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Caribbean Perspectives

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Introduction

Research on successful and effective school leadership has been around for some time with different positions being taken up in relation to what is meant by 'successful' and 'effective'. Indeed, several studies and reports from researchers, school inspectors and others have claimed that leadership is arguably the most important factor in organisational effectiveness and the key to success and improvement (Earley, 2013). It is now widely acknowledged that high quality leadership is one of the key requirements of successful schools and that leaders can have a significant positive impact on student outcomes. Leithwood & Seashore-Louis (2012) summarise the consistency of these findings when they state 'to date, we have not found a single documented case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership' (p.3). In Earley's (2013) view, 'The Caribbean is no different and leadership, leaders and their development are crucial to the future success of all educational systems' (p.7).

The role of the principal is repeatedly emphasised in the literature on school leadership. Yet, according to Kruger & Schreerens (2012), 'despite the many researchers and the many definitions of leadership appearing in the literature, there remains very little consensus concerning what leadership is and what it comprises' (p.1). In the context of the Caribbean, Miller (2013a) argues 'It may not be possible to construct a unitary definition of Caribbean school leadership particularly as school leadership is exercised in multiple ways across

territories' (p.195). Similarly, Earley (2013) proposes there is no 'identikit' leadership style (p.7) pointing instead to the need for principals to interact sensitively with local contexts, peoples and communities.

The international literature on effective schools cites leadership that is firm and purposeful, involves others in decision-making, uses data to help make decisions, exhibits instructional leadership, monitors performance and standards and promotes a culture of high expectations (Mendels, 2012; Kirk & Jones, 2004; Lezotte, 2001). As Earley (2013) notes, 'Effective school organisations also demonstrate a positive culture where a shared vision is shown, and an orderly environment and positive reinforcement emphasised' (p.8). Miller (2013a, p.183) cautions against 'Westernised school leadership influences being deployed en-masse without contextual modifications in the Caribbean'; a point also supported by Pashiardis et al (2011) but which contrasts with that made by an influential report from the McKinsey Corporation which concluded 'good leadership is the same irrespective of context, and "what works" is surprisingly consistent' (Barber et al, 2010, p.3). The McKinsey Report highlights a set of practices which effective leaders share, and a common set of beliefs, attitudes and personal attributes which they possess. Similarly, Miller & Hutton (2014) in a small scale comparative study of principals' values and beliefs in Jamaica and England, found that in both countries are driven by, broadly speaking, the same beliefs, attitudes and personal attributes.

Principals influence school success regardless of culture or context. Studies have specifically considered the relationship between leadership and school success (e.g.: Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Day et al, 2011) argue that the effect of leaders, is largely indirect; what leaders do and say, how they demonstrate leadership, does affect the learning outcomes of students, but it is largely through the action of others, teachers for example, that the effects of school leadership

are mediated. Day et al (2009 and 2011) found a small number of personal traits explained the variation in the effectiveness and success of leadership. Principals' values, strategic intelligence and leadership strategies were key 'in shaping the school and classroom processes and practices which result in improved pupil outcomes' (Day et al, 2009, p.2). Leaders were found to 'improve teaching and learning and thus pupil outcomes indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, teaching practices and through developing teachers' capacities for leadership' (Day et al, 2009, p.2).

School leadership research in the Caribbean

Sustained research into the theory and practice of school leadership and management in the English-speaking Caribbean is an emerging field. For example, over the three years between 2012-2014 there have been three publications aimed at providing understanding and assessment of educational leadership and management issues through regional lens (See: *The Changing Nature of Educational Leadership*, (Miller, 2012); *School Leadership in the Caribbean*, (Miller 2013a); and *Education for All in the Caribbean*, (Miller, 2014a). These have been supplemented by national studies covering such topics as, *High-performing principals* (Hutton, 2011); *Curriculum planning and implementation* (Roofe, 2014); *universal secondary education* (Knight, 2014); *'Inclusive education'* (Brown & Lavia, 2013); *teacher and principal development* (Bissessar, 2013); *transformational leadership practices in emergency situations* (Shotte, 2013) and *educational policy and secondary schooling* (Beepat, 2013).

Although school leadership practice in the Caribbean is by no means uniform several issues have been observed between countries. For example, career progression to the principalship has been found to be problematic in Guyana and Trinidad (Miller, 2013a) and in Jamaica (Miller, 2013b). Similarly, the preparation and development of principals throughout the region is not standardised (Bissessar, 2013; McCallum, 2013) although Jamaica, through the National

College for School Leadership, is trying to lead regional improvements in this area. This chapter examines what principals know and do as successful and effective leadership in the Caribbean. In answering the question, 'What does successful and effective school leadership look like in the Caribbean?' it considers both individual and national contexts.

Conceptual Framework

Successful and effective school leadership is dependent on several discrete yet overlapping components, the most obvious of which may be training. Inputs that are not as obvious, for example experience, can play an equally important part throughout an individual's professional life; since, over time, they will encounter, interact with and engage with several individuals, some of whom they may even come to mimic, admire or resent. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory provides that experience is *the* source of learning and development and that experiential learning is not rationalist but is instead an evolving process not defined by fixed notions and ideas. Knowledge and interventions such as formal training however ought not to be seen as oppositional to experience since, according to James (1980), knowledge is derived from and is continually tested out in the experiences of the learner.

Similarly, tacit knowledge is contrasted with explicit or propositional knowledge (Polanyi, 1958) as important constructs in how knowledge is created and how knowledge and experience interacts. Explicit knowledge is captured in words, writing and drawings, knowledge that has possibilities of being universal, supporting the capacity to act across contexts. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is unarticulated, 'as yet unspoken', tied to the senses in movement skills and accumulated physical experiences. It 'indwells' (Polanyi, 1966) and is rooted in local action, procedures, routines, commitment, ideals, values and emotions. Not everyone sees the notion

of tacit knowledge as a distinct or, indeed, useful form of knowledge (Fodor, 1968). For example, Hildreth & Kimble (2002) also make the case that tacit and explicit knowledge are seldom entirely distinct and inherently inseparable, but interact dynamically along a continuum. Resolving these tensions is beyond this paper. However, suffice to say that effective and successful leadership is a factor of tacit and explicit knowledge, and when used together this can positively impact an organisation's direction. As suggested by Ambrosini & Bowman (2001), to speak a sentence that captures explicit knowledge one needs tacit knowledge to utter it, to pause, shape sounds, find and use rhythm.

Literature Review

Notions of successful and effective leadership vary and overlap depending on who is doing the defining and on the context. In general however, successful and effective leaders are believed to shape the future of their institution, lead learning and teaching, develop self and others, manage and improve their institution, secure accountability and strengthen internal and external links between institution and community (Department for Education & Skills, 2004). The following may illustrate the contested nature of the field.

Successful leadership

Drawing on several research studies on successful leadership, it is possible to gain insights into what successful school leadership is. For example, Leithwood et al (2006) proposed *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership*. Furthermore, from their meta-analysis of leadership, Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd (2009) identified five dimensions which influence success in schools. Drawing on previous studies, in their IMPACT research study, Day et al

(2009), proposed eight key dimensions of successful leadership, in the forms of: vision, values and direction; improving conditions for teaching and learning; restructuring the environment (roles and responsibilities); enhancing teaching and learning; redesigning and enriching the curriculum; enhancing teacher quality and succession planning; building relationships inside school; building relationships outside school and common values.

Taken together, the studies recognise that successful leaders have different starting points and recognition that successful leadership requires a combination of cognitive and emotional understandings connected to clear sets of standards and values, the contextual application of strategies, and enduring commitment to people and education (Day & Leithwood, 2007). Nevertheless, from the available literature, it there appears five characteristics which successful principals are expected to demonstrate: show passion, commitment and personal accountability (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd (2009); articulate moral purpose and manage tensions and dilemmas (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007); focus on learning and development of others in the school (Leithwood et al (2006); make emotional and rational investment (Leithwood et al (2006) and emphasise the personal and the functional (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd (2009).

Effective leadership

The relationship between school leadership and its relationship to student learning has been considered in the following terms:

Effective headteachers provide a clear vision and sense of direction for the school. They prioritise. They focus the attention of staff on what is important and do not let them get diverted and side-tracked with initiatives that will

have little impact on the work of students. They have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of their staff. They know how to build on the strengths and reduce the weaknesses. They can focus their programme of staff development on the real needs of their staff and school. They can gain view through a systematic programme of monitoring and evaluation. Their clarity of thought, sense of purpose and knowledge of what is going on mean that effective headteachers can best out of their staff, which is the key to influencing work in the classroom and to raising the standards achieved by students (NCSL, 2001, p.1).

From their meta-analysis of leadership, Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd (2009) identified three dimensions of effective pedagogical leadership. In addition, the Wallace Foundation (2012) provides eight characteristics of effective leadership which provide important pointers about the work of effective leaders and bespeak the importance of principals showing emotional intelligence (Harris, 2006). From their review of school leadership practices in international contexts, Barber et al, (2010) found “high-performing principals did not necessarily work longer hours than other principals; however, more time was spent with other people in their school: they walk the halls more, spend more time coaching teachers, interact more with parents and external stakeholders, and spend more time with students” (p.47). Similarly, Hutton (2013), found that ‘high performing principals’ in Jamaica spent time getting to know staff and were passionate, committed and possess a clear vision. Furthermore, Hallinger & Lee (2013), reported that how principals used their time was influenced by sociocultural and institutional factors

Methodology

This study was conducted to gain an initial understanding of what principals in the Caribbean (a) know about what Successful and Effective leaders do; and (b) from their own practice, what they 'do' as Successful and Effective leaders. A quantitative approach was used in order to provide useful baseline data for a more extensive study to be conducted on a regional or national basis. The data presented in this paper was elicited from a short questionnaire comprised of a two main sections with two subscales each. The two main themes were: (a) knowing and doing successful leadership and (b) knowing and doing effective leadership. Under each section there were two subscales each with seven items. Each item required respondents to rank them on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest. Snowballing sampling was used to select the participants for the survey questionnaire which was emailed by the researcher to University contacts in Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Barbados and Grenada. There were 12 respondents: 1 secondary principal and 11 primary principals. Three principals were from Guyana and nine from Jamaica. There were two male primary principals, both from Jamaica and one secondary principal, also from Jamaica.

The survey was developed by the researcher- drawing on several studies on Successful (e.g.: Leithwood et al, 2006; Day & Leithwood, 2007) and Effective Leadership (Kirk & Jones, 2004; Lezotte, 2001). Section A required principals to identify what they know about Successful and Effective Leadership, and Section B required them to note what they do in relation to Successful and Effective Leadership. The same questionnaire was used for 'knowing' and 'doing' thereby allowing the researcher to gauge the extent to which what is known is practiced. The main question was, 'What does successful and effective school leadership look like in the Caribbean?' Data were analysed with the use of Microsoft Excel Mega Stats Add Ins.

Findings

A. Knowing and doing successful leadership

This section has two parts: knowing about successful leadership and doing successful leadership. Figure 1 shows a summary of the responses for the subscales of knowing and doing successful leadership. Since the lower the scores the higher the ranking, it is noted that Jamaican Participant 4 scored lowest in both knowing and doing. Participants 10, 11, and 12 are Guyanese Principals and obtained high scores. Participant 12 scored highest in both doing and knowing successful leadership which is a low ranking. Out of the 12 Participants, five participants scored below 8 points in their responses to knowing about successful leadership.

Figure 1



B. Knowing and doing effective leadership

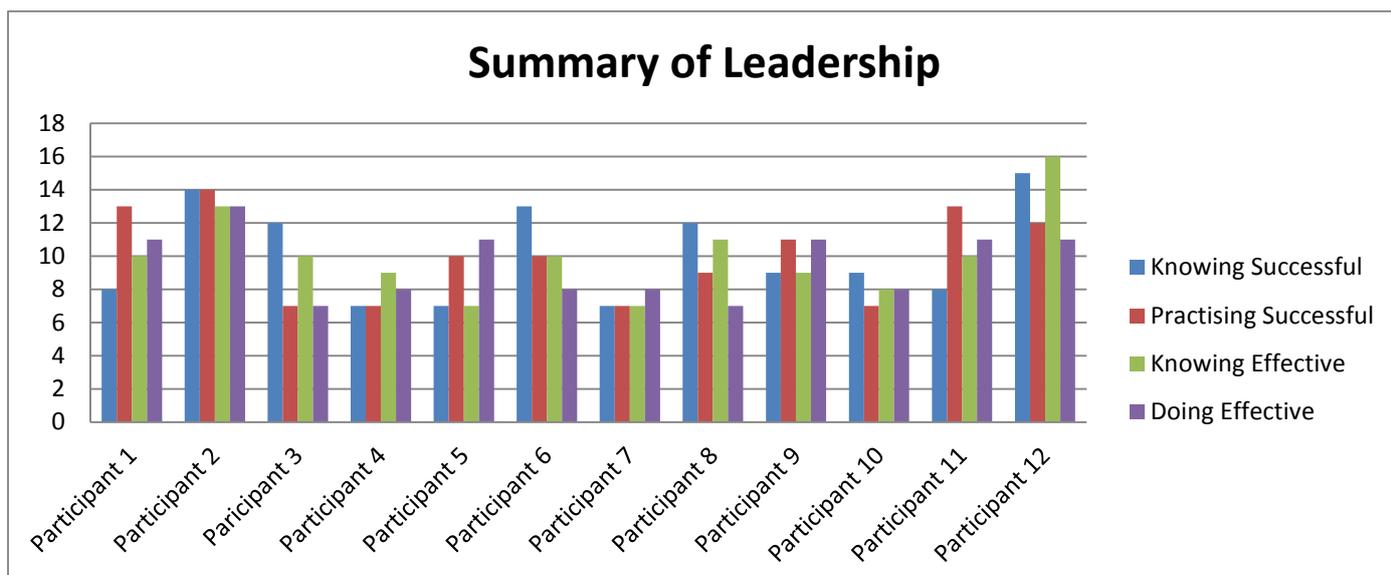
This section also has two parts: knowing about effective leadership and doing effective leadership. Figure 2 shows a summary of the responses for the subscales of knowing and doing effective leadership. Since the lower the scores the higher the ranking, it is noted that Guyanese Participant 10 scored lowest in both knowing and doing effective leadership. Jamaican Participant 2 scored the highest in knowing and doing effective leadership.

Figure 2



Figure 3 shows a summary of the responses for the subscales of knowing and doing successful leadership, and knowing and doing effective leadership. For several participants their knowing of both successful and effective leadership lagged behind their doing. Since the lower the scores the higher the ranking, it is noted that Jamaican Participants 4 and 7 scored lowest in both knowing and doing. Participants 10, from Guyana also had a low score. However, Principals 2 and 12 scored highest in both doing and knowing successful leadership which is a low ranking. Out of the 12 participants, five scored below 8 points in their responses to knowing about successful leadership whereas 3 participants scored below 8 points in their responses to knowing effective leadership. Three participants scored below 8 points in terms of doing successful leadership whereas 3 participants also scored below eight points in terms of doing effective leadership.

Figure 3



DISCUSSION

Successful leadership and effective leadership practices are crucial to a school's success, and where principals provide these kinds of leadership- an entire school community is better placed to achieving short, medium and longer term goals. In this small scale study, the doing of successful leadership outstripped their knowing. Their doing of effective leadership was ahead of their knowing, although their knowing and doing of effective leadership was behind their knowing and doing of successful leadership. Nevertheless, the evidence also suggests that principals 'know' and 'do' successful and effective leadership in a relatively consistent manner. These findings point to three clear issues: Doing ahead of knowing ahead of and individual and contextual issues and the need for continuing professional development of principals. These are discussed in turn below.

Doing ahead of knowing

There was clear evidence among participants that their knowing and doing of successful and effective leadership, irrespective of school phase level (e.g.: primary or secondary); gender and country location. For example, their knowing and doing of Leithwood et al (2006) claim that

‘successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of leadership practices’ was mirrored in their responses, receiving a score of 16 in both cases. This was also the case for successful leaders ‘apply leadership practices contextually’ (receiving a mirrored score of 17); and successful leaders ‘directly and indirectly improve teaching and learning’ (receiving a mirrored score of 15). This uniformity of knowing and doing was also the case for their knowing and doing of ‘effective leadership’, as regards the claim that effective leaders ‘promote and value positive home-school relations’ (Kirk & Jones, 2004), which received a mirrored score of 15.

An important finding of this study is that in all but one case, the actual doing of successful and effective leadership was ahead of knowing. This finding is as cathartic as it is problematic. It is cathartic for two main reasons. First, it shows that principals do not readily have command of the leadership language ‘toolkit’ (Earley, 2013). Second, it shows principals are doing ‘what works’ pointing to a form of ‘on-the-ground’ approach to leadership, which highlights the role of experiential learning and supporting James’ (1980) assertion that knowledge is derived from and is continually tested out in our experiences.

These findings are also problematic because, as the evidence suggests, these principals are already doing well and could possibly exceed their current doing of both successful and effective leadership, through more knowing. In other words, tacit knowledge on its own will not be enough to sustain and improve practice. As suggested by Ambrosini & Bowman (2001), to speak a sentence that captures explicit knowledge one needs tacit knowledge to utter it, to pause, shape sounds, find and use rhythm.

Individual and contextual issues

Individual and contextual differences among principals could be influenced by several factors, for example: leadership preparation, leadership experience, size of school, a school’s geographic location (Pashiardis, et al, 2011), and a school’s culture and the principal’s personal

characteristics (Hutton, 2013). Whereas principals know that effective leaders 'ensure a culture of positive beliefs and high expectations among staff and students' (15); their doing did not always reflect this (20). This is undoubtedly problematic and requires further investigation. Similarly, cultivating leadership in others was a point well known (13) among principals, although doing it (16) lagged behind. Participants were however relatively consistent in their overall knowing and doing of ensure a safe and orderly environment (scoring 11 and 13 respectively).

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory could provide some possible explanations and answers for some of these variations. How did principals in Jamaica and Guyana come to do more than they know? Kolb argues that experience is *the* source of learning. That is, learning is an evolving process and activity that happens from any interaction. In other words, learning can take place through informal means as much as they can take place through explicit rational structures. This study did not ask principals how they came to know and do what they know and do. Instead, it asked them what they know and do. Nevertheless, principals may have come to shape their doing based on observations, the influence of mentors and/or other principals and from 'learning on the job'. These explanations highlight the interlocking between tacit and explicit knowledge (Fodor, 1968; Hildreth & Kimble, 2002) but once more foregrounds the position that knowledge is derived from and is continually tested out in the experiences of the learner (James, 1980).

Continuing professional development of principals

The overall scores arrived at for all principals in terms of their knowing and doing of successful and effective leadership were fairly consistent. This suggests that through targeted intervention and support for groups of principals as well as for individual principals, doing plus knowing can lead to a more effective form of doing and knowing. But this requires the interlocking of

tacit and explicit knowledge (Hildreth & Kimble, 2002) or experience and rational knowledge (Kolb, 1984), defined in terms of ‘book knowledge’ and by joint critical reflection and ‘sense making’ among principals. Transforming lives is the foundational role of a school organisation and power to sustain and develop a school rests with successful school leadership. No two schools are the same and successful school leadership is highly dependent on principals knowing their organisation’s culture and temperature. Similarly, effective leadership is highly dependent on principals being responsive to the needs of everyone in their organisation, and not only students. In other words, principals need to be attuned to the social, political, economic, physical, human and cultural aspects (Kowalski, 1995) of their schools.

There are many external factors that could impact the provision of fit for purpose training to school leaders in the Caribbean. Miller (2013a) highlights socio-economic differences, political diversity, geographic dispersion, location of resource personnel, situated cultural problems and insufficient educational research. Despite these factors however, principals in this study have acted according to the socio-political contexts they inhabit, as well as in response to the particular needs of staff and students. Although in operation for less than five years, it is clear Jamaica’s National College for Educational Leadership will have a lot of work to do in providing appropriate continuing professional development opportunities for principals on the island. Indeed, its programmes and their impact could be a test case for the entire region.

Conclusions

Principals in this small scale exploratory study have shown that it is possible to do successful and effective leadership, even if their knowledge of the theory that informs what they do is missing or not up-to-date. When doing is met with more knowing, this creates the potential for a much more effective practice driven by critical reflection and reflexive actions. The most important thing that can be seen from these findings however is that principals need appropriate

continuing professional development if they are to improve upon what they already do. Additionally, successful and effective leadership in schools is not something to be seen 'out there'. Instead, successful and effective leadership must be theorised and understood in the contexts in which people are located and in line with the values present in a society (Miller, 2013a; Pashiardis, et al, 2011). Successful and effective school leadership for the Caribbean must therefore focus on school leaders and their development, simultaneously grounding itself in an awareness of what visions schools have, where schools are, and what experience and skills principals have, in order to take them to the next stage.

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