

Can Accountability Be Inviting? An Assessment of Administrators' Professionally and Personally Inviting Behaviors

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The purpose of this study was to assess administrators' professionally and personally inviting behaviors and examine whether administrators' reported behaviors were correlated with school rankings, job satisfaction, school climate, or time spent on instructional leadership. Overall, both principals and assistant principals reported engaging in high levels of professionally and personally inviting behaviors. This suggests that, with respect to inviting leadership behaviors, administrators believe that they have adjusted to the demands of Florida's test-based accountability system and are able to be inviting leaders.

Introduction

Current state and national reform efforts, such as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB, 2002), force administrators to increase students' standardized test scores or face sanctions and the disgrace of having their school labeled with a low ranking. It is no wonder that, in an era of high-stakes accountability, many teachers and principals have reported feeling a lot of stress and pressure in their jobs (George, 2001; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). We were curious as to whether this pressure was having an effect on administrators' leadership behaviors, so we designed a study to assess administrators' professionally and personally inviting be-

haviors using self-report scales. In addition, we examined whether administrators' reported behaviors were correlated with school rankings, job satisfaction, school climate, or time spent on instructional leadership.

Theoretical Framework

We chose to use Invitational Education Theory (IET) as a framework for this study because it has been shown to be a useful theory in the educational setting (Asbill, 1994; Barth, 1991; Egley, 2003). According to Purkey and Siegel (2003), "Invitational Leadership is a theory of practice that addresses the total environment in which leaders function. As a theory put into practice, it is a powerful process of communicating caring and appropriate messages intended to summon forth the greatest human potential as well as for identifying and changing those forces that defeat and destroy potential" (p. 1). Their model of Invitational Leadership is one that encourages leaders and their associates to pursue more joyful and meaningful professional and personal lives through four guiding principles: respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. Purkey and Novak (1996) noted that IET is a theory of practice that offers a systematic approach to the educational process and it provides strategies for making schools more inviting. IET furnishes educators with principles of practicing behaviors that seek to integrate, in creative and ethical ways, research, theory, and practice.

Invitational Leadership differs from the standard theories of leadership that emphasize the process of influencing others through the use of power. Instead, it promotes collaboration and shows compassion and respect for individuals in the educational system. Barth (1991) noted that improving the interactions among and between

teachers and principals is a significant factor in the school improvement process.

The goal of Invitational Leadership is to create schools with a climate that invites everyone in the school to experience success. Strahan and Purkey (1992) concluded that the school climate should reflect a sense of excitement and satisfaction for both students and staff. Purkey and Novak (1984) contended that educators should operate from a consistent stance of respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. The research literature on the role of school climate in improving student achievement is widespread with findings that support school climate as a variable that has an effect on other variables in the educational environment (Anderson, 1982; Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Strong & Jones, 1991).

The tenants of IET deal with the five Ps of any organization: people, places, programs, policies, and procedures. The present study focuses on the *people* aspect of the IET and specifically investigates the inviting behaviors of elementary school administrators in the state of Florida. This study builds on the work of Asbill (1994) who documented elementary school principals' inviting behaviors (IBs) and Egley (2003) who expanded the research of Asbill and examined the IBs of secondary principals in Mississippi.

Method

Participants

Of Florida's 67 school districts, about half (47.8%) of all districts (32 out of 67 districts) agreed to participate in this study. We contacted the principals at all of the elementary schools in the districts agreeing to participate a total of three times: twice by electronic

mail (email) and once by letter. In the email correspondence we explained the purpose of the survey, asked them to invite their assistant principal(s) to participate, and provided them with the Web site URL for the online survey. We sent a paper copy of the survey to those who did not complete the online survey within two weeks.

We received completed surveys from 325 administrators that included: 212 principals; 96 assistant principals; and 17 who did not indicate their administrative rank. These administrators represented 41.6% of the schools (264 out of 635 schools) within the school districts participating. Two-thirds of the administrators were female (67.0%) and most were White or Caucasian (87.0%), while 10.8% were Black or African-American, 0.6% were Hispanic, and 1.5% were of another race/ethnicity. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 63 years old ($M = 49.7$ years old, $SD = 7.0$). The principals had an average of 9.9 years of experience as a principal ($SD = 6.6$) and 4.2 years of experience as an assistant principal ($SD = 3.3$). The assistant principals had an average of 0.3 years experience as a principal ($SD = 1.1$) and 5.8 years of experience as an assistant principal ($SD = 5.0$).

Questionnaire and Analysis

Administrators rated their professionally and personally inviting behaviors by completing a 12-item questionnaire. Seven of the items assessed their professionally inviting behaviors (Professionally IB) and five items assessed their personally inviting behaviors (Personally IB). Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert-format scale where: 1 = *very seldom or never*, 2 = *seldom*, 3 = *occasionally*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *very often or always*. Administrators were

asked to select the response that best described his/her own perception of his/her leadership behaviors.

We had used the questionnaire items in a prior study to assess teachers' perceptions about their administrators' inviting behaviors and found both scales to be highly reliable ($\alpha = .92$ for the Professionally IB scale and $\alpha = .93$ for the Personally IB scale; Egley & Jones, in press). These items were originally part of a larger set of scale items that were developed by Asbill (1994). Tables 1 and 2 show the complete list of questionnaire items used in the present study.

Results and Discussion

The means and standard deviations for the 12 questionnaire items and the Professionally and Personally IB scales are provided in Tables 1 and 2. Overall, both principals and assistant principals reported engaging in high levels of professionally and personally inviting behaviors. In fact, the lowest mean rating for principals or assistant principals was a 4.15 (a little more than "often"). This finding is encouraging because high levels of inviting behaviors are associated with the principles of moral commitment to coworkers. By increasing the concern to many within the organization, the leader can appear to be more thoughtful and reflective of the totality of the relationships within the organization (Sirotnik, 1990).

Reform strategies have historically caused people within the organization to adjust to the new demands and expectations that the movement imposes on them. Some of the adjustments that leaders make may be associated with learning new ways of seeing and dealing with things that they have experienced for years. With re-

spect to inviting leadership behaviors, administrators believe that they have adjusted to the demands of Florida's test-based accountability movement and are able to be inviting leaders.

In another study, we found that teachers also rated their principals highly in inviting behaviors, although not quite as highly as the administrators in the present study (Egley & Jones, in press). Teachers provided an average rating of 4.26 for their principals for professionally inviting behaviors and 4.16 for personally inviting behaviors. In comparison, principals and assistant principals in the present study rated themselves 4.70 or higher on both the professionally and personally inviting behavior scales.

With only one exception, the mean values for the scale items can be ranked from highest to lowest in the same order for both principals and assistant principals. For example, on the Professionally IB scale, the highest mean value was reported by both principals and assistant principals on the item "You expect high levels of performance from co-workers," followed by the next highest-rated item related to communicating expectations. In this respect, principals and assistant principals have similar perceptions of their inviting behaviors.

To test for differences between principals and assistant principals, we conducted *t*-tests for each item and scale. A few statistically significant differences emerged as is shown by the asterisks in Tables 1 and 2. These differences, however, are generally small and indicate that, overall, principals and assistant principals have similar perceptions about their inviting behaviors.

Unfortunately, the reliability scores for the Professionally and Personally IB scales were low, ranging from .31 to .69. Furthermore, our analyses did not reveal that any one or two items were particularly uncorrelated with the remainder. The items simply did not correlate with one another as highly as we expected. This finding was surprising to us because when the same scales were used assess teachers' perceptions of principals inviting behaviors, the reliability scores were found to be .92 for the Professionally IB scale and .93 for Personally IB scale (Egley & Jones, in press). We believe that one possible explanation for the low reliability scores in the present study was that the range of values for each item was small, which can lower the reliability estimates. That is, the correlations between items tend to be small when the item responses do not vary (Shannon & Davenport, 2001). Because Cronbach's coefficient alpha is based on correlations between items, the reliability of the scale is lowered when the item variation is small.

The second purpose of our study was to determine whether the reported inviting behaviors were correlated with school rankings, job satisfaction, school climate, or time spent on instructional leadership. Because of the low reliability of the scale scores, however, we view the correlations between these scales and the other variables only as an initial investigation that needs further exploration. More reliable scale scores might increase or decrease the correlations reported in this study.

The Professionally IB scale was moderately correlated with the Personally IB scale for both principals ($r = .43$) and assistant principals ($r = .42$). Level of job satisfaction and school climate were also correlated with both the Professionally and Personally IBs for both principals and assistant principals (see Table 3). This indicates that administrators who rated their inviting behaviors higher

also rated their job satisfaction and the climate of their school as higher, and *visa versa*. This finding is consistent with other studies that have found teachers' job satisfaction to be correlated with principals' inviting behaviors (Asbill, 1994; Egley, 2003). Taken together, these results suggest that when administrators are more inviting, both they and their teachers are more satisfied with their jobs. Because these findings are only correlational, future studies could examine whether the inviting behaviors actually lead to job satisfaction.

Administrators' inviting behaviors were generally not correlated with their school's ranking, with the exception of principals' professionally inviting behaviors. In other words, principals who perceived themselves to have higher professionally inviting behaviors also tended to have higher student scores on state standardized tests. It seems reasonable that professionally inviting behaviors would be more predictive of test scores than personally inviting behaviors. However, it is unclear as to why assistant principals' inviting behaviors would not be correlated with increased test scores.

Finally, it was interesting to find that principals' inviting behaviors were correlated with the amount of time per day that they reported spending on instructional leadership. Instructional leadership involves frequent monitoring of the teaching process to assess the instructional capacity of the educational organization. As instructional leaders, principals are responsible for ensuring that each student has the opportunity to receive a quality education. Because instructional leadership has been shown to have positive effects on instructional practice (Quinn, 2002), the relationship between a

principal's inviting behaviors and instructional leadership should be investigated further.

Conclusion

Despite the pressure of high-stakes testing, both principals and assistant principals have high perceptions of their professionally and personally inviting behaviors. We view this as an encouraging finding because of the positive outcomes associated with inviting behaviors. Another positive finding is that when administrators are more inviting, they are more satisfied with their jobs and perceive their school climate to be healthier. These findings suggest that invitational education theory may be a useful construct through which to view the work of educational administrators.

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Table 1
Differences Between Principals and Assistant Principals for the Professionally Inviting Behavior Scale and Items

	Principals ^a		Assistant Principals ^b		df	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
Professionally Inviting Behaviors scale	4.70	0.29	4.72	0.26	297	0.69
1. You expect high levels of performance from co-workers	4.90	0.30	4.92	0.28	304	0.33
2. You communicate expectations for high academic performance from students	4.77	0.45	4.83	0.38	217	1.41
3. You have a sense of mission you share with others	4.71	0.47	4.76	0.43	199	1.06
4. You create a climate for improvement through collaboration and shared decision making	4.70	0.48	4.71	0.46	306	0.41
5. You facilitate policies and procedures which benefit staff, students, and teachers	4.66	0.53	4.74	0.44	216	1.37
6. You offer constructive feedback for improvement in a respectful manner	4.58	0.52	4.69	0.49	201	1.98**
7. You provide opportunities for professional growth through meaningful in-service	4.56	0.62	4.40	0.66	305	1.91*

Note. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-format scale that ranged from: 1 = very seldom or never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often or always
^an = 203, $\alpha = .69$. ^bn = 96, $\alpha = .63$. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$

Table 2
Differences Between Principals and Assistant Principals for the Personally Inviting Behavior Scale and Items

	Principals ^a		Assistant Principals ^b		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Personally Inviting Behaviors scale	4.71	0.28	4.79	0.21	2.68**
1. You make an intentional effort to treat others with trust and respect	4.92	0.28	4.98	0.14	2.71***
2. You care about co-workers	4.91	0.29	4.96	0.20	1.71*
3. You are polite to others	4.87	0.34	4.90	0.31	0.80
4. You demonstrate optimism	4.71	0.48	4.78	0.44	1.35
5. You take time to talk with faculty and staff about their out-of-school activities	4.15	0.74	4.32	0.69	1.92

Note. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-format scale that ranged from: 1 = very seldom or never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often or always
^an = 208, $\alpha = .60$. ^bn = 96, $\alpha = .31$.
 * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 3
Intercorrelations Between Inviting Behaviors Scales and Four Other Variables

	Professionally IB		Personally IB	
	Principals	Assistant Principals	Principals	Assistant Principals
Personally IB	.43***	.42***	--	--
School ranking ^a	.15*	-.04	.04	.05
Level of job satisfaction ^b	.16*	.39***	.27***	.32***
School climate ^c	.35***	.35***	.29***	.28**
Time per day spent on instructional leadership ^d	.24***	.20	.01	.09

^a Each school was assigned a grade by the state based on their student test scores on standardized tests. For this analysis, we assigned each school grade a numerical value, where: A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2, and F = 1

^b Administrators rated their job satisfaction on a 7-point Likert-format scale where: 1 = very dissatisfied, 4 = satisfied, and 7 = very satisfied

^c Administrators rated their school climate on a 7-point Likert-format scale where: 1 = very unhealthy, 4 = somewhat healthy, and 7 = very healthy

^d Administrators provided the percentage of time on an average day that they spent on instructional