

Secondary Principals in Cyprus: The Views of the Principal Versus the Views of the Teachers-A Case Study

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Abstract: *This piece of research was undertaken with the main purpose to find out about the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding their principal and her leadership style. The underlying (and guiding) assumption for this project was that the effectiveness of a leader is mainly depended on how others view him/her as a leader. From the overall results, it seems that there is some agreement and some disagreement between the teachers and the principal regarding the principal's view of herself and the teachers' perceptions of her. Generally speaking, in four out of the nine questionnaire areas there is an agreement on perceptions from both sides (in the areas of school climate, curriculum development, student management, and relations with parents and the community); in two areas there is disagreement (the areas of personnel management and professional development and in-service) and in three areas there is some agreement and some disagreement between the teachers' and the principal's perceptions of the school principal (in the area of school leadership and management, the area of administration and fiscal management, and the area of problem solving and decision-making).*

Introduction

THIS PIECE OF research was undertaken with three main goals in mind: (1) to find out about the perceptions of teachers regarding their principal and her leadership style, (2) to find out about the perceptions of the principal herself regarding her own leadership style, and (3) to compare teachers' perceptions with those of the principal and find out if there are any discrepancies between the views of the two groups of people.

The underlying (and guiding) assumption for this project is that the effectiveness of a leader is mainly depended on how others view him/her as a leader. This effectiveness is also depended on how the principals themselves perceive their leadership style. Principals may have some ideas about themselves and the way they lead their schools. They also act and perform their duties based on these ideas and also based on their perceptions of themselves as leaders. However, if their staff perceives them in different ways, then it is almost certain that the leader will have problems in performing his/her duties since his/her staff will almost certainly behave towards the principal in the way they (the staff) perceive the principal. If the views of the principal match the views of the staff things work out fine; if these views, however, are divergent things do not always work the way we want them to. This discrepancy of views and perceptions is usually to the detriment of the school and its students since everybody acts in different ways according to

their own perceptions about what is happening in the school. It is, therefore, assumed that it is important to find out whether the teachers' views are in congruence with those of the principal regarding the principal's leadership and management of the daily affairs of the school, since all involved behave according to their own perceptions and not according to how things really are. Moreover, I would argue that whether we are ready to accept it or not, what is perceived as reality is what we base our actions on. Therefore, it could be argued that perception is indeed, reality.

At this point it is probably useful to briefly describe the education system of Cyprus so that the context in which this piece of research was undertaken, is better understood. The public education system in Cyprus is highly centralized, with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) responsible for the enforcement of educational laws and the preparation of new legislation. Public schools are financed from government funds, while private schools raise their funds primarily from tuition and fees. Private schools are administered by private individuals or bodies, but supervised by the Ministry. Education is provided in pre-primary, primary, general secondary, technical and vocational secondary schools, and special schools. Approximately 54% of children aged three to five are enrolled in some form of pre-primary education. Children begin free, compulsory, primary education during their sixth year, and leave when they have completed primary school. In 1997-98 there were 376 primary schools with 64,592 pupils and 4,159 teachers, with 67% of the students enrolled in urban schools and 33% in rural schools. Secondary education takes place mainly at public schools but there are some private schools and it is compulsory to the end of Grade 9. The gymnasium comprises Grades 7 to 9 of secondary education, during which all pupils follow a uniform course of general education. The lyceum comprises Grades 10 to 12. In 1997-98 there were 125 secondary schools with 61,703 pupils and 5,757 teachers. Enrolments in public schools accounted for 81% and private schools for 19%. Some 65% of secondary school leavers attend tertiary institutions (Ministry of Finance, 1998).

Methodology and Procedures

The methodology used in this piece of research was a mixed one combining qualitative and quantitative methods. More specifically, in March 1997, a questionnaire was constructed and pilot-tested regarding a principal's duties and style of leadership in the secondary schools of Cyprus. The questionnaire items were constructed mainly from a review of the literature on effective schools and effective principalship (Duke, 1982; Duttweiler and Hord, 1987; Hoy and Miskel, 1996; Imants, Blom, Borst, and Van Zoelen, 1995; Pashiardis, 1998; Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1998; Sessions, 1996). The specific circumstances of secondary education in Cyprus were also taken into consideration (i.e., a list of duties for school principals in Cyprus as developed by the MOEC). The questionnaire included 57 items which were grouped under the following nine areas: School Climate, School Leadership and Management, Curriculum Development, Personnel Management, Administration and Fiscal Management, Student Management, Professional Development and In-Service, Relations with Parents and the Community, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making. The complete questionnaire can be seen in its entirety in the Appendix. The questionnaire is considered to be very reliable since its reliability coefficient is: $r = 0.94$ (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$). It can also be assumed that the instrument is valid since a panel of experts judged it as such; therefore, face validity is assured as well. The scale used is an interval, Likert-type scale from 1 to 4, where 4 indicates that the principal "always" behaves in the way described by a certain questionnaire item, 3 indicates "often", 2 indicates "sometimes", and 1 indicates "never". For the statistical analysis of the collected data the "SPSS for Windows 9.0" was used. Statistical analyses were conducted using primarily descriptive statistics such as means, medians, standard deviations and frequencies.

The questionnaire was distributed and collected during a day visit to the high school visited. The reason that this particular high school in Nicosia (the capital city of Cyprus) was chosen is because the researcher met the principal during a staff-development session organized by the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus. The principal (and other principals as well for later phases of this project) was asked whether she would want to participate in this project and, after asking her staff, she agreed with the proviso that the researcher would go back and talk to them about the findings (which the researcher did). All teachers present at the school during the day of the visit were given the questionnaire and were asked to complete it. The instructions were simply “to grade your principal using the items and the scale provided about how she performs her duties”. The principal of the school and the researcher left the room when teachers were completing the questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected on the same day by the researcher. Even with the reassurance of strict anonymity, it was evident that a number of teachers declined to respond to the questionnaire altogether, or declined to respond to demographic questions, which could potentially give out their identity. In a way this is understandable due to the small size of the educational system of the island and the feeling that everybody knows everybody and (presumably) can tell whose questionnaire they were looking at.

Also, in this piece of research, the ethnographic approach to leadership was used (Gronn and Ribbins, 1996), i.e., observing, shadowing and interviewing the principals. In a way, a multiperspective approach was used following Argyris' (1982) distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use in order to find out whether what the principals say they do is what is actually perceived as what it is they do. After the questionnaires were collected, the semi-structured interview process began with the principal. The areas that were discussed were similar and/or identical to those of the questionnaire in order to be able to make certain comparisons and draw some conclusions about possible discrepancies between what the teachers perceived and what the principal thought of herself.

Also, following Seddon's (1993) distinction of context between categorical, interpretive, and relational, I would argue that this piece of research tries to construe meanings within the interpretive or constructivist approach of context, i.e., based on the premise that it is indeed important to find out what organizational members' conceptions of reality are. Therefore, it is hoped that through comparison and contrast of all the available evidence, we should be able to arrive to more objective accounts on the principalship. In the case presented in this study, the researcher spent a total of about 12 hours with this particular principal during three different visits interviewing her on various aspects covered by the questionnaire. The results, which follow, are based on interviews with this one principal and the schoolteachers' responses to the questionnaire. The demographic data concerning the school have been slightly changed in order to avoid the school or the principal being identified.

The School and the Principal

The school is an urban Lyceum (high school, which includes the last 3 grades for students, aged 15-18). The school has around 700 students and 62 teaching personnel out of which one is the principal, 11 are assistant principals (who also teach) and the rest are teachers. Forty-three questionnaires were completed which corresponds to about 70% of all the staff. This return rate is considered to be very good and quite representative of the teaching staff in this school.

The principal is a female in her mid-50s who has a total of 3 years of experience as a principal and about 25 years of classroom experience as a teacher. The principal is required to teach about six 45-minute periods per week, therefore, acting as a part-time teacher as well. The

demographics regarding this principal are very similar for all other secondary school principals in the education system of Cyprus, i.e., after a long and (usually) successful career as a classroom teacher (for about 20-25 years) some of them are promoted into leadership positions when they are close to retirement which is 60 years old.

Milestones in the principal's career

- 1974-78 when she worked as a teacher in her former high school which she had attended as a student. She was very emotional about the whole issue.
- 1979 when she became very sick and almost totally lost her voice and therefore, she was horrified of the idea of losing her job or having to stop teaching all together.
- 1981 when she became an assistant principal.
- 1994 when she became a principal.

Another important year in her career was when her daughter was 3 years old and became sick and told her mother how happy she was for being sick because in this way, “she has her mom with her all the time”. The principal was so moved and felt so guilty that this prevented her from ever wanting to go back to university or get any more credentials which would help her enormously with her job-performance and future promotions. Therefore, she never received an advanced degree even though she would have loved it, as she mentioned.

Presentation of Results

First, the questionnaire responses were analyzed in order to find out what the teachers thought of the principal, i.e., what their perception was about the school principal with regards to all 57 items for which simple descriptive statistics were calculated. The presentation of the results will be as follows: For each questionnaire area the items with the highest and lowest average scores will be presented concerning the principal's performance, as perceived by the responding personnel. Between the highest and lowest items, the comments of the principal will be presented about how she perceives herself regarding that particular area.

1. School Climate

In the area of “School Climate”, the principal received the highest marks in item #4 (mean = 3.44), where it is stated that the principal leaves great autonomy to teachers to organize and plan their teaching. Based on the teachers' written responses, it seems that they actually enjoy this kind of autonomy to a great extent (often or always based on the scale used).

This view is in agreement with the way the principal sees herself (under the circumstances which exist in Cyprus, i.e., a highly centralized, bureaucratic system), since she mentions that the curriculum is a given by the Ministry of Education and, therefore, there is little anyone can do about this; however, the principal sees to it that every teacher teaches according to their own style and preferred teaching methodology and this is the minimum she can do (i.e., accord this freedom to them, as she mentioned during the interview) since the teachers are so much tied up and controlled with regards to everything else in such a highly centralized system. Sometimes, school inspectors will even demand to see a particular teaching methodology; therefore, when a principal allows this kind of freedom, teachers are very appreciative.

The item which received the lowest marks in the area of “School Climate” is the one regarding “whether the principal takes initiatives and supports such programs which facilitate the creation

of a positive and humane work environment” (item #8, mean = 2.83). However, even this score is not really low for this particular area since 2.83 is close to 3, which in the scale used stands for “often”.

Again, this view is, to a great extent, in agreement with how the principal sees herself. She considers “good human relations” as one of her strongest personality characteristics. Here is what she said: “In the 30 or so years that I have been in the schools, I believe that there is not a single instance where I was in conflict with anyone without them realizing (and knowing) that I had a valid reason for being angry or for not agreeing with them. This means that they had been convinced by my arguments and that in the end we separated with no hard feelings”.

To further illustrate her efforts to create a humane work environment this is what she mentioned: “There was this teacher whose brother-in-law had cancer and was dying. Someone had to be with him at all times. She wanted every Friday to have half of her teaching periods off so that she can be with him in the hospital in order that her sister could be with her children. I made sure that I arranged it, and another teacher agreed to perform her duties.”

There were also numerous other examples concerning student discipline, which the principal mentioned. Those examples do indicate a humane perception of what leadership is all about with regards to both the teaching staff as well as the students. In general, all eight items in this category received an overall mean of 3.05 which means that the principal “often” exhibits the behaviors described in these items in her leadership style, as perceived by her staff.

2. School Leadership and Management

In this area of the questionnaire, the principal received the highest marks in item #15 (mean = 3.39) which refers to the extent to which the principal closely cooperates and contributes to the work of the Ministry of Education of the Republic.

This view is again in accordance with how the principal sees herself since she really knew the laws governing the schools of Cyprus as was indicated during our conversation. To closely cooperate and contribute to the work of the MOEC in Cyprus really means to know the legalities of the bureaucracy involved and adhere to all laws and regulations in an almost religious fashion. She also knew the list of duties for principals, as stated in Cyprus statute (of which a number were included in the questionnaire used, as mentioned earlier). She also mentioned that she always wanted to be within the letter of the law. This view is perceived as a “must” for anyone working within the Cyprus system since the island's education system is highly centralized and highly bureaucratized and any deviation from what the law stipulates is considered a heresy.

The principal received lowest marks in item #13 (mean = 2.31) which refers to the amount of support she gives for experimentation and innovations at her school. The teachers' perception is that she “sometimes” lends such support. This view is not really unusual since teachers in Cyprus are over-burdened with the huge curriculum they need to cover in a particular grade-level and all they can do is “rush to cover the subject area.” Therefore, there is no time or room for experimentation. Furthermore, the educational system of Cyprus does not sanction any experimentation unless it is decided centrally for the introduction of an innovation of some sort, i.e., computers in education.

Thus, even the fact that this principal sometimes allows for experimentation in her school is really good news under the circumstances described above. The perception among staff is also that she uses position authority as opposed to expertise in her leadership style. This is indicated by the relatively low mean score concerning item #14 (mean = 2.62) which states that “the principal's power is mainly presented through his/her knowledge and abilities other than through

his/her position authority". This is in slight disagreement with the principal's own statements during the interview, that "she can be easily swayed and convinced by anyone who has strong arguments and that she doesn't really use the authority vested in the principalship".

3. Curriculum Development

The item in which the principal received the highest marks in this area is item #20 (mean = 3.37) which refers to the extent that the principal effectively directs and integrates programs designed for children with special needs with regular school programs. Apparently, the principal goes out of her way to accommodate students with special needs which is a rare phenomenon for Cyprus high schools since teachers and principals alike are not really trained or otherwise equipped or assisted to deal with such cases. Special education provision in secondary schools in Cyprus is almost non-existent or is at its infancy.

The principal received low marks in item #17 (mean = 2.88) which refers to the extent that the principal strives for the constant renewal of programs in order to respond to students' needs. However, the mean score in this item is not that low and it really indicates "often" which, in a centralized system such as the one in Cyprus, is indeed a very high score. This is very important because it indicates that the principal tries her best to ensure that academic program offerings are renewed in order to respond to students' needs to the extent that anyone principal can control this process in Cyprus.

Overall, the principal received a mean score of 3.17 in the area of "Curriculum Development" which is indeed a good score bearing in mind the highly centralized system of Cyprus. These views of the teachers are in accordance with the principal's perceptions about herself when she mentions that, "OK, I have a given curriculum, however, the teachers are quite free to work on their own, produce their own materials and use their own teaching methods which they consider more suitable. After all, they are the experts!!"

4. Personnel Management

In this area, the principal received the highest marks (but not that high, generally speaking) in item #24 (mean = 2.80), which refers to the extent to which her expectations with regards to personnel performance in terms of teaching strategies, classroom management and communication with the public, are clear to the teachers. Apparently, as measured on the scale used in the questionnaire, there are mixed feelings among personnel that her expectations are not really as clear as they could have been.

For this area, the principal's perception does not fully agree with that of the teachers'. The principal thinks that she is clear about her expectations from her teachers. In the interview, the principal mentioned that she always makes an effort to let a teacher know exactly what she thought of the teaching session she observed without beautifying the situation and, thus, letting the teacher know exactly how the lesson went and what she thought the strong or the weak points were. In this way, the principal thought that she made her expectations and her standards quite clear. For instance, she said, "first of all, I will let the teacher know that I am going to observe her/him even though (by law) I do not have to give them any warning that I am coming into their classrooms. Then, I will comment on the lesson I observed first with the students telling them how good they were, or if I did not see many hands up when questions were being asked or when opinions were solicited. Then, I will talk with the teacher in private."

The principal received the lowest score in item #23 (mean = 1.91) which refers to the extent that she uses an instrument for classroom observation when evaluating teachers. Actually, this

rating means “sometimes” (meaning that the principal sometimes uses such an instrument) which could be regarded as a big plus for the principal (if she really does use one) since no such instrument is used in the educational system of Cyprus and almost no principal or school inspector is trained how to observe, analyze and evaluate classroom instruction. Actually, this is a hot subject currently in Cyprus, and there is an ongoing debate about revamping the current system of teacher appraisal in Cyprus. Overall, the mean score for the category “Personnel Management” is 2.40 which means that the principal exhibits the behaviors described in the items under this category to some extent.

5. Administration and Fiscal Management

The principal received very high marks in item #26 (mean = 3.82) in this area. Indeed, this item received the highest score of all 57 items in the questionnaire. The item deals with the extent to which the principal complies with Ministry of Education policies as well as school regulations in trying to fulfill the school's mission. Of course, this comes as a natural response from teachers since the educational system in Cyprus is so centralized and therefore, compliance with MOEC directives is crucial, indeed vital, for the school's (and the principal's) survival.

The principal also received a low score in item #31 (mean = 2.52) which deals with how punctual the principal is and how much she respects other people's time when setting up appointments or when attending various functions. Apparently, teachers believe that sometimes the principal is punctual and sometimes she is not.

In any case, this is the area (administration and fiscal management) where the principal received the highest scores. For instance, she was awarded the highest scores (among all 57 items) in items #25, #26, #28, and #30 which all belong in this area and deal with issues such as making sure that all reports to the MOEC are timely and accurate; preparing the school budget based on proven needs-according to MOEC directives-and keeping proper accounts, books and receipts; and making sure that all school buildings and premises are kept in order and clean. Apparently, this is her strongest of all nine areas in the questionnaire.

This really comes as no surprise since it is what the principal kept stressing, i.e., that it is very important to “go by the laws, not to let anything happen by chance, otherwise they'll (Ministry officials) get you”, and therefore, the principal was always aware of her rights and duties as prescribed in education regulations and in her job description of duties for the principal. Again, it should be emphasized that this should come as no surprise since Cyprus has such a centralized form of educational structures, which do not allow any deviation from mainstream policies. Those who deviate are ostracized (either formally or informally) and will not normally be allowed to continue their own policies.

6. Student Management

The principal received high scores in item #34 (mean = 3.46) which is the item dealing with the effectiveness of the principal when communicating with parents about their children either in assemblies or in private. This item also dealt with the extent to which the principal communicates both positive and negative aspects of student behavior to their parents.

More is said about this area in the section dealing with relations with parents and the community. What should be stressed here is that the principal did say (when asked), that if she walked in the schoolyard, almost all students would recognize her as being the principal (Note: This is not the case with quite a number of principals the researcher talked with in similar size schools). She tries to have a general assembly (with all 700 students) at least once a week and,

as she mentioned, "...talk to them and with them. I believe in this kind of gatherings, for which I am well prepared always in advance. I feel that some messages may not really go through, however, the students get a feeling of being a whole and being tied together."

As mentioned under the area of "School Leadership and Management", and through the conversations with the principal, it was becoming more and more evident that she really follows the laws and regulations especially with regards to disciplining and managing the students. For instance, she mentioned an incident about a student having been caught with a ruler on which certain mathematics formulas were written during an examination. Even though they were erased, one could still see that some formulas had been written but then erased. In other words, one could still read them on the ruler. The student wasn't actually caught cheating, however, the teacher accused the student and did not allow him to take the exam. The principal however, insisted that the law stipulates that a student must be caught cheating and not prepared to cheat. Therefore, the principal took a different stand than the teacher. Moreover, during the interview, the principal said "I come from a family of lawyers, and therefore, I am sure of what the courts will do and how they will interpret the laws. Therefore, I always stick to what the law says."

The principal received lower marks in item #38 (mean = 2.24) which deals with the extent to which she tries to connect what is being learned in the school with what is happening out of the school. Apparently, the staff believe that she is not really making an effort to do that. There was nothing in the conversation with the principal to either support or discard this impression. In any case, schools in Cyprus in general, are not really very prone on connecting with the "outside" world or with emphasizing "real life" skills. They are mostly disconnected with what goes on outside the school environment, and, therefore, no principal really has the time or the motivation to find out if what is being done inside the school has any relevance to what is happening outside. Technical and vocational schools do have close connections with the outside world but there are only 11 such schools in Cyprus attended by only about 20-22 percent of students.

The overall mean score for the principal in this area was 2.86 which is a pretty good view of the principal on the scale from 1 to 4, implying that the principal is good regarding student matters for most of the time. In any case, this is not her highest score, as there is a small discrepancy between the teachers and the principal on this view since the principal believes that the "Student Management" area is one of her strongest, as she mentioned during the interview.

7. Professional Development and In-Service

The principal received the highest score in item #43 (mean = 2.96) in this area, which refers to the extent that the principal uses information she received during staff-development or in-service sessions for her own self-improvement. The perception of the staff is that she sometimes does use her own in-service in order to make improvements in her actual work environment. Apparently, the perception is that she is not really strong on doing this. The principal did not give any clear indication as to whether this is the case, however, when asked and prompted, she indicated that sometimes she will attend in-service sessions according to how much free time she has (and "there isn't much, being a mother and a wife also", as she mentioned). Furthermore, when asked if she has any way of keeping abreast of new developments in her own teaching field or in school administration and management in general, the answer was "no".

In this area, she received lowest marks in item #44 (mean = 2.54) which deals with the extent to which she disseminates information and materials and introduces new ideas to other colleagues in order to solve common problems. Not much of this is being done either. In any

case, there is not any compulsory in-service for teachers in Cyprus after they are appointed. Whatever is done is done in a haphazard way and as time permits. This somewhat low score is also in agreement with what the principal said regarding her own or her staff's development and in-service activities. As the principal said, she doesn't do it to the extent she would have liked to due to lack of time.

The overall mean score for this area was 2.77 which indicates that the principal is only sometimes willing to use in-service for her own improvement or to help her staff. In any case, this view was in accordance with the principal's feelings that she doesn't do enough to organize more staff development for her own teachers.

8. Relations with Parents and the Community

The principal received the highest score in item #45 (mean = 3.48) in this area, where there is a clear indication that the principal often tries to encourage relations between the community, the parents and the school.

The staff's perception is in accordance with the principal's perceptions. She too emphasized that one of her strongest characteristics is her ability to communicate with parents. She actually said: "My ability to communicate with all factors and variables affecting the school and my cooperation both with personnel (secretarial and professional) as well as the students and their parents is great. I always give reasons and my true thoughts behind a decision; there is always a justification for whatever I do and I make sure that people understand it. Therefore, when discussing an issue, I put my justifications about an issue on the table to be judged by everyone. I will tell the truth and will not beautify the situation for anyone, albeit taking care not to hurt someone personally."

The principal received the lowest marks (but not really low, relatively speaking) in item #49 (mean = 3.09) in this area, which indicates that she often uses appropriate techniques for further encouragement and development of these relations. There were many instances and examples, which the principal brought up during our discussions to indicate her willingness to talk with the students' parents when an important problem arose. She would talk things over together with the parent and the student in her office. She would make every effort possible to deal with the big problems in a fashion which would not hurt the student in the long run or in any permanent way, as she mentioned. The overall mean score for this category was 3.25 which is one of the highest means she received indicating that her staff indeed perceived this to be one of the principal's strongest areas.

9. Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

The principal received the highest score in item #52 (mean = 2.97) in this area, which deals with the extent that she allows discussion and promotes the idea of searching for solutions and that she presents these as commonly accepted practices of this school. The staff's perception is that she "often" does that.

This was her own assessment of herself as well. She mentioned that in the regular assemblies with teaching staff she would rarely present her opinions first. As she said, "usually, I will introduce a subject and then I will be silent. I will let the rest of the teachers speak out their ideas until I see a consensus building up. If the issue is really divisive and there will have to be a vote, then I speak out my own opinion (always with full justification) in order to sway some of the undecided staff this or the other way. Then, we will take a vote in order to reach a decision. Often times, I will have what we call a pre-meeting with my 11 assistant principals and discuss a certain

issue together before taking it to the whole assembly of the faculty.”

The principal also received the lowest marks in item #55 (mean = 2.65) in this area, meaning that she is “sometimes” open to different approaches and solutions and does not insist on any one way of problem solving. This perception of the principal by the teaching staff, comes in contrast to what the principal believes about herself, i.e., that she often listens to others’ opinions and, as a result, changes her own ideas about an issue. For instance, she mentioned that if a student or a group of students come to her with problems or to make a report about something which is happening in their class, she will prompt them that the right way is to speak first to their own teacher who is responsible for their class, and then speak to the area assistant principal. If things do not work out in this way, then, they should come to her. Therefore, as she mentioned, students are given an array of options and approaches to their problems.

Another example she mentioned concerning the area of different problem-solving approaches is the following: “One day, one of the assistant principals came into my office and told me that parents are calling him at home because one of the teachers had an exam for the children without giving them any warning. Parents were upset and students were upset. The assistant principal said that the principal should call the teacher in and talk things over with her. The principal suggested instead that the assistant principal find out what really happened (by talking to the teacher as well and not just listen to parents and students), and then they would discuss the matter together. Indeed, the assistant principal talked with the teacher and found that the parents’ complaint had some validity; he informed the principal accordingly. As the principal went on, “after about a week, I called the teacher in my office and told her what I would do if I were in her position, i.e., I would explain to kids that I feel I have to give them mock exams in order to get them prepared for when the real examinations come for entrance into the universities. She did explain to the students and she thanked me for this suggestion after she realized that the matter was resolved in a satisfactory manner.” The overall mean score for this area is 2.81 which is an indication that the principal is doing relatively well in this area.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the overall results presented above, it seems that there is some agreement and some disagreement between the teachers and the principal regarding the principal’s view of herself and the teachers’ perceptions of her. Generally speaking, in four out of the nine questionnaire areas there is agreement of views from both sides; in two areas there is disagreement and in three areas there is some agreement and some disagreement between the teachers’ and the principal’s perceptions of the school principal.

More specifically, the principal and the teachers are in agreement in the areas of (1) school climate, (2) curriculum development, (3) student management, and (4) relations with parents and the community. Both the teachers and the principal feel that there is a positive and humane overall climate in the school and the work environment in general. Furthermore, the perception is that there is enough room for curriculum development in their school even in a centralized system such as the system in Cyprus. The teachers’ perception is that there is some freedom for new ideas and changes and some room for modifications with regards to the curriculum (to the extent possible of course). In addition, both parties agree that student management at the school is really good and that the principal deals with discipline problems and student issues in a satisfactory way. Finally, relations with parents and the community seem to be regarded as excellent, and indeed it was mentioned that this is one of the principal’s strongest areas. No further analysis of these results is warranted when all participants perceive the situation in the

school more or less in similar ways. What indeed is needed is to pay attention to some of the areas where there is a discrepancy, such as in the following cases.

The areas in which the views of the principal and the views of the teachers are in disagreement are the areas of (1) personnel management and (2) professional development and in-service. From the answers given, it seems that the teachers feel that the principal's expectations about their performance are not really clear. Probably, this has to do with the non-existence of clear-cut performance standards and with the lack of training for principals as evaluators. On the other hand, the principal's perception was that she was clear about her standards and expectations of teachers. What this means, is that the principal needs to investigate further the views of the teachers and try to find out how and to what extent are teachers aware of performance expectations, standards for the school, etc. Maybe what is called for is better communication with regards to this particular area.

As for the area of professional development and in-service, the faculty thought that the principal only "sometimes or rarely" used her own training for her personal development whereas the principal thought that she "often" did that. Generally speaking, the perception among staff was that she doesn't use in-service for her own or/and her staff's improvement. There are many potential explanations for this view: In Cyprus, school principals are promoted into an administrative position at a rather old age and as a result, they lack the zeal and energy for professional growth. At some cases, principals may have been promoted merely a year before retirement. The motivation for these principals to extend their academic background through personal staff development and through new sources of knowledge is, understandably, limited.

Another factor, which deters principals from embarking into other ways of in-service activities, is the fact that they don't have any motivation by the Ministry of Education to do so. Since the promotion system exalts the age of a candidate and not their qualifications, principals don't feel the need to improve; on the contrary, they patiently await to get a bit older and therefore raise their chances of being promoted to a supervisor position. Age is the factor that really matters and not the individual charisma or qualifications (Pashiardis and Orphanou, 1999). This promotion system has been reigning for decades now and a great number of teachers feel contempt towards it, since age is the decisive factor. As a consequence, principals are deprived of any intrinsic zeal to improve, a long time before promotion and definitely are not given any other chance to change even after being promoted.

Another explanation could lie in the fact that supervisors who evaluate principals don't show any real interest in evaluating the principal's professional development or performance. Instead they show a great interest in how books are being maintained and how obediently the principals respond to all governmental decrees. Naturally a principal's main concern becomes the satisfaction of bureaucratic obligations. Most of the principals interviewed in an earlier piece of research mentioned that they do not have the time to be the kind of leader they want to be, because of the many bureaucratic chores they have to deal with (Pashiardis, 1998).

Finally, there were three areas in which there was some agreement and some disagreement as follows: the area of (1) school leadership and management, the area of (2) administration and fiscal management, and the area of (3) problem solving and decision-making. In the area of "school leadership and management" the teachers agree with the principal that she has excellent relations with the MOEC, but they feel that there isn't really much support for experimentation and innovation and that the principal relies mostly on position authority in her leadership style. This later view is in contrast with what the principal perceives of herself, i.e., that she allows freedom for experimentation and new ideas.

Furthermore, in the area of “administration and fiscal management” there is again agreement between the principal and her staff that she is good with laws, in complying with these and with other laws and regulations of the MOEC, however, the staff feels that she is not good with her own time-management and punctuality in appointments. This is in disagreement with how the principal perceives herself, i.e., that she is punctual and does not let people wait for appointments. Apparently, this is not the way the principal is being viewed and, therefore, she probably needs to address this area as well as some of the others mentioned above.

Finally, in the area of “problem solving and decision-making” there is some agreement and some disagreement. Both the principal and faculty agree that the principal uses discussions and some kind of searching for solutions in trying to reach decisions. However, teachers also feel that the principal is not really open to different approaches and solutions, i.e., that she already has a fixed idea and this is what she will push for. In other words, they feel that the principal is not easily swayed or convinced and even though discussions will take place, in the end what will be done is what the principal probably had in mind from the beginning. This could be true, because to some extent, during our discussions, even the principal herself alluded to the fact that she is sometimes over-concentrating power near her and that she is being “nosy”, as she put it. She also mentioned that she wants to change that.

Conclusion

It is increasingly becoming acknowledged that our perceptions are important as to how we view reality. It is also accepted that people will treat us or “sense us” based on their perceptions about us and not based on our perceptions about us. It is therefore, very important to know ourselves well enough (through both introspection and extrospection) in order to be able to ask and answer: “What knowledge of self do I bring to the position? Is this knowledge sufficient? Can it help an organization realize its potential? (Curry, 1997). I would even extend these questions a bit further: Am I aware of how others see me and how they actually perceive me as a leader? Indeed knowing the answer to these questions is crucial to the leader's self-awareness about the multiple realities of leadership and about the multiple perceptions of ourselves as leaders. Knowing and understanding the perceptions about us will help our knowledge and understanding about us as leaders.

In conclusion, the principal in this case study probably needs to pay closer attention to:

1. making her expectations more clear
2. becoming more punctual with her appointments
3. using in-service and staff development more widely and,
4. listening to and accepting different views and approaches other than her own.

If we were to quantify her perceptions with her staff's perceptions about her, I would argue that there is almost a 50-50 split, i.e., half of the time she is right and half of the time she is wrong on how her staff perceives her. I feel that this kind of knowledge is very important for our advancement to being a better and more reflective educational leader. I would argue that it is indeed crucial for our survival as educational leaders.

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