General Paper Proposal for ICSEI 2018
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Connection to the Conference Theme: Leading Capacity for Change

Title of the Paper:
School Leadership That Cares: The Impact of a Positive Growth Mindset on School Culture

A new mindset of how one views school leadership in relation to the culture of the organization needs to occur (Conway & Andrews, 2016). Carol Dweck (2006) states that what people believe, they will achieve. She claims that people’s beliefs about themselves and the nature of their abilities determines how they interpret their experiences and can set the boundaries of what they accomplish.

Believing in these foundational truths establishes the purpose of this paper which is to focus on the importance of leaders who have a caring growth mindset and the impact this has on the sustainment of innovative changes in school practices through the establishment and development of Cultures of Belonging. These Cultures of Belonging essentially create the conditions necessary to guide the direction needed for successful, sustainable whole school improvement. Sustainability is dependent on caring leadership that is innovative and creative and that increases both individual and collaborative capacities through the promotion of changes in school practices by further enhancing student learning outcomes. (Leithwood, & Mascall, 2008; Hargreaves, 1999).

The research study’s framework, a Cultural-Relational Leadership (CRL) model (Bauman, 2015) considers the relationship between formal and informal school leadership as it is associated with caring, a sense of belonging, mindset, organizational culture, success and revitalization. Autono-collaborative leadership (Bauman, 2015) was an approach that actively engaged both the principals and teachers as it emphasized the importance of collective action, distributed leadership (Harris, 2004, 2013) and parallel leadership (Crowther & Associates, 2011). This was further evidenced by the leaders’ growth mindset which supported sustained trusting relationships built on care and a belief system that enriched a sustainable Culture of Belonging.

The school sites that participated in this research study were three elementary schools in Ontario, Canada (Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8) that demonstrated an increase in provincial assessments (EQAO) at the grade 3 and grade 6 levels for a sustained period of 5 years. The
principals and elementary teachers from these three schools were the participants in this research study.

Recognizing that people enact the reality of their everyday world of work invokes a powerful way of thinking about leadership and school culture (Schein, 2016). Rethinking means teachers and school principals must attempt to understand leadership and school culture as an ongoing, proactive process of reality construction (Bauman, 2015).

The focus of this research was the experiences of principals and teachers as they attempted to master leadership within their respective school contexts. In particular, the case study reports on the lived experiences of principals and teachers and the process of empowerment both individually and collaboratively that enabled them to effectively action leadership and impact school culture (Conway, 2014). The research approach taken was a qualitative interpretivist case study where the case of the empirical investigation is bounded by the phenomenon that the impact of caring leadership had on school culture. The data collected by unstructured interviews enabled the researchers to derive a deep understanding of particular instances of phenomena (Mabry, 2008, p.214). As the qualitative interpretivist study is positioned, all knowledge is personally constructed (Glassam, 2001) and personal experience provides the basis for individuals’ construction of knowledge in regards to their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From the personal experiences related in the interviews, a thematic analysis was undertaken and presented as enabling factors for caring principal and teacher leaders within their respective contexts and then across contexts.

The findings indicated that both teachers and principals enjoy autonomy as well as collaboration in their work settings further ensuring both individual and collaborative efforts at varying levels to bring about and sustain changes. The significance of this research study has further emphasized the importance of a caring mind set on the part of individuals as well as the importance of the need to belong as it relates to collective action. This research study’s framework, a Cultural-Relational Leadership (CRL) model explains the relationship between a caring leader’s sense of belonging as it connects to mindset, organizational culture, sustained success and student achievement.

The research study is significant in that the interpretive findings from the data were also reinforced by international researchers. Through the enactment of a Cultural-Relational
Leadership (CRL) model, caring leadership and a sense of belonging play a key role in learning and organizational success. If a teacher feels excluded, anxious, or inadequate, he or she is less likely to become engaged in participating in whole-school revitalization processes that lead to increases in student well-being and achievement (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). School leaders who care are very pivotal in developing sustainable individual and collaborative leadership processes that foster successful whole school improvement. It is the growth mindset of a leader to believe in and care for staff and school community members that significantly contributes to the success of a school organization.

References


