

Leadership at the School Level

Michael Fullan (2005)

READING 5.2

By Liz Cummins and Brett Benkenstein

New challenges of School Leaders

Technical challenges

- We know how to approach them
- Short term results are possible
- Need constant attention
- Eg raising literacy proficiency, teaching a child to read.

Adaptive challenges

- We do not have the answer to
- Requires deep participation of the people with the problem
- Complex, requires sophisticated leadership
- Take longer, more politically charged
- Disequilibrium in resolution inevitable
- Eg changing aspects of culture, involving parents
- Fullan concentrates on these challenges in this piece of work

Assessment for Learning

- Refers to “any assessment for which the first priority is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning” (p54)
- Can change teaching and learning
- Learnable within a reasonable time frame
- Black et al (2003) worked with 36 English & Maths teachers in 6 secondary schools on improving four areas of classroom teaching and learning (p54)
 - Questioning
 - Self and peer assessment
 - Feedback through marking
 - Formative use of summative tests

Results

- If replicated across whole school, it was predicted that schools at the 25th percentile nationally would rise into the upper half. (p54)
- Teachers' perceptions of students having fixed levels of abilities changed.
- Empowering of students and increased motivation.
- Fullan concludes: (p56)
 - Little of this type of teaching currently practiced
 - Sustainable (work smarter not harder)
 - Leadership is responsible for facilitating and leading critical mass changes in pedagogy – improves the school culture
 - Schools with traditionally high scores on achievement tests were no better off because the students had high ability in the first place. No evidence to show that results were due to assessment for learning type teaching methods. Describes these schools as Stoll & Fink's "cruising schools" (p57)

Changing School Culture

- Hay (2004) contends that culture are the shared values and beliefs of an organisation. (p57)
- Conducted a study of cultures in 134 secondary schools in England by asking teachers to rank 30 statements of culture in a hierarchy.
- “High value added” schools had more demanding cultures than “low-value-added.”

High value added schools valued

- Measuring and monitoring targets and results
- Hunger for improvement
- Raising capability – helping people learn
- Focusing on value added (hope for every child)
- Promoting excellence
- Making sacrifices to put pupils first
- Working together

Low value added schools valued

- Measuring and monitoring results
- Warmth and humour
- Recognising personal circumstances
- Keeping up with initiatives
- Creating a pleasant and collegial working environment
- Working together

Conclusions of Hay(2004) study

- Effective cultures establish progressive interactions in which creativity and cohesion are valued
- There is a hunger for improvement, raising capability, working together and high expectations for all
- To improve culture, compare actual against ideal and work on discrepancies

Working with the Community

- Acknowledged as a challenge “right up there with changing school culture” (p60)
- Schools that “have their act together” are more confident and proactive in seeking parent and community connections that support classroom and school work
- Bryk and Schneider (2002) compared high trust and low trust schools in Chicago.
- In the same underprivileged communities teacher attitudes to parents affected their interactions, positively and negatively.
- Difference between poor and middle class parents
- When Principal and teachers reached out to poor parents, student achievement goes up. (p61)
- Middle class parents are most likely to be threatening but if the school includes programs to connect them then they are put in a position to be “proactive and nondefensive”. (p61)
- Noguera (2003) studies urban schools in USA and says educators must work on practical solutions that are complex and require system thinking. (p62.)
- Excellent concluding comment on p62 “the solutions have to be worked out with the stakeholders, and to do this requires skilled, confident school leaders, who have one foot on the present and the other on the sustainability accelerator.”

Conclusions - Stepping Out

- School leaders need a wide range of support to address adaptive issues as well as interacting with peers.
- School districts need to develop ongoing experience and support for principals.
- Support network and partnerships to develop capacities and consolidate system thinking
- To practice system thinking in action, other school leaders and whole school districts including business, community agencies and parents must all have input.
- Discipline and focus as to what the leaders wants is critical, though.
- Commitment of all is vital.
- School leaders need to “step out” so that everyone’s system-thinking capacity can be engaged. (p63)