Trends and Issues in Educational Leadership

1. Current Challenges in Educational Leadership

The purpose of leadership in a finance constraint environment is to effectively manage and lead changes that will free up more resources to be able to make an impact on student learning, and to protect initiatives that they believe are beneficial to student learning from being cut because of lack of funding.

This is difficult because often the decision about where to allocate and reallocate resources to meet new challenges comes from leadership above the principal. Educational leaders must be making informed evidence-based decisions on how to allocate the budget in their school or district given the constraints on discretionary funds that they have to work with. This means knowing what every dime is going towards and what return that dime is getting in terms of impact on student learning.

Finally, developing individual benchmarks for school spending, and monitoring and controlling resources to meet those benchmarks could ensure that the right resources get to the children that need them. The reason this approach is known as cost-effective strategies for compensating teachers is that educational funding will likely not increase in the future, so it's about finding ways to provide the best service and resources given the current money available. This is more about micro-level leadership but largely comes from constraints at a higher level of leadership.

Educational leaders should adopt a programmatic view of financing. A programmatic view can be about asking what are the costs to educate a child to standards, and design a system to provide the funds needed to provide adequate resources. Asking for a cost estimate. An activity-based costing model could be employed to cost students' activities, and resource allocate based on the student's cost. Cost-effective strategies for compensating teachers could also manage teacher salary compensation systems. Another approach is to tie educator compensation directly to resources, that could be done by matching incentives or compensation to targeted student outcomes. This also means getting the most experienced and successful teachers to work with higher need, high-cost students.

It is important to take macro (financial) cultures and micro (local, community or organization) cultures into account when considering the challenges facing

educational leaders. Financial constraints affect the daily lives of teachers and the ability of educational leaders to hire and retain qualified staff. These constraints also affect students in numerous ways.

1.1. Financial Constraints

Presently, the issues encountered in funding educational establishments the world over are growing for the worse. The need for financial resources to ensure the sustainability of schools is growing due to the increase in running costs. Wohlstetter and Odden (1995) had stated that in the US, there is a gap between the current resources and the level of resources needed to achieve effective schooling. The study found that there was a need for 25% more in financial resources to enhance student achievement. This figure is staggering and it is expected that this situation is not only limited to the USA. Globalisation and internationalisation of economies have meant that cost of living and thus education is getting more expensive in certain regions. It is expected that educational leadership in identifying funding resources and allocating them to ensure quality schooling will be of utmost importance in the future. The recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC) has brought about a dire lack of funding to schools in many countries. Kiragu et al. (2012) argue that schools in Kenya are in an underfunded situation with many schools having not received funding from the government for their free primary education programme. This problem has reached Australia, where there have been reports of federal funding cuts to schools as well as claims that some Australian universities will become unviable due to the cuts in government funding (Smith, 2013). From here it is evident that the financial constraints issue is prevalent and will be an ongoing concern for educational leadership in future.

1.2. Increasing Diversity and Inclusion

It is important that every student sees themselves reflected in the curriculum and develops a sense of belonging in the school environment. It is this belonging that is a crucial factor in determining academic success. In the past, the education system has been exclusive and has marginalized certain groups of students. This has not always been a conscious process but the result of schools and educators who have not kept pace with the changing demographics of their student population. In order to rectify this, it is necessary to actively work towards inclusive education. This means identifying and removing the barriers that prevent some students from participating fully in the school environment and ensuring that all students are given the opportunity to learn to their full potential. This effort will require a systemic shift, and educators will need to be provided with professional development and tools to support diversity in their classrooms.

It is increasingly important to include diverse voices and experiences in all aspects of society, and the education system is no exception. Canada is a diverse country, and the student population in Canadian schools is becoming more and more reflective of this. For education in Ontario, this means that there is an increasing number of students who are learning in English or French as a second language. As well, there are also an increasing number of students with special needs that must be met. These students may have a wide range of exceptionalities, but it is important to note that students who have historically been labeled in the education system as having special needs are often groups that have been marginalized in the past. This includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students who may have been directed to special education programs based on a misunderstanding of their learning needs, students from racial minorities, and those of low socio-economic status.

1.3. Technological Advancements

A talented leader of any endeavor should keep a close watch on trends and changes, predicting which forces will impact their organization, and timing their strategies to leverage what is happening in the world outside. Four key aspects of the changing times must be considered as new forms of organizations are being shaped. These four forces, choice, diversity, accountability, and inequality, are acting in such a way that the very nature of the democracy has been altered, and are reshaping the social, economic, and cultural context of education. This will not alter the fundamental fact that education is a public good and a basic human right, but it will change the ways in which schools are organized, curriculum is delivered, and educational resources are allocated. How these forces are leveraged to improve learning for students is the ultimate leadership challenge of the next decade. In the global knowledge society of the 21st century, advanced education is one of the most important factors in a nation's future development. The societies that are the most successful in terms of sustainable economic development and who have the highest standards of living will be the ones that have people who can sort through the abundance of information and make good decisions about complex problems. This matches directly the kinds of student success that educational leaders aspire to and want to systematically improve. But where many nations are taking the wrong fork in the road is assuming that the measure of success and quality in education is generating gains on test scores and university admissions. Multiple measures show that in the so-called high-stakes, test-driven accountability systems that are prevalent today, access to a quality education is actually being decreased for many students and groups of students. This is especially concerning in an era where the United States is increasingly diverse, and gaps in educational and economic disparities are already growing. Educational leaders in many countries had the misfortune of assuming that the current era would be temporary and chose policy and budget decisions that

were harmful to long-term system development. In the current era, education leaders must understand that the globalization of the 21st century is a permanent and tectonic era in which their actions will be decisive in whether nations' education systems prosper or decline. Now more than ever, there is a great need for leadership that can envision policy and make decisions that are in the best long-term interest of students and learning, and create public understanding and support for those decisions.

1.4. Globalization and Internationalization

In the last century, globalization has had both positive and negative effects on educational leadership in the United States. During the past century, many have claimed that the prevalence of a global economy has increasingly impacted the socio-political dynamic of everyday life. With the increasing dominance of global economic systems, the capacity to regulate and facilitate knowledge and culture between international perspectives dictates the ability of individuals to function within this system. In employing global strategy for knowledge transmission, internationalization of education at post-secondary levels has become a primary focus. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, to prepare students for work and citizenship in a global era, higher education must provide more international and global curricular and co-curricular opportunities as well as create more globally oriented campuses (2003, para. 11). Such a concept holds immense weight for educational leadership, and bears significant impact on the leaders of educational institutions. With an increasing focus on preparing students for a global society, understanding the ways in which internationalization affects education and the role of educational leaders has become an important area of study.

2. Emerging Trends in Educational Leadership

The first of the emerging trends is that of transformational leadership. This particular style of leadership is one that is used to implement change within an organization. Its effects have been profound in many areas particularly in the business sector although its applicability within the educational environment is one that can be argued. Transformational leadership involves leaders working closely with their staff and being strongly focused in terms of what it expects from its staff and the outcomes from the organization. Changes are made through the identified weaknesses with a collaborative effort from staff and leaders are ultimately able to generate trust and respect from staff through considerable influence. It is through this influence that leaders are able to motivate staff and generate higher morale with the prospects of further development and change. This type of leadership has been welcomed in many areas because of its successes in changing levels of student

learning. However, the education sector can be a difficult environment to expect change from and there are certain aspects of this kind of leadership that may not be widely welcomed. An example would be through the higher expectations of performance from staff. While some high expectations can be a positive way to generate change, unreasonable expectations that cause any form of stress or anxiety in the workforce can have negative effects on teacher wellbeing and ultimately influence the possibility of change in a negative way. Throughout all attempts of change with one style or another, the true challenge is to strive for an improvement in student learning and it is still inconclusive as to whether the transformational leadership style is one that can guarantee this.

The following section of the essay will critically explore the new and emerging trends for leaders within the educational environment. To date, these trends have been very influential in shaping the role of a leader and generating personal and professional development. It is evident that some of these new trends have been much more effective than others and there has been a mixed response about impact and practicality of each trend. This paper will look at the changes in light of how important it is for leaders to continue developing and how much of an impact these trends have had in terms of maximizing student development through teacher learning.

2.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that involves a high degree of communication between the leader and his followers regarding a shared vision of the future. The leader is expected to effectively communicate the future vision to their followers who in turn might raise their own leader expectations till their provides them with a mutual stimulation and intellectual motivation that makes the followers feel the need to changes their own conduct to support their leaders vision. This then turns out to create a higher standard of conduct. Transformational leadership goes beyond exchange theory and moving towards something better. This has a greater appeal to morality and higher order needs in people. By providing a vision to the followers, it can act as a source of inspiration, a sense of identity and the work itself can determine to be motivating if the followers are able to believe in the end result. This is shown to raise followers expectations and motivation ultimately converting followers to leaders. This can result in an increase in productivity and efficiency where the leader and followers can help each other to move to a higher level.

2.2. Distributed Leadership Models

Distributed leadership models have been proposed as a very powerful tool that enables executing the vision for existing in numerous domains that involves school leadership and management. Distributed leadership has been associated with making a role distinction as well as separating the "leadership" from the person who happens to be occupying the leadership role. This has been seen as a means for empowering leadership practice in various management positions and providing a key to intellectual work across many professions. Spillane et al. (2001) suggests that what leaders do is create the conditions (intentionally or unintentionally) that facilitate the work of others and restrict it. The focus of distributed leadership is to compare what people do that influences the work of others in organizations, to what leaders do in positional terms. It is generally concerned with leader behavior across all levels of the educational system and its effects on the ways in which teachers can exercise their agency to influence what students learn and experience in the schools. This broad view of leadership practice suits some forms of investigation, but distributed leadership is also about leaders at various levels yielding their positional power and influence to work collegially on complex issues. This includes work in Headteacher/Principal and other senior leadership positions moving from hierarchical forms of team leadership in order to pool their experience and expertise to work on issues of educational improvement. This requires an involvement in the collective more than their individual work alone. Wildfire and Spillane (2005) dug this through a study of leadership re-culture in urban schools compared to the initiatives of school leaders.

2.3. Data-Informed Decision Making

Educational leadership is facing an increasingly demanding environment, especially given the impact of educational policies on student achievement. There is growing recognition of the need for administrators to lead their schools and districts in using data to inform practice. It is expected that effective use of data will result in higher quality instruction; enhanced decision making at all levels of the educational system; and improved student learning and achievement. A number of factors contribute to the growing interest in data as a tool for school improvement. The reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has been a major impetus. NCLB put a strong emphasis on the use of data for accountability through the testing of students in reading and math. These tests are intended to provide information on the performance of individual students as well as the overall performance of schools and school districts. NCLB requires states to implement statewide accountability systems based on reliable and valid assessments. This in turn requires the development of data systems that can track students' progress over time and provide information on the

effectiveness of different programs. A second factor is the improvement in technology for data management and analysis. Many educators are unaware of what data systems can now do for them, and still think of data in terms of the annual state assessment test. In fact, data from a wide range of formative and summative assessments can now be used to guide an improvement process. This includes data on the implementation of specific programs as well as student demographic information. With the use of data increasing in other sectors, such as medicine and business, there is a growing understanding of what it means to be a data-informed organization. This in turn has created a demand from educators for training in how to use and interpret data, and what it means to be a data-informed school or district. Finally, there is a growing body of research that shows that the use of data can significantly improve the learning environment for students if done thoughtfully. As a result, many educational leaders have become convinced that their efforts are best focused on changing the practices of adults in the system through the use of data, rather than implementing another quick fix innovation aimed directly at students.

2.4. Collaborative Partnerships

While there is a strong moral case for distributed and collaborative leadership, it is vital that educators be discriminating and not simply embrace any or all collaborative initiatives. The potential inherent in collaboration is by no means guaranteed, and some ventures have minimal impact or can even be detrimental. Robinson (2008) contends that "highly effective collaboration is quite different from the 'motherhood' notion that teachers collaborating always have a positive impact on student learning". One potential strong avenue for educational leaders to engage in fruitful collaborative partnerships is with academics. A developing body of research indicates that there is much potential benefit to be gained from stronger connections between the education sector and the education faculties of universities. A recent project funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) involving academics and educational leaders investigating the impact of education leadership on student learning is a demonstration of the potential benefits of such collaboration. Sustained collaborations of this nature have the potential to bridge the gap between educational research and practice and enhance the quality of school leadership and its impact on student learning through improved access to research and research-informed practice.

Moving away from the isolated and individually focused case of the dominant traditional leadership paradigm, collaborative forms of leadership are growing in significance and acceptance. This is being driven to a significant degree by the increasing complexity of social issues and the growing awareness of the limitations of individual change initiatives. In the education sector, the development of shared

leadership practices that reflect a collaborative culture is being shown to have a meaningful impact on teaching and learning. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2011, p. 246) report that in their extensive study of leadership effects in school organizations, the leadership characteristic that had the most impact on student learning was "the development of a professional community of teachers focused on student learning". Shared leadership is a key factor in the development of a professional community, and as such, there is a growing body of literature documenting the relationship between leadership and student learning. A recent meta-analysis of studies on distributed forms of leadership, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), report that there is a clear association between distributed forms of leadership and increased student achievement. It is important to note, however, that not all forms of collaboration are equal in their capacity to impact student learning. A focus on learning and teaching is essential.

2.5. Culturally Responsive Leadership

In today's culturally diverse society, the need for culturally responsive leaders is becoming increasingly important. Cultural responsiveness is defined as the ability to value, engage, and include the diversity of the student body and communities served, wherein the learning is validated and the student is connected to the curriculum. The changing demographics of the student population, the federal emphasis on high standards and school accountability, and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act are some of the reasons cited in the report to justify the pressing need for cultural leadership. Title I and No Child Left Behind legislation require that all students achieve high learning standards and that educational equity gaps be closed between advantaged and less advantaged subgroups. Societal disparities evidenced through health, income, education, and incarceration rates suggest that minorities are disproportionately represented in conditions of lower status. Schools have a significant opportunity to interrupt these patterns by developing strong leadership for high standards and equality of educational opportunity. (NCBE, 2004) Former NCBE Commissioner and culturally responsive educational leadership expert, Russell Skiba, defines inequity as differences in access or outcomes that are systematically associated with, or result from, arbitrary factors including but not limited to race, gender, class, or ethnicity. An inequitable educational system is one where differences in educational resources, achievement, or treatment are closely associated with group membership. Achieving equity in educating our increasingly diverse student body is another urgent issue. Cultural representation disparities between the student population and teaching or administrative staff can contribute to a lack of cross-cultural understanding, low expectation and achievement levels for minority students, and the marginalization or exclusion of students from the educational

process. A culturally responsive leader is one who takes an active role in reducing these disparities and combating inequity by raising the achievement of all students and closing achievement gaps. The pressure to improve student achievement and eliminate disparities provides definitive goals for a cultural leadership agenda.

3. Leadership Development and Training Programs

The two principal associations have created web-based tools and services to help members get more from their membership and provide guidance for professional growth. A recent survey of U.S. principals found that close to ninety percent of U.S. school principals are members of a principal association. As students increasingly grow up in a digital world, members of these associations are asking for online access to products and services to better fit their professional and personal lifestyles. Principal associations offer a significant source of professional community among school leaders and are key venues for accessing other professional development opportunities. The web services and tools being created are tapping into databases and electronic communication schemes to help leaders connect with resources and expertise more efficiently. Principals seek programs built around their busy schedules and say web-based programs can bridge barriers of time and location. This shift aligns with changes in professional development practices that are facilitating learning over extended periods of time and enabling access to support and resources. An example of how this is affecting leader learning is the new National Institute for School Leadership by NAESP and AASA. This program is designed around a methodology of study, collegial inquiry, and practicality to improve practice and to develop and retain high-quality leaders.

The National Staff Development Council, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals all have made recent and significant changes to their professional development programs that impact school leader development. The National Staff Development Council's effort in redesigning standards for professional development holds potential for improving leader development opportunities. The new NSDC standards identify the essential conditions for professional learning that strengthen the knowledge and practices of educators. The standards establish criteria for professional learning that promotes active engagement of leaders, occurs in a supportive environment, includes time for collaboration and study, uses models and modeling of effective practice, provides coaching, and leads to practice and program application by participants. The standards provide a defensible rationale for leaders to support specific professional development opportunities and a benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of those learning experiences.

3.1. Professional Development Opportunities

Professional development can take on numerous forms and varies in effectiveness. A recent study that surveyed almost 50,000 teachers indicated that the traditional "workshop" was among the least effective forms of professional development (O'Brien, 2001). There is, however, promise in professional development opportunities that result in changes in teaching practice and student learning. One meta-analysis of 35 studies found that in order to affect student achievement, professional development needs to be ongoing, intensive, and connected to learning and teaching. It also needs to engage teachers in active learning processes and be strongly related to the specific context in which the teacher is working (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009) (Blank, et al., 2009). This type of professional development holds promise for making changes in leader practices too, as it shares many of the same principles in effective learning for adults. Whether teachers or leaders, the goal of professional development is to increase student achievement through improving practices. Hult and Lennung refer to enhanced leader practices and student achievements as the "ultimate aim" of professional development (2009, p. 177). This sort of change, however, does not result from many professional development experiences. Using Guskey's framework for evaluating professional development, there is often a lack of clarity from the beginning as to what the learner will gain. Activity is mistaken for learning, as participants engage in lectures and sit and get meetings, but fail to engage in cognitive processes resulting in new understanding. Participants' attitudes do not change and ultimately there is no change in practice and no effectiveness on student achievement (Guskey, 2000). There are, however, professional development opportunities that are effective at changing leader practices and result in increased student achievement.

3.2. Mentoring and Coaching Programs

Mentoring and coaching programs are perhaps the single most popular leadership development activity in the United States today. Many school districts and administrator training academies have some sort of mentoring or internship program designed to attract and train potential leaders into the education profession. A mentor is seen as "a senior, experienced person (usually outside the protégé's line of supervision) who provides professional and personal advice to a less experienced person (the protégé)". A mentor's intention is to develop a supportive and constructive relationship with the protégé in order to further the career development of the protégé. Coaching on the other hand, is a "process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve". Coaches are thought to be individuals who work with leaders to help them clarify their vision and achieve it with minimal distraction and deterrence. Both mentors

and coaches are there to facilitate a leader's development and enhance their professional learning.

3.3. Leadership Certification and Accreditation

There are currently 39 states that have some sort of licensure for school administrators. These vary from state to state, but most require a master's degree, an internship, and a passing score on a state competency exam. One consistent trend among the states is the move from licensure to certification. It is anticipated that the move to certification will increase national professional standards and offer portability of the credential from state to state. The movement from licensure to certification is in response to the educational leadership position as well as pre K-12 teachers increasingly being required to prove competency through a certification process. Professional teaching certification has become particularly important in the teacher hiring process, with many states requiring teachers to complete certification within a certain time period of beginning employment. It is anticipated that in the future, the leadership certification process will affect hiring practices for educational leaders in a similar way.

4. Ethical Considerations in Educational Leadership

Ethical considerations within the educational leadership sphere are of particular importance as the nature of the decisions and the resulting impact invariably involves the well-being of students and educational staff. Starratt (2005) provides a useful definition for the concept of ethics within the context of the educational leadership field: "Educational administration ethics is micro-ethics. It is about the morality of the decisions they make and the consequences of such actions on human dignity" (Pg.67). Duignan (2006) comments that educational leaders are moral agents and that varied value systems involving issues of what is good and bad, right and wrong, will be a common feature in the decision-making and contemplation of educational leaders. Adhering to this role as a moral agent requires an adherence to a certain range of admirable features. Sergiovanni (1992) suggests that educational leaders abide by a defined code of ethics, take prescribed norms and values seriously, and preside over a community that shares the said norms and values. It is important for educational leaders to not only make ethical decisions but to be able to identify what is an ethical decision and assess the worth and validity of its consequences. Lickona (1992) suggests that education leaders should cultivate moral thinking and decision making amongst students and staff. This implies an ethical decision has not only to be identified but it has to be able to be rationalized and analyzed in the pursuit of identifying what is the best course of moral action.

4.1. Ethical Decision Making

In making ethical decisions, leaders are required to move beyond their personal value systems and be able to apply a range of values in decision making on behalf of the institutions they serve. Sergiovanni states that "In a pluralistic society, individuals process and adhere to a variety of often conflicting values that are largely a function of one's culture, family upbringing, religious or spiritual affiliation, and personal experience" (1992, p. 220). Educational leaders are faced with a plethora of difficult decisions that require a consideration of conflicting values. For example, a head of department may realize that the allocation of resources unfairly advantages students in certain classes over others. The decision the head of department makes regarding this issue will require an examination of conflicting values surrounding fairness, individual vs. collective needs, and social justice. In facing such complex decisions, it is essential that leaders have well-honed critical thinking skills. Requiring distance from the issue at hand, the critical thinker is able to make decisions objectively by evaluating the rights and wrongs of potential courses of action. It is imperative that educational leaders involve their subordinates in critical thinking efforts, encouraging them to expose potential errors in the leader's thinking and evaluating the decision in terms of its effects on stakeholders.

4.2. Equity and Social Justice

At a global level, the most marginalized and vulnerable populations are frequently those that are displaced. The educational needs of refugee and immigrant children are profound. The destruction of cultural resources and disrupted learning can be lifelong for some displaced populations. The children of indigenous populations are also among the most marginalized and vulnerable learners on a global basis. Their learning needs are complex and unique and are often situated within a complex interplay of local, national, and international forces. The voices of indigenous learners are seldom heard and even more rarely understood in education policymaking circles. The provision of inclusive and enabling education opportunities at all levels for indigenous and marginalized populations is a matter of equity and social justice that extends well beyond the removal of barriers to participation in mainstream education.

In educational systems around the world, significant access barriers exist which result in differential learning outcomes among children. National as well as international research clearly demonstrates the educational impact of poverty and inequality on the educational experiences and outcomes of young people. Research consistently demonstrates that socio-economic status is one of the strongest predictors of student learning achievement. Low-income students can begin school

with learning delays as early as 3 years of age and by the time they are 15 years old, they can be up to 6 years behind their more affluent peers (Aus. Dept. Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000).

4.3. Ethical Leadership Practices

Some leadership practices are more ethical than others. Insofar as leadership requires the mobilization of human and material resources, the word often connotes the exercise of power. In its worst manifestations, power is exercised in ways injurious to both the subordinates and the organization being led. Coercion, manipulation, and self-serving politics are but a few of the negative ways in which leadership power is wielded. While these practices may have short-term utility, their long-term effects are frequently counterproductive. They undermine subordinates' self-esteem, alienate them, and breed distrust and hostility. They frequently result in lowered job satisfaction and commitment, increased absenteeism and turnover, and sometimes threats of violence directed toward leaders. It is clearly in the interest of effective leadership and organizational effectiveness to find ways for leaders to exercise power that are beneficial, or at least not harmful, to the followers and the organization. The first step toward a more ethical exercise of leadership power is for leaders to become more aware of how they are using their power. This is a difficult task because many uses of power become so routine and are taken so much for granted that they are difficult to bring into conscious awareness. Leaders must consistently ask themselves "What is the purpose served by my behavior?" and "What are its intended and unintended consequences for the subordinates and the organization?" Doing this would make leaders more alert to potential negative effects of their behavior and more open to alternative ways of exercising power.