

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: ORIGINS OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

- State level superintendent
– New York, 1812
- Intermediate level superintendent
– Most prevalent in the early 1900s
- Local district level superintendent
– Buffalo, NY, 1837

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Role Conceptualizations of the Superintendent
(Callahan, 1966; Kowalski & Brunner, 2010; Kowalski, 2005a).

Roles are described as *discursive* rather than *developmental*
(Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002).

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Superintendent as teacher-scholar
 - (1850 to early 1900s)
- Superintendent as manager
 - (early 1900s to 1930)
- Superintendent as democratic leader
 - (1930 to mid-1950s)
- Superintendent as applied social scientist
 - (mid-1950s to mid-1970s)
- Superintendent as communicator
 - (mid-1970s to present)

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PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Superintendents – Which of these roles is the most prominent for you in your current position?

Other leaders – Which of these roles best describes your current position, and how do you provide support to your superintendent in this area?

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PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this multi-case study is to explore how visibility of school district superintendents is perceived and understood, broadly speaking.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What perceptions and understandings do school district superintendents have related to their own visibility in their role as the leader of an educational organization?

What perceptions and understandings do staff members (central office and building-level), school board members, and community members have related to the visibility of their school district's superintendent?

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SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY: ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT VISIBILITY

Assumptions:

- There exists a belief that visibility is important for leaders, generally, and superintendents, specifically
- Assumptions about visibility permeate literature focused on leadership and its practice
- Educational leadership literature implies that visibility is essential for superintendents



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THE PROBLEM & ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

- Problem: There exists little or no empirical research on the topic of superintendent visibility
- To address this dearth of literature, this exploratory study examined how the visibility of superintendents is perceived and understood by various stakeholders in a school community.



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REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Context of Visibility: Relationships and
Communication Interconnected

Concept of Visibility: Social Psychology and
Leadership Considered

Concept of Visibility: Absence and Presence
Discussed



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CONTEXT OF VISIBILITY: RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNICATION INTERCONNECTED

Relational Leadership

- Leader-follower
- Leader-member exchange
- Authentic
- Transformational

Communication Theory

- Leadership communication
 - Michigan leadership studies
 - Ohio State leadership studies
 - Blake and McCauley's leadership grid
- Superintendent communication



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CONCEPT OF VISIBILITY: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY & LEADERSHIP CONSIDERED

Social Psychology

Leadership

- Social influence
- Politicians
- Superintendents

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CONCEPT OF VISIBILITY: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP CONSIDERED

Social Influence

- Social Impact Theory (Latané, 1981) – Changes as a result of the real, implied, or imagined presence or actions of other individuals. The amount of influence is a function of the strength, immediacy, and the type or quality of presence exhibited by others.
- A leader's influence is created in part by visibility (Hackman & Johnson, 2009)
- A leader must maintain presence throughout the organization in order to maximize the impact of immediacy; effective leadership involves the creative use of social influence, including presence, to produce desired outcomes (Wren, 1999; Stangor, 2004)

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CONCEPT OF VISIBILITY: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP CONSIDERED

Politicians

- Politicians must be visible in order for constituents to see leadership activity and visible examples of confidence (Maxwell, 1998)
- Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton (Dlott, 2007; Keohane, 2010)
- Abraham Lincoln – Roving leadership, being in touch (Phillips, 1992)
- Lincoln was visible to large groups and he also used conversation to build relationships (Phillips, 1992)

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CONCEPT OF VISIBILITY: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP CONSIDERED

Superintendents

- Many superintendents do not appreciate the importance and difficulty of engaging key constituencies (Heifetz, 2006)
- Superintendents in an increasingly pluralistic society are necessarily embracing collaboration as a means to accomplish goals, and getting to know the community is a key to this approach (Grogan & Blackmon, 2001)
- Visibility is central to connecting with community members because it is important for people to feel a sense of comfort in seeing their leader (Dlott, 2007)

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CONCEPT OF VISIBILITY: ABSENCE & PRESENCE DISCUSSED

Reflective Practice: Inextricability of Absence and Presence

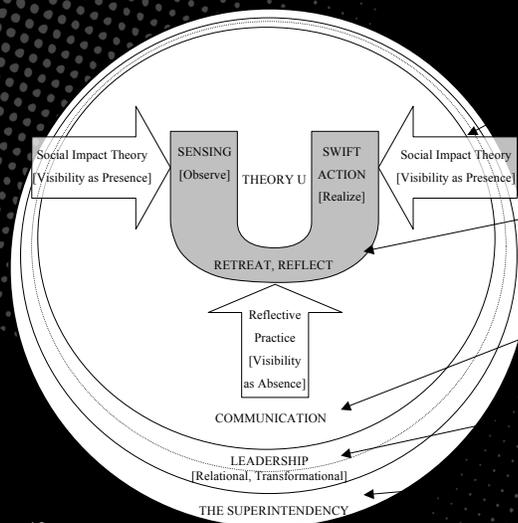
Organizational Learning: Intentionality of Absence and Presence

- Intentional visibility: Theory U
- Intentional visibility: Action theories



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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



SOCIAL IMPACT THEORY
(Forgas & Williams, 2001; Latané, 1981; Stangor, 2004; Wren, 1999)

THEORY U, REFLECTIVE PRACTICE
(Scharmer, 2007; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004; Schon, 1984; Argyris, 1999; Argyris, 2010; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001)

COMMUNICATION
(Kowalski, 2001; Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002; Leithwood, 1995; Dlott, 2007; Kowalski & Keedy, 2005; Kamrath & Brunner, 2011)

LEADERSHIP
(Burns, 1978; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Collins, 2001; Stangor, 2004; Keohne, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; George, 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Gardner,

THE SUPERINTENDENCY
(Callahan, 1966; Tyack, 1974; Butts & Cremin, 1953; Kowalski, 2006; Kowalski & Brunner, 2010; Cuban, 1988; Cuban, 1976; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Urban &

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PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

SURVEY LINK FOR **SUPERINTENDENTS**

<http://s.zoomerang.com/s/2012V1SUPT>

SURVEY LINK FOR **NON-SUPERINTENDENTS**

<http://s.zoomerang.com/s/2012V2NONSUPT>

If you do not have web access, please use a hard copy for this reflective exercise.



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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Emergent Themes (64 total codes)

Among the most commonly spoken about include the following:

- District face/spokesperson
- Relationship development
- Authenticity
- Attending school and community events
- Trust



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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Among the most intriguing emergent themes:

- Trust
- Bad visibility
- Visibility as a shared responsibility (Distributed Visibility)
- Superintendent-community fit
- Economic development
- Political capital
- Pressure to be visible
- Community expectations placed upon a superintendent
- Can't be tied to a desk

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Superintendent Interviews

- Pressure to be visible was felt by all participants
- Impact of presence
- Quality of presence
- All participants indicated that the role of communicator is currently the most dominant role conceptualization
- All participants exhibited frustration as they contemplated the concept of reflection
- All talked about building relationships through visibility
- Importance of framing messages

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Superintendent Interviews

- Intentional visibility
- Importance of visibility
- Variations in priorities of visibility
- Trust
- Visibility as communication
- Absence
- Social media – presence not dependent on physical location, doesn't allow absence

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

School Board Member/Community Member Interviews

- Bad visibility (when they spoke of superintendents with whom they worked prior to their current superintendent)
- Superintendent/organizational fit
- Trust
- Importance of visibility
- Political considerations
- Face of the district
- Visibility as communication
- Relationship development
- Not tied to desk
- Economic development

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Building and District Level Staff Interviews

- Trust
- Want to know the superintendent on a personal level
- Relationship development
- Face of the district
- Communication
- Rumor control
- Presence in buildings and in community
- Open door

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CLOSING REFLECTION

What role does visibility play as you imagine the future possibilities of your organization?

Deep Visibility: Meaningful Absence and Presence

Thank you!

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