School Administration's Role in Preventing School Violence: Strategies for Promoting School Connectedness

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School Violence

School violence continues to be a major concern among educators, parents, and students (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006). Interestingly, recent statistics show that incidents of school violence have consistently declined since the mid-90s (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012). Nevertheless, youth violence – both in the school and community – is considered to be a significant concern that requires a preventative, sociocultural response (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Within the past decade, school violence has been studied from multiple perspectives in an effort to understand the causes and how to prevent these traumatic and sometimes deadly, violent events. One significant factor that has emerged from this research is the quality of relationships between students and school personnel (e.g., teachers, staff, and administrators), which may ultimately influence violent incidents within and outside the school. The quality of these relationships between students and school personnel is commonly referred to as school connectedness. Research has demonstrated that students who feel connected with their teachers are less likely to engage in disruptive/violent behaviors and more likely to succeed in school (Henrich, Brookmeyer, & Shahar, 2005; Karcher, 2002; Volungis, 2013).

School Administration and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) is a theoretical approach that accounts for organizational effectiveness through relationships among employees. This theoretical approach has received much application in the business sector, while only recently receiving attention in mental health and school settings. Organizational citizenship behavior is defined as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006, p. 3). OCBs are unique in that they are not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system. However, the dynamics of reciprocal relationships/interactions (e.g., social exchange) in conjunction with OCB constructs (i.e., altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, and courtesy) have empirically demonstrated increases in organizational effectiveness. This theoretical approach takes into account a variety of contextual/systemic factors, including the role of school administration by way of fostering OCBs within their organizational system, and how these behaviors can influence the perceptions of members within the school community as an operating structure. In the school setting, organizational effectiveness is considered to be providing the best possible services to meet the needs of students in a stable, nurturing, and supportive environment. Like all organizational systems, administrators are models for setting cultural expectations and behaviors.
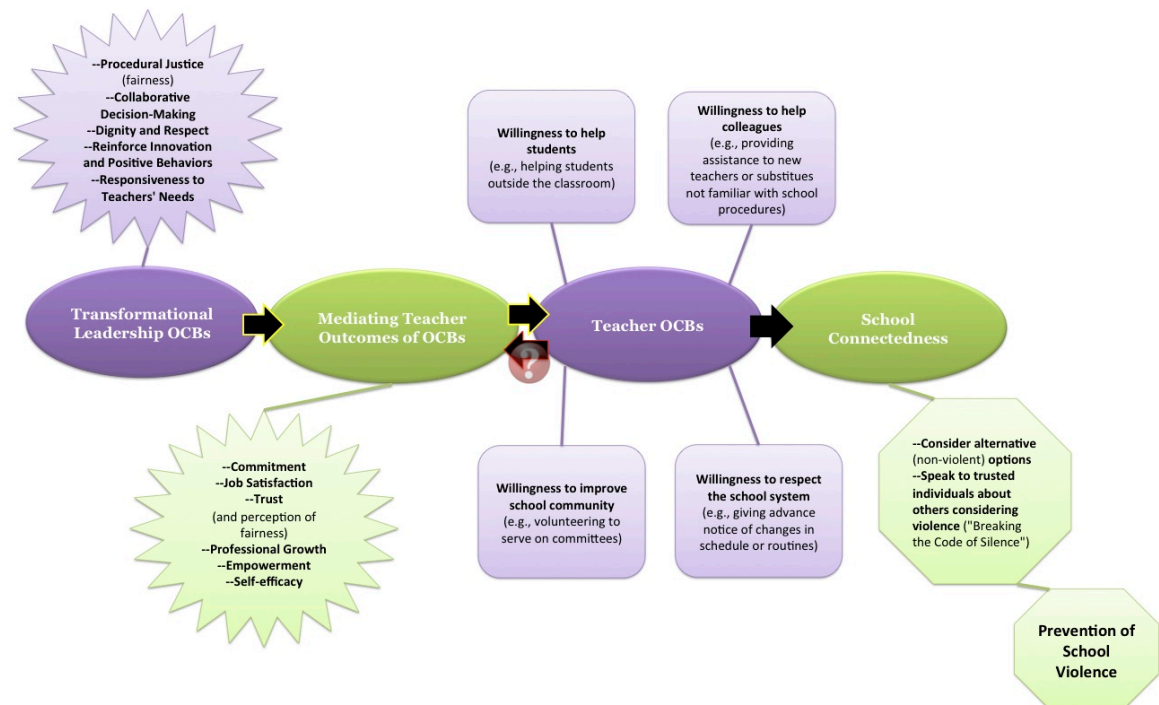
Past studies have identified specific leadership styles that affect school success, teacher OCBs, and school connectedness (DiPaola et al., 2005). Administrative transactional leadership styles convey to teachers that they should expect external rewards for their work, loyalty, and compliance (Graham, 1995). In comparison, empirical evidence suggests that transformational leadership styles in schools, or the extent to which teachers consciously value their work and strive to improve their output (Graham, 1995), are more likely to promote OCBs and school connectedness (Nguni et al., 2006; Vecchio et al., 2008). In addition, administrators who look at the costs and benefits for the school as a whole—while at the same time utilize principles of justice—are more likely to elicit trust, job satisfaction, and commitment in teachers (Belogolovsky, & Somech, 2010; Oguz, 2010).

Transformational leadership OCBs leads to an environment that fosters teacher OCBs, which is the willingness of teachers to participate in activities outside of their regular requirements (DiPaola et al., 2005; Oguz, 2010). Indicators of Teacher OCBs may be broken down into four categories: (1) Willingness to help students, (2) Willingness to help colleagues, (3) Willingness to improve school community, and (4) Overall respect for the organization (DiPalola & Hoy, 2005; Somech & Ron, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2002). In sum, when administrators apply transformational leadership styles and strategies that foster OCBs, there is a social exchange phenomenon (Bogler, & Somech, 2005). Thus, teachers who are recipients of administrative OCBs are more likely to reciprocate such behaviors within the school system, which ultimately fosters school connectedness and reduces school violence (Daniels et al., 2010; Volungis, 2013).

Goal of Paper

The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual framework for school personnel to instill a culture of communal, trusting relationships in the school setting as a means to school violence prevention. More specifically, this paper provides the first known approach to promote school connectedness at the administrative level through an OCB lens. In many ways this paper can be viewed as a "call" to school administrators to recognize that they can have a significant impact on preventing school violence simply by nurturing a culture of trusting relationships among teachers and students. First, we will review the literature on the importance of school connectedness, established through trusting relationships, as well as its link to school violence prevention. Second, we will then review the literature pertaining to OCBs that have been shown to be effective in establishing organizational effectiveness and trusting relationships. This will include suggestions ranging from administrative leadership styles (i.e., transformational) to day-to-day interactions with teachers and students. Finally, concluding comments will summarize how administrative-teacher trusting relationships facilitate teacher OCBs, which ultimately reduces school violence through fostering school connectedness.

Administration-Teacher Interpersonal and Relationship Event Stages

--Procedural Justice (fairness)
--Collaborative Decision-Making
--Dignity and Respect
--Reinforce Innovation and Positive Behaviors
--Responsiveness to Teachers' Needs

Willingness to help students (e.g., helping students outside the classroom)

Willingness to help colleagues (e.g., providing assistance to new teachers or substitutes not familiar with school procedures)

Transformational Leadership OCBs → Mediating Teacher Outcomes of OCBs → Teacher OCBs → School Connectedness

--Commitment
--Job Satisfaction
--Trust (and perception of fairness)
--Professional Growth
--Empowerment
--Self-efficacy

Willingness to improve school community (e.g., volunteering to serve on committees)

Willingness to respect the school system (e.g., giving advance notice of changes in schedule or routines)

--Consider alternative (non-violent) options
--Speak to trusted individuals about others considering violence ("Breaking the Code of Silence")

Prevention of School Violence