What Makes A Successful Principal?

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NZEALS International Leadership Conference, 8 April 2010
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- Background of Study
- Purposes of Study
- Research Design
- Findings
- Conclusions and Implications
- Discussion
Background of Study

- **International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP) – Director is Professor Christopher Day**
  - Multinational
  - Originally 5 countries and now 14
- **Purpose of study**: “To gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics, processes, & mediating influences of successful school leaders in primary and secondary schools in different socioeconomic circumstances in different countries” (Notman, Henry, Latham, Potaka, Ross, & Slowley, 2008).
Research Design

- Multi-site case study methods with inductive cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)
- Six case studies in New Zealand
  - 2 urban primary schools
  - 1 semi-rural primary school
  - 2 urban secondary schools
  - 1 rural secondary school
    - 1 semi-rural primary, 1 urban primary, and 1 urban secondary schools
- Added a community component
Research Questions

- What practices do successful principals use?
- Do these practices vary across contexts?
- What gives rise to successful principal leadership?
- Under what conditions are the effects of such practices heightened or diminished?
Principal Selection Criteria

- At least 5 years as principal in the school
- Positive independent inspection report with regard to leadership & management of the school – used Education Review Office (ERO) report
- Acknowledged by professional peers as a highly respected school and leader
Data Collection

- Principal interviewed 3 times
- Teachers, Deputy Principal, Leadership Team, Board of Trustees Chair, Students, Community members interviewed
- Principal completed extensive questionnaire
- Confidentiality and anonymity
“What gives rise to successful school principal leadership?”
School Profiles

- School A: Lower socioeconomic, multicultural, urban primary school
- School B: Semi-rural, median socioeconomic, primary school
- School C: High decile, urban secondary school
Findings

- Sets priorities and adapted them as the school changed
- Builds community
“...putting it all together. It was a very tumultuous time, ... being able to build the confidence of the teachers’, the students’, the community and pull the whole lot together and ...take the school to a level that we wouldn’t have thought possible before she started.”

School B Parent
Findings Continued

- Has passion and purpose
- Uses reflection and self-diagnosis
Findings Continued

- Develops relationships that are meaningful
- Utilizes direct and indirect leadership
- Is resilient and nurtures resilience in others
Positive Connections

Clear Consistent, and Appropriate Boundaries

Meaningful Participation

Purposes and Expectations

Life-Guiding Skills

Nurture and Support

Findings Continued

- Has a mentor
- Is inclusive, not exclusive
- "Walks the talk"
Conclusions
Successful Principals:

- Listen to others, articulate ideas, and communicate clearly to bring cohesion among the staff and community.
- Understand that relationships are paramount to building a school where values, cultures, and aims are shared by the school and its community.
Successful Principals:

- Take care of self through reflection, self-diagnosis, building resiliency, and honing skills as well as developing new ones
- Respond to the environment
- Balance direct and indirect leadership
Implications

- Principals who have the skills, intuition and knowledge will create the environment for success no matter what they are given. If principals don’t have strengths in those areas, they struggle to have successful schools and leadership will be more difficult.
Implications

- Principals must develop appropriate relationships that protect and strengthen the environment.
- Principals must respond to the changing environment.
- Principals must set up a system to have time to reflect and take care of self that keeps them resilient.
When an effective leader is finished with his work, the people will say it happened naturally.

–Lao Tzu
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