A radical change in school leadership

HELPING SCHOOL LEADERS THINK AND PLAN STRATEGICALLY TO MEET THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB) ANNUAL YEARLY PROGRESS (AYP) IN PUERTO RICO

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RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es ayudar a los líderes educativos a desarrollar destrezas y conocimientos en el liderazgo estratégico que puedan incorporar a su estilo personal de liderazgo y en su práctica. El liderazgo estratégico puede tener un efecto extraordinario en el éxito que el líder obtenga en su escuela. El éxito se mide fundamentado en el continuo aprovechamiento del estudiante y las prácticas del liderazgo. Los líderes tendrán la oportunidad de reflexionar acerca de sus prácticas y utilizar algunas estrategias sugeridas al ejercer su liderazgo estratégico para pensar estratégicamente y desarrollar un plan estratégico.

Palabras clave: liderazgo, liderazgo estratégico

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to help school leaders develop strategic leadership skills that they can adopt into their personal leadership style and practice. Strategic leadership can have an amazing impact on the school leader's success in his or her school. Success is measured fundamentally on the sustained growth of student achievement and leadership practice. Leaders will have the opportunity to reflect on his or her leadership practice and utilize some suggested approaches for strategic thinking and strategic planning.

Keywords: leadership, strategic leadership

The 21st century has already proven to be a difficult beginning for public education in Puerto Rico. The accountability challenges that school leaders face are making it more difficult to satisfy those same requirements. These challenges include closing the achievement gap and meeting the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). In order to face the problem, school leaders must exert excellent leadership practice. They must possess great skills and knowledge about several leadership theories. Most of them believe that they must be transformational leaders in order to inspire a learning community to close the students' achievement gap. Ironically, the public school system mandates them to be transformational leaders, but imposes a transactional model. School leaders of the 21st century need to combine different leadership styles to be successful. Understanding and reflecting upon their own personal leadership styles and practices they can begin the process of strategic leadership.

Through strategic leadership, school leaders can face with success today's public school challenges. They already have a vision in their schools and through this kind of leadership they will sustain high student achievement and leadership practices. They need to learn how to develop strategic skills for the development of a plan to close the student achievement gap. In other words, strategic skills are useful when school leaders aim to improve instructional programs, collaborate with broad constituencies, and transform their schools into learning communities (Glanz, 2006).

This paper will focus on strategic leadership from a K-12 educational perspective. There are several research questions that are part of the discussion's framework. As you read, keep reflecting on the following inquiries: (1) is strategic leadership a style or form of leadership? (2) How can strategic leadership help school leaders sustain their practice to ensure sustained student achievement? (3) How can school leaders develop a strategic plan to sustain student achievement? The premise is that school leaders already understand very well their leadership style and have deeply reflected on their practice. It is also assumed that most school leader preparation programs at the universities in Puerto Rico employ the Educational Leadership

Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002) as guidelines to develop their programs and courses. The ELCC Standards consist of seven standards, each of which has its school facility implications. This last assumption implies that school leaders are well prepared to face the challenges of public schools in Puerto Rico. Let us review briefly some types of leadership styles that can be related to strategic leadership.

Leadership Theories

Transformational Leadership

Northouse (2007) states that transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals, and includes assessing follower's motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. Also, it involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. Many believe that strategic leadership is integrated in many forms of leadership such as transformational leadership. Burns (1978) says that these leaders apprehend the future, see and articulate a compelling vision for what is possible, and ignite in others the enthusiasm and energy to make that vision a reality. Leithwood (1992) emphasizes personal traits to introduce organizational change. This form of leadership demands shared decision-making, teacher empowerment as well as understanding and encouraging change, while necessitating abilities to work in teams, see the complete picture, concentrate on continuous school improvement and foster the school community's sense of ownership.

While transformational leadership is built on personal qualities, strategic leadership is more impersonal, being concerned with relationships between the external environment and the organization's mission, as well as its implementation (Maghroori & Rolland, 1997). Transformational leadership is related to moral leadership, being influenced by Burns, which appeals to followers' moral values to raise their consciousness on ethical issues.

Ethical Leadership

Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) state that ethical leadership was the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision making. The emphasis is more on the directive and normative behavior, involving the employees, building trust, and above all being ethical in one's behavior. Their items focus on making fair decisions, showing ethical behavior, listening, and having the best interest of employees in mind.

These behaviors and characteristic are shared with strategic leadership. The strategic leader must make ethical decisions on a daily basis. They are ethical leaders by nature and have to exercise that style while planning and guiding their team in strategic thinking and planning. The strategic leader can also incorporate servant leadership skills in the process of developing the strategic team.

Servant Leadership

In the early 1970s, Robert Greenleaf (1970) developed servant leadership theory. It emphasizes that leaders should be attentive to the concerns of their followers and empathizes with them; they should take care of them and nurture them. Greenleaf (1970) argued that leadership was bestowed on a person who was by nature a servant first. These leaders focus on the needs of followers and help them to become more knowledgeable, "free", autonomous, and more like servants themselves.

Servant leadership can be related to strategic leadership in the nurturing of the strategic team. The latter has to inspire followers and must focus specifically on the individual needs of his or her strategic team to guide them in the process of acquiring the necessary skills to embark in strategic thinking and planning.

Strategic Leadership

Hughes and Colarelli-Beatty (2005) mention that the focus of strategic leadership is the sustainable competitive advantage or the enduring process of the organization. Freedman and Tregoe

(2003) note that strategy was the framework of choices, the nature, and direction of an organization. Bush and Glover (2003) state that the term leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. It involves inspiring and supporting others towards accomplishing a vision, which is based on clear personal and professional value. A more general definition for strategic leadership is the ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, and empower others to create strategic change as necessary.

Cheng (2000) argues that strategic leadership used to be defined as determining where an organization was heading and how to get there. It was mainly about leaders engaging in strategic and long-range planning, and was seen as a process that belonged to upper management alone, often taking place behind doors. It is clear that the leader should be *strategic*, where that concept means positioning the organization to its best advantage in order to maximize goal attainment. It is about acknowledging the complex and unpredictable nature of the future and developing strategies to prepare for the unexpected rather than just to plan for the known. Quong and Walker (2010) assert that for schools, this means achieving the best possible student outcomes now and into the foreseeable future. Davies and Davies (2010) indicate that strategic leadership is defining the vision and moral purpose, and translating them into action. This transition requires a proactive transformational mind-set which strives for something better, rather than the maintenance approach of transactional leadership.

Who is the strategic leader?

Quong and Walker (2010) use a metaphor for strategic leadership that describes a principal as a car driver, someone who has an image where they want to end up, but who does not have a navigation system (a GPS) to lock-step his or her journey. They advise that a strategic leader's job is to point the way forward for the people they work with through developing and communicating a futures strategy. In education, it also means understanding where the students live and preparing them to take their place as valued citizens of a global community. Davies and Ellison (2003) indicate

that strategic leaders force themselves to look beyond and into an uncertain future. That is strategic intent, which is a powerful concept used to describe how a school can take a strategic perspective into a rapidly changing and turbulent environment. Quong and Walker (2010) suggest it is more than having a vision for the future; it is about acknowledging how unpredictable that future is and developing strategies to face the unexpected rather than just plan for the known. Strategic leaders must be perceived as someone who gets things done, they are practical achievers.

Davies and Davies (2005) identify four characteristics that successful strategic leaders display: (1) they have a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present, (2) they prioritize their own strategic thinking and learning, (3) they create mental models to frame their own understanding and practice, and (4) they have powerful personal and professional networks. Strategic leaders are rarely satisfied with the status quo. They are imaginative and enjoy planning for the future. School leaders who plan strategically build and sustain meaningful partnerships or networks of individuals who can advise them or support their ideas and initiatives. Hughes and Colarelli-Beatty (2005) explain that creating sustainable competitive advantage was the strategic leaders' work toward the future state of enhanced vitality for the organization so that it will endure in the long term.

How to plan strategically?

As the strategic leader of the school, you are continually, and above all else, involved in strategic thinking. School leaders must be active, connected, committed, alert, and stimulated. Such thinking must not only be informed by the moving details of action, but be driven by the very presence of that action (Mintzberg, 1994). Chance and Williams (2009) suggest that strategic planning is an ongoing process that requires leaders to question the status of stand initiatives, changes in the environment, new requirements for learning, and adjustments to the plan continually. Strategic planning is predicated most fundamentally on an articulated well-established vision, mission, goals, and objectives for the school. Here is a brief definition of the aforementioned terms. (1) *Vision* is knowing where you want to be or become.

(2) *Mission* is your reason for being and the work you pursue to realize your vision. (3) *Goals* are simply a clear statement of the mission, specifying how to achieve the mission; they must be specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound. Also, goals are outcomes and address needs. (4) *Objectives* are statements of results to be achieved, and include a timeframe, specific results to be accomplished, method of measuring the results, and criteria for successful achievement. Objectives should be stated in ways that describe what you will do and how you will do it; they state results, and not activities.

There are many steps that school leaders can follow for successful planning. First, they must possess a clear and comprehensive grasp of internal and external opportunities and challenges. Second, they will begin to select the staff that will be part of the process. The staff selection is crucial in the success of the planning process. These individuals should be: (1) critical thinkers, (2) self-motivated, (3) good at their craft, and (4) team players. Third, the school leaders must inspire their staff to embrace the vision and provide guidance and knowledge for the team members to develop strategic thinking skills. Once the group is prepared for the process, the team begins to benchmark, research, and frame the strategic vision in light of school data of student achievement, social, economic, and political realities and trends. Finally, the strategic team will assess the internal and external factors that affect the school (SWOT). The SWOT analyses the internal and external weaknesses and strengths.

How to conduct a SWOT?

Next, the team undertakes a realistic and comprehensive assessment of the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). The basic four broad questions are: (1) What are the organization's internal strengths?; (2) What are the organization's internal weaknesses?; (3) What external opportunities might move the organization forward?; (4) What external threats might hold the organization back? SWOT analyses involve identifying key school stakeholders (e.g. teachers, parents, students, community leaders, district personnel, and state people) and having them work through the SWOT strategy (Glanz, 2006). The

school leader would meet with each constituent group separately at first and work through the SWOT analysis. A summary should be made for each category. I would like to clarify some differences between strengths and opportunities, and weaknesses and threats.

- Strengths and weaknesses tend to describe the present situation, positive factors, and are typically internal.
- Opportunities and threats tend to describe the immediate future, negative factors, and are typically external.

I will examine the school curriculum as an example of a SWOT analysis for this article. Once the analysis is completed, the team answers the two questions written in Table 1. The team will study the data collected and make assumptions and judgments. The group also evaluates the validity of the assumptions and implications before formulating the strategy. This evaluation will help in developing the strategic plan. During this process, the school leader must have patience, expect upsets and the unexpected. Here is an example of a chart that you can use to conduct your SWOT analysis:

Table 1

Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis of a Curriculum

Strengths	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
Curriculum is standards-based...	It is not meeting the students' needs...	We can create a task force to look for the latest trends in curriculum development that can help us align our curriculum to meet students' needs...	Budget cuts from the Department of Education...

Note. What is required to remediate the weakness? and What is required to defend against threats?

How to develop a strategic plan?

Both strategic and long-range planning cover several years. However, strategic planning requires the organization to examine what it is and the environment in which it is working. Therefore, it helps the leader decide what to do about the issues and challenges

faced now or in the uncertain future. I developed the sample plan mentioned above to help school leaders plan for the future. It can be used for long-range planning, but school leaders should not confuse the intentions of both plans (long-range/strategic plan). They may have a great long-range plan for the school, but that does not mean that the school leaders are good strategic leaders. To be a strategic leader, they must follow the initial steps mentioned at the beginning of this article. They can develop long-range plans to achieve particular goals in a five-year period, but again must not confuse both plans; the strategic one has, as its name implies, a strategic time frame, which denotes the end point to achieve the vision, mission, and objectives. Both plans can be integrated to develop a strategy that will help sustain great leadership practice and, most important, high student achievement. Hughes and Colarelli-Beatty (2005) suggest that a strategic plan in itself is only a plan; an organization's actual strategy lies in the decisions and choices its members make as they enact, or fail to enact, the plan. Porter (1996), of the Harvard Business School, explained that strategy renders choices about what not to do as choices about what to do. I recommend the following model for school leaders to follow when creating a strategic plan.

Table 2

Sample format for the strategic plan

Goals	Objective	Activity	Staff	Measure/ Indicators	Resources	Time Frame	Strategy

School leaders should already know how to write a measurable goal and objective, and what activity to use in order to achieve that aim. The measure indicators are the evidence that will demonstrate that the goals have been achieved. School leaders must plan carefully on how to assure the resources to meet the objectives. The SWOT analysis is key to identifying resources needed and to determine the time frame. The strategy is what will make the difference in achieving the goal, which is more than an activity. It will make the difference because it is formulated through strategic thinking and planning.

Conclusions

School leaders have the power to turn a school around, but it will take a lot of hard work, commitment, dedication, and planning. The purpose of this paper was to help them develop strategic leadership skills that they can adopt into their personal leadership style and practice. The goal was to help school leaders reflect upon their leadership style, acquire an understanding of other leadership skills, and to think and plan strategically. Through exemplary leadership practice, they can make their visions a reality by inspiring and training their teams. This leadership practice will achieve and sustain high student achievement. It is known that instructional and administrative leadership are pivotal in school leadership, but incorporating strategic leadership will help instructional leaders sustain high student achievement, and will help the administrative leader sustain good practice.

Today, school leaders face many challenges that might hinder the possibilities of developing this process, but using strategic leadership can help eliminate those situations. As a former school leader, I can tell you that it can be done with great success. Heck and Weiss (2005) highlight several key aspects of strategic leadership that are useful and relevant for school principals: (1) they have a vision and know how to achieve it; (2) principals cultivate broad understanding and support for their vision; (3) they also cultivate commitment to their vision; (4) use interventions to translate their vision into reality; and (5) start small, refine their strategies as needed, and provide evidence that their strategies are succeeding. These key aspects can serve as a framework to guide you through the process and keep you focus. As school leaders, you may ask yourself, where do I start? Start by viewing strategy as a learning process.

Hughes and Colarelli-Beatty (2005) explore four implications about viewing strategy as a learning process: (1) leading strategy involves discovery more than determination; (2) strategic leadership is not reserved for those at the top; (3) it is not enough to be a good strategic leader yourself, you have to foster strategic leadership in others; and (4) strategic leaders blend skills of thinking, acting, and influencing to drive strategy as a learning process in the organization. This new paradigm shift may help school leaders

begin this journey with promising results. I personally recommend the following steps to begin the strategic process.

First, school leaders should reflect upon their practices and evaluate the school's vision and mission. They have to think about their leadership skills and beliefs. This reflection will yield the knowledge they need to start this strategic process. This personal reflection will help them start identifying staff, resources, and steps to make the strategic planning an initial success. The complete operation can take a year or two, but they will be able to develop strategic thinking through staff training, guidance, and successfully developing a strategic plan. This approach will help schools meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) by achieving and sustaining high student achievement.

Second, school leaders must develop a strategic plan to achieve student academic excellence and sustain leadership practice. They have already reflected on their practices and have selected a strategic team. Now, the strategic team will conduct the SWOT analysis. This evaluation of internal and external factors that may affect the realization of the vision can help the leaders assure the success of the strategic plan. This evaluation is the main difference between a long-term plan and a strategic plan, and can inspire teachers to conduct action research in the classrooms to meet the strategic goals and objectives. Another crucial part of this second step is the strategic time frame, which is critical in determining the implementation of the strategies and when they should be completed. Strategic time frame is not the same as putting a date on a long-term plan; it suggests that the leader and the strategic team will know when and how to implement the strategy in the strategic planning process. Now you are ready to develop the strategic plan and discuss it with the team.

Third, the strategic plan is ready to be implemented and monitored continuously. The entire learning community is part of this evaluation process to assure that goals are being met and/or to make the necessary changes in order to achieve the goals. The strategic team should have checkpoints to monitor the progress of the plan. The team should also meet monthly to discuss the progress of the objectives. This continuous assessment will help the group acquire more knowledge about the strategy that is

being implemented to meet short and long-term objectives. Also, it will keep the team learning about the process, as well as highly motivated and involved in the process.

Finally, through strategic leadership, school leaders can inspire their learning communities to learn to plan strategically in order to meet the AYP, sustain good practice, and achieve high student academic achievement. To be a true educational leader, one must possess great skills in many areas of the realm of leadership and understand the role of strategic leadership. Strategic school leaders will boost student achievement and meet AYP. In conclusion, have you thought about the questions posed at the beginning of this article? (1) Is strategic leadership a style or form of leadership?; (2) How can strategic leadership help school leaders sustain his or her practice to ensure sustained student achievement?; and (3) How can school leaders develop a strategic plan to sustain student achievement? If school leaders can answer these questions, they are off to a great start in their strategic learning process. I challenge school leaders to conduct research about strategic leadership, so they can realize what a powerful leadership style this can be in order to get a school out of a state school improvement plan and meet AYP.

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