consistent with the analyses of Oyinlade (1998, p. 11; see also Oyinlade et al., 2003), who indicated that "lower-order data cannot be transformed into higher-order data-- except in situations where ordinal data are treated as interval data or when nominal data is converted into dummy variables."

As was mentioned earlier, only the responses of the teachers were used in the data analyses; the responses of the principals and superintendents to the general survey were removed from the analyses. From the responses of the teachers, mean scores were derived for the extent of essentiality of each of the 18 EBLQs on the questionnaire for both the principals and superintendents. From the mean scores, the top 10 EBLQs for each administrative category were determined and used for further analyses. Because the mean scores were calculated from the responses of the teachers alone, the scores were slightly different from those reported in Oyinlade et al. (2003), which were calculated from all the responses in the general survey (those of the teachers, principals, and superintendents).

Although the mean scores in this study were different from those in Oyinlade et. al., the newly derived top 10 EBLQs were the same as in Oyinlade et al. for both administrative categories, perhaps because the teachers constituted 89% of the respondents in Oyinlade et al., thereby minimizing the impact of the responses of the principals and superintendents in that study. Also, the top 10 EBLQs that were obtained only from the teachers were in the same exact rank order as those obtained in the general survey (of teachers, principals, and superintendents) in Oyinlade et al. A slight exception was for the items that were ranked 6th (knowledge of policies) and 7th (fairness) on the top 10 EBLQs for superintendents in this study but that were in the reverse order in Oyinlade et al. (see Table 1 for the mean scores on the top 10 EBLQs for the principals and Table 2 for these scores for the superintendents). For each of the top 10 EBLQs for both the principals and superintendents, mean scores of effectiveness were also obtained for the extent to which the teachers perceived that their principals and superintendents were performing effectively (see Tables 1 and 2).

Begin Tables 1 and 2:

Table 1.
Perceived levels of essentiality and levels of effectiveness for principals on the top 10 essential behavioral leadership qualities (EBLQs).

Description: There are 10 main column heads: Essentiality rank, EBLQs, MEss score, MEff score, MEss-Meff difference, DF, Paired t-value, P-value, MEff-MEss rate, and Effectiveness rank

Note: MEss = mean score of essentiality; MEff = mean score of effectiveness; and MEff-MEss rate = rate of mean score of effectiveness relative to mean score of essentiality.

Essentiality rank: 1; EBLQs: Having good listening skills; MEss score: 6.672; MEff score: 6.238; MEss-Meff difference: 0.434; DF: 238; Paired t-value: 14.802; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .93; Effectiveness rank: 1.

Essentiality rank: 2; EBLQs: Being honest and ethical; MEss score: 6.653; :MEff score 5.508; MEss-Meff difference: 1.145; DF: 237; Paired t-value: 10.066; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .83; Effectiveness rank: 4.

Essentiality rank: 3; EBLQs: Being fair; MEss score: 6.544; MEff score: 4.971; MEss-Meff difference: 1.583; DF: 236; Paired t-value: 12.210; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .76; Effectiveness rank: 7.

Essentiality rank: 4; EBLQs: Being a motivator; MEss score: 6.506; MEff score: 4.916; MEss-Meff difference: 1.590; DF: 237; Paired t-value: 13.018; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .76; Effectiveness rank: 7.

Essentiality rank: 5; EBLQs: Providing support; MEss score: 6.440; MEff score: 4.761; MEss-Meff difference: 1.979; DF: 236; Paired t-value: 13.176; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .74; Effectiveness rank: 10.

Essentiality rank: 6; EBLQs: Engaging in participative decision making; MEss score: 6.409; MEff score: 4.794; MEss-Meff difference: 1.615; DF: 237; Paired t-value: 14.159; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .75; Effectiveness rank: 9.

Essentiality rank: 7; EBLQs: Having good inter-personal skills; MEss score: 6.376; MEff score: 4.958; MEss-Meff difference: 1.418; DF: 236; Paired t-value: 11.261; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .78; Effectiveness rank: 6.

Essentiality rank: 8; EBLQs: Having problem-solving skills; MEss score: 6.347; MEff score: 5.147; MEss-Meff difference: 1.200; DF: 236; Paired t-value: 11.068; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .81; Effectiveness rank: 5.

Essentiality rank: 9; EBLQs: Having organizational knowledge; MEss score: 6.282; MEff score: 5.513; MEss-Meff difference: 0.769; DF: 237; Paired t-value: 11.036; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .88; Effectiveness rank: 2.

Essentiality rank: 10; EBLQs: Having good communication skills; MEss score: 6.270; MEff score: 5.238; MEss-Meff difference: 1.032; DF: 238; Paired t-value: 11.196; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .84; Effectiveness rank: 3.

EBLQs: Mean of all top ten items; MEss score: 64.973; MEff score: 51.034; MEss-Meff difference: 13.939; DF: 236; Paired t-value: 14.925; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .79.

Table 2.
Perceived levels of essentiality and levels of effectiveness for superintendents on the top 10 essential behavioral leadership qualities (EBLQs).

Description: There are 10 main column heads: Essentiality rank, EBLQs, MEss score, MEff score, MEss-Meff difference, DF, Paired t-value, P-value, MEff-MEss rate, and Effectiveness rank

Note: MEss = mean score of essentiality; MEff = mean score of effectiveness; and MEff-MEss rate = rate of mean score of effectiveness relative to mean score of essentiality.

Essentiality rank: 1; EBLQs: Being honest and ethical; MEss score: 6.640; MEff score: 5.054; MEss-Meff difference: 1.586; DF: 221; Paired t-value: 11.010; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .76; Effectiveness rank: 6.

Essentiality rank: 2; EBLQs: Having good listening skills; MEss score: 6.552; MEff score: 4.786; MEss-Meff difference: 1.766; DF: 223; Paired t-value: 14.890; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .73; Effectiveness rank: 8.

Essentiality rank: 3; EBLQs: Having a vision for the future; MEss score: 6.418; MEff score: 5.614; MEss-Meff difference: 0.804; DF: 222; Paired t-value: 6.542; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .87; Effectiveness rank: 4.

Essentiality rank: 4; EBLQs: Having good communication skills; MEss score: 6.379; MEff score: 5.410; MEss-Meff difference: 0.969; DF: 226; Paired t-value: 10.053; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .85; Effectiveness rank: 5.

Essentiality rank: 5; EBLQs: Being a motivator; MEss score: 6.368; MEff score: 4.717; MEss-Meff difference: 1.651; DF: 222; Paired t-value: 11.474; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .74; Effectiveness rank: 7.

Essentiality rank: 6; EBLQs: Having knowledge of policies; MEss score: 6.352; MEff score: 5.969; MEss-Meff difference: 0.383; DF: 222; Paired t-value: 3.490; P-value: .0006; MEff-MEss rate: .94; Effectiveness rank: 1.

Essentiality rank: 7; EBLQs: Being fair; MEss score: 6.349; MEff score: 4.649; MEss-Meff difference: 1.700; DF: 221; Paired t-value: 12.299; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .73; Effectiveness rank: 8.

Essentiality rank: 8; EBLQs: Engaging in participative decision making; MEss score: 6.307; MEff score: 4.381; MEss-Meff difference: 1.926; DF: 222; Paired t-value: 15.448; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .69; Effectiveness rank: 10.

Essentiality rank: 9; EBLQs: Being fiscally efficient; MEss score: 6.249; MEff score: 5.489; MEss-Meff difference: 0.760; DF: 222; Paired t-value: 6.405; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .88; Effectiveness rank: 3.

Essentiality rank: 10; EBLQs: Having organizational knowledge; MEss score: 6.230; MEff score: 5.758; MEss-Meff difference: 0.472; DF: 222; Paired t-value: 4.382; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .92; Effectiveness rank: 2.

EBLQs: Mean of all top ten items; MEss score: 63.843; MEff score: 51.820; MEss-Meff difference: 12.023; DF: 221; Paired t-value: 13.011; P-value: < .0001; MEff-MEss rate: .81.

End of Tables 1 and 2.

Principals: Research question 1

The top 10 EBLQS for principals, from most to least essential, were having good listening skills, being honest and ethical, being fair, being a motivator, providing support, engaging in participative decision-making, having good interpersonal skills, having problem-solving skills, having organizational knowledge, and having good communication skills (see Table 1 for more details). Analyses of data were conducted at both the aggregate and item levels. The paired t-test was used to determined the difference between the perceived overall (aggregate) level of essentiality of all top 10 EBLQs and the perceived overall (aggregate) level of effectiveness of the principals on all 10 items. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the perceived overall level of essentiality and the perceived overall level of the principals' effectiveness (mean difference = 13.939, df = 236, paired t-value = 14.925, p <.0001). Given the extent to which the teachers perceived the aggregate of the top 10 EBLQs to be essential for effectiveness as a principal, the teachers perceived their principals to fall short (significantly) by approximately 14 points.

Item-by-item analyses were also conducted to determine the extent to which the teachers perceived their principals to be effective relative to the level of essentiality of each top 10 EBLQ. For each top 10 EBLQ item, a separate (single) paired t-test was conducted, and the results indicated that a significant difference existed between the perceived level of essentiality of each item and the perceived level of effectiveness of the principals on each item. On each item, the mean score of effectiveness for the principals significantly fell short of the mean score of essentiality of each item (see Table 1 for detailed results).

Principals: Research question 2

Although the paired t-test indicated that the perceived levels of effectiveness of the principals fell significantly short of the desired levels of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQ items, the tests did not readily tell the extent to which the principals were perceived to be effective relative to the level of essentiality of the items. Thus, the effectiveness rates of the principals (relative to the levels of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQ items) were determined through the use of a devised rate-of-effectiveness formula: MEff-MEss rate = (MEff/MEss), where

MEff = the mean score of effectiveness, MEss = the mean score of essentiality, and MEff-MEss rate = the rate of effectiveness relative to the level (mean score) of essentiality. The MEff-MEss rates were calculated for each item to derive an item-by-item effectiveness rate and for the aggregate of all 10 items to derive the overall effectiveness rate.

The results of the MEff-MEss rates for the top 10 EBLQs for the principals showed that the principals were perceived to be the most effective on the most-essential (highest-ranked) EBLQ for effective leadership, good listening skills, at an effectiveness rate of.93. The second item on which the principals were perceived to be the most effective was organizational knowledge, at an.88 effectiveness rate, and the third item on which they were rated most effective was good communication skills, at an.84 effectiveness rate. The two items on which the principals were perceived to be the least effective were participative decision making and providing support, at effectiveness rates of.75 and.74, respectively. The overall effectiveness rate (the aggregate of all top 10 EBLQs) for the principals was.79 (see Table 1 for details).

Superintendents:

Research question 3

The top 10 perceived EBLQs for superintendents, from most to least essential, were being honest and ethical, having good listening skills, having a vision for the future, having good communication skills, being a motivator, having knowledge of policies, being fair, engaging in participative decision making, being fiscally efficient, and having organizational knowledge (see Table 2). The paired t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the overall (aggregate) level of essentiality of all 10 EBLQs and the overall (aggregate) level of effectiveness on all the items for the superintendents. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the perceived overall level of essentiality and the overall level of effectiveness of the superintendents (mean difference = 12.023, df = 221, paired t-value = 13.001, p <.0001). The perceived overall level of effectiveness of the superintendents was significantly lower than was the perceived overall level of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQ items by approximately 12 points.

Separate paired t-tests were also used to test for a significant difference between the perceived levels of essentiality of each of the top 10 EBLQ items and the perceived levels of effectiveness of the superintendents on each item. The results, shown in Table 2, indicated that there was a significant difference between the levels of essentiality of the EBLQs and the levels of effectiveness of the superintendents on each item. On each item, the teachers rated the superintendents significantly lower than the score of essentiality of each item.

Superintendents:

Research question 4

To determine the perceived rate of effectiveness of the superintendents on each EBLQ and on the aggregate of the top 10 EBLQs (for the overall rate of effectiveness), we calculated MEff-MEss rates. The results showed that the teachers perceived the superintendents to be the most effective on knowledge of policies (effectiveness rate =.94), organizational knowledge (effectiveness rate =.92), fiscal efficiency (effectiveness rate =.88), and vision for the future (effectiveness rate =.87). The areas of least effectiveness for the superintendents were good listening skills (effectiveness rate =.73), fairness (effectiveness rate =.73), and participative decision making (effectiveness rate =.69). The overall rate of effectiveness (aggregate of all 10 EBLQs) for the superintendents was.81 (see Table 2 for the details).

Discussion and conclusion

Unlike typical assessment tools that measure effective leadership against preset, standard criteria, this study assessed the principals and superintendents in schools for students with visual impairments according to the qualities that the teachers perceived to be essential for effective leadership. That is, rather than being assessed by a standard administrative assessment tool (which the teachers may have had no input in designing), the principals and superintendents were assessed by the teachers on the basis of what they (the teachers) perceived to be the EBLQs of their leaders. This method is a bottom-up method from design to implementation. The teachers constituted 40% of the judges, 100% of the opinions that determined the levels of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQs for both principals and superintendents, and 100% of the opinions of the effectiveness of both categories of school leaders. Although this method

of assessment contradicts those of Kowalski (1998) and Ediger (2002), which favored the use of standard criteria, it allows the source of information for evaluation to conduct the actual evaluation. This method is consistent with the claim by Beckhard (1969) that decision making is best delegated to the source of information, rather than being made a function of a rigid hierarchy (such as was favored by Kowalski, 1998, and Ediger, 2002).

The substantive findings of this study provide opportunities for principals and superintendents to see how they were perceived by their teachers on the items that the teachers perceived to be essential qualities for effective leadership. Overall effectiveness was higher for the superintendents (.81) than for the principals (.79), but these two rates of overall effectiveness were not significantly different (df = 219, t = -1.110, p =.2681). Although these ratings of overall effectiveness may be considered above average, especially for the superintendents, they show that the performance of school leaders needs to be improved greatly from their subordinates' perspectives. This fact is especially true when the leadership effectiveness rate of both leadership categories is considered item by item, for each top 10 EBLQ item.

The item-by-item analysis of effectiveness for both principals and superintendents revealed a pattern of incongruence between the levels of essentiality of each item (depicted by the mean scores and ranks of essentiality) and the school leaders' levels of effectiveness on each item (depicted by the mean scores and ranks of effectiveness). The only exception to this incongruence was good listening skills, which was ranked number 1 on both essentiality and effectiveness for the principals. That is, the principals were perceived to be most effective on the same item that the teachers perceived was the most essential for their effectiveness.

The item-by-item analysis of the top 10 EBLQs showed that both principals and superintendents were rated the most effective mainly on lower-ranked items of essentiality. For example, aside from good listening skills, the principals were rated the most effective on organizational knowledge (effectiveness rank = 2) and good communication skills (effectiveness rank = 3), but the rankings of essentiality for these two items were 9th and 10th, respectively. In contrast, the performance of the principals on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th most essential leadership items (fairness, motivator, and providing support, respectively) were ranked 7th, 8th, and 10th, respectively, for effectiveness. Similarly, the superintendents were ranked the highest for effectiveness on knowledge of policies (effectiveness rank = 1), organizational knowledge (effectiveness rank = 2), and fiscal efficiency (effectiveness rank = 3), but the ranking of essentiality for each of these items was 6th, 10th, and 9th, respectively. In contrast, the superintendents were rated poorly (6th and 9th) for effectiveness on honesty and good ethics and good listening skills, respectively, but the

teachers perceived these qualities to be the top two most essential items for effectiveness as a superintendent.

It is difficult to determine precisely the reasons for the incongruence between the essentiality and effectiveness rankings because it is difficult to tell whether the incongruence existed because the school leaders perceived their roles differently from the way their teachers perceived these roles. If this was the case, the leaders might have devoted their energies to the areas that they (the leaders) perceived to be important, therefore, creating the incongruence observed with the teachers. But it is also possible that there was a congruence in the perceptions of essentiality of the EBLQs between the teachers and the school leaders, but the leaders were unable to live up to their teachers' perceived expectations of their performance on each item. This inconsistence could have been caused by many factors, including constraints of time and other resources, the priorities of the school leaders, and prior evaluation processes that might have placed a different level of importance on the EBLQs (and perhaps other items that were not used in this study) than the teachers did.

If time and other resources (such as money) were insufficient for their duties, it is possible that the school leaders might have had to prioritize their efforts for effective leadership according to their perceptions of the best ways to optimize the use of their resources. Such prioritization could place greater importance on the essentiality of some roles over others. Consequentially, the leaders could be perceived to be less effective in the roles that they ranked low in priority, especially if they invested minimal resources in these roles. Because of the expanding roles of schools for students with visual impairments (see Baker, 1993; DeMario & Caruso, 2001; Miller, 1993), these leaders might not have had adequate time to devote to such roles as providing support and motivation and engaging in participative decision making for which the teachers ranked them less effective.

The incongruence between the levels of essentiality and the rates of effectiveness of the principals and superintendents on the EBLQs may be further explained by situational leadership theories. Collectively, situational leadership theories indicate that no one-size-fits-all leadership style will produce effective leadership in every job situation. Rather, the theories assert that effective leadership is contingent upon leadership styles and job situations. For example, Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory indicates that effective leadership depends on the leadership style and favorableness of the job, whereas House's (1971) path-goal theory claims that a leader's behaviors and job-situation factors determine effective leadership. In addition, according to Hersey and Blanchard's (1969; see also Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001) situational leadership theory, to be effective, a leader must know how to apply appropriate leadership styles to different leadership situations.

Although this study was not a test of situational leadership theories, these theories appear to be useful in providing a framework for understanding some of the differences in the patterns of incongruence (essentiality versus effectiveness of the EBLQs) between the principals and the superintendents. Within the framework of these theories, the principals and superintendents could be perceived to have prioritized their work on the basis of their different job situations. For example, the top three items on which the principals were rated the most effective (good listening skills, organizational knowledge, and good communications skills, respectively) could be the direct result of the pressure on the principals to excel in these areas.

The job of a principal is largely detail-oriented in nature, requiring principals to listen to the various concerns of their many teachers and other staff members, as well as to be able to communicate effectively with their staffs. The chief role of the principals is communication; hence, principals are

forced by the demands of their jobs to be effective in listening and presentation. In addition, principals are required to be well schooled in the "hows" and "whys" of their schools, thereby forcing them to gain significant competence in organizational knowledge.

Like the principals, the superintendents might also have prioritized their efforts to be successful leaders by their job situations. The job of superintendents is broader in nature, thereby requiring them to be knowledgeable about policies that affect the school system, as well as about fiscal planning. Since the superintendents were the ultimate heads of each school in their jurisdiction, it might also have been imperative for them to be well versed in organizational knowledge. Furthermore, if prior evaluation instruments had placed a different level of importance on any of the EBLQs than the teachers in this study did, the school leaders could have adjusted their efforts to the levels of importance dictated by such instruments, thereby making them excel inconsistently with the perceptions of their teachers on the levels of essentiality of the top 10 EBLQs.

Regardless of the possible reasons for the incongruence between the rankings of essentiality and the rankings of effectiveness on each EBLQ, the primary result of this study is that both categories of school leaders significantly fell short of the expectations of their teachers on all the items. For each leadership category, above-average ratings of effectiveness (MEff-MEss rate >.80) were recorded on only 50% of the EBLQs, and .90 effectiveness was rarely obtained. The principals exceeded .90 effectiveness on only one item (having good listening skills), while the superintendents exceeded .90 effectiveness on two items (having knowledge of policies and organizational knowledge). On the five items in which the principals were perceived to be the least effective, their effectiveness ratings ranged from .74 (providing support) to .78 (having good interpersonal skills). For the superintendents, effectiveness ratings on the least-effective items ranged from .69 (engaging in participative decision making) to .76 (being honest and ethical).

On the basis of the findings, we recommend that both principals and superintendents should pay more attention to what their teachers perceive as important qualities for effective leadership. This is especially important because the teachers usually constitute the primary looking glass through which the effectiveness of school leaders is typically determined, regardless of the instrument for assessing effectiveness that is used.

Given their effectiveness ratings in this study, we recommend that both principals and superintendents make significant efforts to improve their effectiveness on all the top 10 EBLQ items used in this study. These items were what the teachers perceived to be the most essential for effective leadership. In addition, both principals and superintendents need to make adequate efforts to improve their effectiveness in the five areas on which they were ranked the least effective. For principals, these areas were providing support, engaging in participative decision making, being a motivator, being fair, and having good interpersonal skills. For superintendents, the areas were engaging in participative decision making, having good listening skills, being fair, being a motivator, and being honest and ethical. The fact that both the principals and superintendents were poorly rated for effectiveness on being a motivator, being fair, and engaging in participative decision making may underscore the significance of these factors as areas in which the teachers would like to see their leaders become more effective.

Despite the importance of teachers' participation in decision making, we believe that care should be exercised in determining the extent to which it is relevant to the superintendents' decision-making processes. Again, within the framework of situational leadership theories, the relevance of participative decision

making may vary between principals and superintendents. Unlike principals, whose daily duties are mainly internal to their particular schools and therefore involve extensive interactions with their teachers, superintendents' roles are mainly external, dealing with the state legislature, governmental agencies, the board of regents, and other policy-making entities. Thus, although principals could readily involve their teachers in decision making, the decision-making processes of superintendents may not readily lend themselves to a similar degree of teachers' participation because of the external nature of their roles. This fact might have contributed to the teachers' poor rating of superintendents' effectiveness on this item.

Limitations

As Oyinlade et al. (2003) noted, even though the schools that participated in this study were randomly selected, the individual participants were not. The lack of access to the names and addresses of the participants prevented us from contacting them directly. In addition, the response rate of 32% could have introduced some respondent bias, which we could not accurately estimate (owing to the nonrandom selection of individual respondents). If direct access to the names of teachers can be obtained, a random sampling of teachers is recommended for future studies. Such research could expand on this study by having the principals and superintendents rate themselves and one another on the items used in this study and then compare the results with those reported here--a process that may indicate how the school leaders perceive their duties in comparison to their teachers' expectations of them.

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