Defining Effective School Leadership

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Abstract:

Accordingto Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5).. There are several characteristics that contribute to a principal being a school leader, however, this article will discuss the characteristics necessary to be an effective school leader. This review suggest recommendations for leaders to enhance the quality of their leadership in order to truly be effective.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, school leadership, ethical leadership, pedagogical leadership, leadership practices

Defining Effective School Leadership

The concept of effective school leadership is not new, however simply managing a school building is no longer enough. Principals are examining the instructional leadership role and how it has increased due to academic accountability. The responsibility of student achievement ultimately falls upon the school principal. School success begins with the school principal, who has a direct effect on the success of the learning organization. It has been noted that leadership is the second most influential school-level factor on student achievement, after teacher quality (Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, & Fetters, 2012).Smith and Andrews (1989) characterized an effectiveinstructional leader as one who gives curriculum and instruction the highest priority, mobilizes resources to enable the accomplishment of goals, and creates a climate of high expectations for academic achievement and respect for all students.This article will identify key traits and behaviors that leaders should demonstrate to be effective instructional leaders.

Defining Leadership

There are many definitions of leadership and the traits and behaviors that one must encompass to be effective. Effective leadership refers to the attributes, actions, and skills demonstrated by rural school leaders that contribute to successful schools, such as staff collaboration, capacity building, and power sharing (Preston & Barnes, 2017). The effectiveness of a leader has the ability to create a vision of the future of the organization, to ensure that the members of the organization focus on this vision, and to show their commitment to the organization (Conger, 1999). Kareem and Patrick (2019) defined educational leadership, as, "the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims" (p. 53).

In order to promote student learning, principals who enact instructional leadership will have a clear vision for their school and will communicate this vision to their staff (McEwan, 2003).Bolman and Deal (2014) presented the Four –Frame model which consist of four frames to include; structural, human resources, political and symbolic.

Bolman and Deal (2014) indicated that as a leader "you don't have to be equally comfortable with all four frames. If certain areas fall outside your comfort zone, expand your field of vision-or work with someone who can help cover for your blind spots" (Bolman& Deal, 2014, p. 145).Evans (2006) described effective

leadership as a willingness to accept responsibility and accountability, and a commitment to support open and honest relationships to motivate others to work together for the common goal of the organization.

Leadership Practices

Through in-depth inquiry of when leaders perform at their best, Kouzes and Posner (2007) identified five practices that can be found in an effective leader. Kouzes and Posner (2007) recommended five exemplary practices that leaders can adopt to empower organizational development:

1. "Model the way-sets example to inspire others to follow, living by what one say and do. Leaders are expected to demonstrate behavior that is exemplary to gain understanding of principles and ideas" (pp. 15-16).
2. "Inspire shared vision-leaders who can discern the vision, turn their dream into actions through concise communication for others to comprehend and act. Leaders inspire commitment, dreams, hopes, aspirations, and vision" (pp. 16-18).
3. "Challenge the process-leaders who are willing to seek for opportunities to innovate, grow and improve and challenge the status quo to venture into the unknown. Always searching for opportunities to learn, and learn from mistakes and failures" (pp. 18-20).
4. "Enable others to act-leaders who seek true results from other. Success comes with teamwork where trust relationship competence, confidence, collaboration and accountability enable others. Have a spirit on inclusion, strengthen capacity, and build trust in team to achieve successful output" (pp. 20-21).
5. "Encourage the heart-leaders demonstrate genuine care for others. Recognized contribution of others, value people, show appreciation and link reward with performance" (pp. 21-23).

These practices serve as a guide for leaders to accomplish as leadership is not a position, but a collection of behaviors practiced.

Pedagogical leadership

Effective leadership helps drive academic achievement, which is perceived through the actions of principals. Over the last decade,instructional leadership has evolved from a principal directed leadership style to a shared instructional leadership model where teacher leaders participate and collaborate to enhance instructional leadership (Shatzer et al., 2014). Classroom walkthroughs and observations are two methods for principals to gain insight into the instructional program within their schools (DiPaola& Hoy, 2009).Blasé and Blasé (1999) endorsed several principal practices that could benefit teachers, including: refining teachers' coaching and reflective conversation skills, modeling effective teaching, and providing resources for teacher development that are designed to meet the needs of adult learners.

Spillane (2006) suggested that improving learning in schools requires collaboration among the strategic players. Within a school, strategic players are the teachers, parents and the community. Consequently, Spillane (2006) emphasized that leadership is part of the vision of improving teaching and learning:

A distributed perspective is not a recipe or a blueprint for practice; it is a framework for focusing diagnostic work and a guide to help us design for improving practice. It is about practice and improvement. We must engage with the practice of leading and managing teaching and learning. Improving practice involves the twin processes of diagnosis and design. A distributed perspective provides a framework for diagnosis and design work. School staffs are key agents in this work. (p. 39)

Ethical leadership

The most common definition used in research of ethical leadership is "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" (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120).

Frank (2002) states that ethical leadership flourishes when one examines his or her inner character.Principals who demonstrate a commitment to their teachers create teachers who demonstrate a commitment to their schools (Dou, Devos,&Valcke, 2017).

Lee and Nie (2014) added that there is an imperative need for principals to adopt a more empowering approach of management to facilitate teacher empowerment effectively.This includes recruitment of qualified teachers, motivation, vision and goal setting, appropriate resource procurement and allocation, organizational development, and support of learning and instruction (Rice, 2010).When teachers perceive their principals as authentic in their empowering behaviors, they develop a higher level of trust and respect for their leaders (Lee &Nie, 2014).

Conclusion

It is apparent with the abundance of available research, that effective leadership supports positive outcomes for school success.   There are so many practices and characteristics that are important qualities for leaders to exhibit. Leadership is regarded as a critical factor to initiate and implement a successful school. Effective school leaders should be able to apply their leadership styles to align their vision with the school in which they lead.Kouzes and Posner (2007) expressed that leaders are pioneers who venture into unknown territory; search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve; experiment; and take risks. Leadership is demonstrated every day through the leader's behavior, voice, respect and confidence. It is impossible for principals alone to effect substantial improvements in schools as it takes a balance of vision, partnership, and commitment.

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