WELSmain 2021 - Abstracts

September 30, 2021, 16.30 – 17.30 CEST

E7 Role and Function of Education Leadership

Prof. Dr. David Gurr, The University of Melbourne, Australia

Title: Research on Middle Leaders in Schools

The paper provides a review of research on middle leaders in schools. The paper defines middle leaders and explores several established and more recent reviews, combined with discussion of several coherent research programs and research about the impact of middle leaders. Trustworthy claims include: middle leaders impact positively on teacher work and student outcomes; they work to establish the conditions that lead to collective endeavour by teachers to improve teaching and learning; high expectations, leadership focus, role clarity, principal and senior leadership support and professional development enhance their work. More holistic research and a greater practice focus are suggested future research directions.

Zvisinei Moyo, University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg, South Africa

Title: Struggling to make a difference against the odds: a synthesis of qualitative research on women leading schools in Zimbabwe

Purpose
This paper reports on results of a systematic research synthesis of 25 research studies on women in educational leadership and management in Zimbabwe. The aim of this systematic review of research was to report conclusions drawn from a synthesis of findings from studies of gender and educational leadership in Zimbabwe.

Method
The review used systematic methods to identify studies from a variety of relevant databases. The review sourced 25 research studies that examined women leading schools in Zimbabwe. Methods used in the synthesis of qualitative research studies were employed in order to identify three broad themes and related sub-themes across the studies.

Findings
The review identified three themes: 1) barriers to women gaining access to management positions, 2) female ways of leading, 3) context challenges for women leaders. Both barriers to gaining positions and context challenges consisted of an intertwined web of personal, institutional and cultural challenges. Women's ways of leading were characterised as collegial, collaborative and caring.

Implications
Three implications were identified. First, was a need for better statistical information on gender representation in Zimbabwe and other African countries. Second was a need to design and implement training, mentoring and networking support programs for female leaders. Finally, the authors recommend that future research move towards the use of mixed methods research designs capable of achieving complementary research goals.

Matías Sembler, Universidad Diego Portales Santiago de Chile, Chile

Title: Leading high schools in a crisis context: leadership teams during the COVID-19 pandemic in Chile

This study characterizes the leadership of high school leadership teams during the COVID-19 pandemic in Chile. Specifically, the objective is to identify good leadership practices and the main personal resources mobilized in crisis contexts. The conceptual framework corresponds to the leadership practices model developed by Leithwood, research on personal leadership resources and studies on educational leadership in crisis contexts.   The study is empirical and qualitative, based on six case studies, in which members of leadership teams and teachers were interviewed. The information was analyzed through the content analysis technique.   The research results maintain that the main challenge generated by the crisis for the leadership teams is to take responsibility simultaneously for the care of the members of the educational communities and the continuity of the teaching and learning processes. Relational leadership practices and resources are critical to responding to these tasks.   In particular, the practices of providing support and showing consideration, along with building trusting relationships, are essential. This requires mobilizing emotional intelligence as resource, under an approach characterized by resilience.   This challenge is expressed in three key processes faced by leaders of high schools in the context of crisis: responding to a changing context, reorganizing school processes and strengthening external networks.   The study contributes to understanding the reorientation of leadership teams in a crisis context, emphasizing the importance of the relational dimension of leadership. This has implications for the policies that regulate school leadership and for the generation of specialized training programs.

Osman Buleshkaj, University of Prishtina, Kosovo

Title: Leading curriculum: an opportunity for new way of leading in Kosovo schools

The aim of this study was to examine leadership practice applied in the ten curriculum pilot schools in Kosovo. Efforts of school principals and school staff in leading school-based curriculum implementation, internal school re-organization to implement externally driven policy, and professional collaboration amongst school staff, were explored. International studies show how distributed leadership must be linked with leadership for learning and professional collaboration amongst school-teachers. It is a responsibility and an obligation of the school principal to provide opportunities and support capacity development of the school staff. As such, modelling distributed leadership practice and leading learning become essential elements of school principal practice in leading and supporting school improvement. Models of leadership looking at the role of school principals, have recognized the importance of distributed leadership and leadership for learning for successful implementation of new policies and the overall school improvement. Therefore, specific roles of curriculum coordinators, school quality coordinators and curriculum leaders in Kosovo require clarity and structure to ensure effective utilization of school-based leadership capacities. A case study methodology was conducted involving three school principals, twelve teachers, and three curriculum coordinators; two methods of data collection were applied using interviews and focus group discussions. This study conducted in 10 curriculum piloting schools in Kosovo found that school principals practiced distributed, collegial, collaborative, and shared leadership practices to enable implementation of the new curriculum in Kosovo schools. School principals involved school staff in planning and guiding curriculum implementation, established school-based professional teams, and encouraged staff professional collaboration.

Scott Eacott, UNSW Sydney, Australia

Title: A relational inquiry on the provision of schooling: small schools in New South Wales, Australia

Small schools are a significant feature of the education ecosystem. In Australia they make up 22 per cent of all schools and serve some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. While their social and emotional worth to their communities (students, educators, families) is rarely questioned, at times of fiscal contraction (e.g., global pandemic) with government revenue in decline and expenses rising, the pressure to sustain provision through small schools is brought into question. This project aims to advance concepts and theory capable of investigating, describing and explaining the delivery and impact of education through small schools. Drawing on the emerging field of relational studies, this paper introduces a novel approach - relational inquiry into the provision of schooling (RIPS) - and applies that to the case study of small schools in the Australian state of New South Wales. In doing so it calls on geographic information systems analysis, secondary analysis of publicly available datasets and initial insights from case studies to development guidelines to inform rules, policies and systems associated with assessing and supporting the functionality of small schools and how best to prepare and develop school leaders for these schools; and establish a new educational knowledge space of relational inquiry on the provision of schooling.