

GUR05254

**The International Successful School Principalship
Project (ISSPP): Comparison across country case
studies.**

Dr David Gurr (The University of Melbourne, d.gurr@unimelb.edu.au)
Dr Lawrie Drysdale (The University of Melbourne, drysdale@unimelb.edu.au)
Dr Russell Swann (Victoria University of Technology, Russell.Swann@vu.edu.au)
Ms Joy Doherty (The University of Melbourne, j.doherty1@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au)
Ms Patricia Ford (Australian Catholic University, P.Ford@patrick.acu.edu.au)
Ms Helen Goode (The University of Melbourne, d.gurr@unimelb.edu.au)

Correspondence to:
Dr David Gurr
Centre for Organisational Learning and Leadership
The University of Melbourne
Ph: +61 03 83448224
Email: d.gurr@unimelb.edu.au

Paper presented at:
The Australian Council for Educational Leaders National Conference, Gold Coast,
September 20-23, 2005.
Australian Association for Research in Education National Conference, Parramatta,
November 27 – December 1.

The International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP): Comparison across country case studies.

Introduction

The position of principal is an enduring feature of schools. Any attempts to have structures that don't include principals are resisted or are only evident in small, often community based schools. In some areas there is a relatively low level of importance attached to the principal role (for example, see Zhang & Ribbin's, 2003, description of principals from the prefecture of Chuxiong, in Yunnan province, China). There are also alternative school leadership arrangements, such as co-principalships in which two or more people share the principal role (see Court, 2002), or the sharing across all teachers in the College of Teachers used in Steiner schools (Richards, 2005). Nevertheless, in most countries it is the principal who is regarded as the key educational leader and the one person in a school who has the most opportunity to exercise leadership. There is, however, considerable debate concerning the impact that principals have on schools, especially in terms of student learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Mulford, 1996).

Despite these concerns about the impact of school leadership, the fascination with this phenomenon has ensured that there has been considerable research focus on successful school leadership. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) have provided a comprehensive review of knowledge about successful school leadership based upon academically sound quantitative research studies, multiple case studies and systematic single case studies. Leadership was defined as 'those persons, occupying various roles in the school, who work with others to provide direction and who exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school's goals' (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p.9). This definition, and their review, included people in schools other than principals. Nevertheless, the bulk of the research reviewed was concerned with principal leadership. Leithwood and Riehl described six claims that could be defended by the research evidence and which are generalisable to most school contexts. These are described briefly below:

1. Successful school leadership makes important contributions to the improvement of student learning.
2. The primary sources of successful leadership in schools are principal and teachers.
3. In addition to principals and teachers, leadership is, and ought to be, distributed to others in the school and school community.
4. A core set of 'basic' leadership practices is valuable in almost all contexts: setting directions; developing people; redesigning the organisation.
5. In addition to engaging in a core set of leadership practices, successful leaders must act in ways that acknowledge the accountability-oriented policy context in which almost all work including market, decentralisation, professional and management accountability.

6. Many successful leaders in schools serving highly diverse student populations enact practices to promote school quality, equity, and social justice through: building powerful forms of teaching and learning; creating strong communities in school; nurturing the development of educational cultures in families; and, expanding the amount of students' social capital valued by the schools.

There are two important limitations to the review which this current research addresses: (1) most of research evidence was from North America or the United Kingdom; (2) in respect to principal leadership, the research typically relied on principals as the source of evidence.

The disregard for country context is worrying, as despite observations about the apparent homogenisation of world education, there remain important differences in how countries approach school education such as the degree of autonomy given to principals and schools (OECD, 2001). Expectations of the principal's role can vary widely and can sometimes even be seen to be contradictory (eg. autonomy versus control). Yet despite these differences, there is often uniformity in how research is approached. An example is the use of narrow definitions of success for both schools and principals, with these typically constrained to student performance on external tests of literacy and numeracy.

The reliance on principals as the primary source of data about principal leadership limits our understanding. Findings from studies of student (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000), teacher (Berends, 2000; Silins & Mulford, 2002) and teacher, student, ancillary staff, governor and parent (Day et al., 2000) perspectives provide particularly rich sources of evidence about principal leadership. Whilst there is evidence that principal and teacher views on principal leadership are often congruent (Gurr 1996, Gurr, 2002), there is also evidence of difference, with school leaders shown to be consistently more optimistic about the effects of their leadership or efforts at school reform (McCall et al., 2001; Mulford et al., 2000, 2001). Reliance on principal evidence may not only be limiting, but it may lead to ill-founded conclusions.

In response to these concerns, the International Successful School Principalship Project has been instigated. This is a three-phase project involving eight countries (Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden, USA). The three phases consist of multiple-perspective case studies, surveys, and observational case studies. Thus, the ISSPP involves perspectives across several countries from Asia, North America, Europe and the Pacific, and contains the voices of students, parents, teachers and principals.

The first phase is now complete and an upcoming special issue of the *Journal of Educational Administration* is devoted to reporting upon 63 case studies from the countries. In a synthesis of the articles, Leithwood (2005) suggests that it is 'for individual researchers in the international project to take greater account of evidence and ideas from the work of their colleagues in other countries.' This paper attempts this by discussing evidence from the case studies. Following Leithwood's synthesis of the case studies the paper explores evidence for the following themes:

- contextual differences between countries
- common features of leadership across the countries
- factors affecting successful leadership
- interventions affecting successful leadership
- conditions enhancing or diminishing leadership effects

Contextual differences between countries

Evidence reported from each country shows school leaders using practices in ways especially suited to their own school context set within the wider national context. The contextual differences that exist between the case studies fall under three broad headings: case study sites; the education system or structure within the country; and the government educational policy.

Case study sites

The case study schools differ both within countries and across countries in size, location, background history, stage of development, leadership structure (whether top down or team-centred), school-wide pedagogy, staff competence and professional disposition, student mix and resource need, and culture. The details of the study context for each of the seven countries (Canadian data is unavailable) now follows.

The English report concerns successful head teachers in ten ‘challenging’ public-owned schools where, upon entry, the majority of students were underachieving and where there exist relatively high levels of social deprivation indicated by both high levels of free school meals and by special education needs being well above national average (Day, 2005). The schools are urban or suburban, of varying size and consisting of one nursery/infant school, five primary schools and four comprehensive secondary schools, with three serving communities with a significant proportion of ethnic (Muslim) pupils.

The Danish report (Moos, Krejsler, Kofod, & Jensen, 2005) is of two contrasting schools – the North school, characterised as materially affluent with two to four children per upper middle class blended family – and the Islet school, with low income, high unemployment families with no academic background and increasing social problems. North is an affluent suburban school in a big city and Islet a poor rural school outside a small provincial town. Both schools have about 600 students and are designated as primary and lower secondary (7-16 year olds).

The USA report (Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles, 2005) is of seven ‘challenging’ schools in western New York state and includes five elementary (primary) schools, one middle school (grades 5-8) and one high (secondary) school (grades 9-12); one of the schools is explored in more detail in (Giles, Johnson, Brooks & Jacobson, 2005). All but one are high need schools, reflected in the high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-fee lunch. All schools have shown improved student performance since the arrival of the current principal. The schools vary in size from 400 to 900 students and in location from large urban, small city, first-ring suburban and rural. As they are in the same state, the schools operate under the same federal and state accountability systems, but vary in their ability to provide resources in response to the external expectations.

The Norwegian report concerns 12 ‘good practice schools’ (Møller, Eggen, Fuglestad, Langfeldt, Presthus, Skrøvset, Stjernstrøm & Vedøy, 2005). Located throughout Norway, two are in large cities, four are in small towns, two are in semi-rural districts and four are in rural districts. Two are primary schools (grades 1-7), three are lower secondary (grades 8-10), four are combined (grades 1-10) and three are upper secondary (grades 11-13).

The Chinese report (Wong, 2005) is of two contrasting schools in northern areas of the city of Shanghai. Eastern Senior High is one of the best schools in

Shanghai and has about 2000 students who have completed the nine years of education to the end of junior high school. Northern Junior High has about 1625 students and is in a poor district with high crime and illiteracy rates and with the lowest average rate in educational attainment.

The Swedish report (Höög, Johansson & Olofsson, 2005) involves four junior high schools, grade 7 to 9 in Sweden. The River school is rural, located 50 kilometres from the nearest town. The Mountain school is small, with a low level of parent education. The Multicultural school, in a large urban area, has a high proportion of immigrants and segregation. The Upper Middle Class school is in a prosperous urban community with a culturally and economically homogenous population.

The Australian report (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005) combines two independent sets of case studies involving five schools in the state of Tasmania and nine schools in the state of Victoria. The Tasmanian schools were all in the government system and included one primary school, one primary/secondary school and three secondary schools. The four Victorian government schools included two primary schools, one secondary school and one special school. The five Victorian non-government schools included four Catholic primary schools and one independent primary/secondary school. Schools ranged in student numbers from 120 to 1330.

Educational systems and structures

The schools are situated within quite different educational systems and structures, as evidenced by the following brief descriptions from the Chinese, Australian and Norwegian studies.

The Chinese government provides nine years of education for all children and at the end of junior high school, all students sit for an examination. The results are used for entering senior high schools, with the key municipal senior high schools requiring the highest scores for entry. For most Chinese schools, principals and teachers are appointed and sponsored by local governments. Teachers have large classes and relatively light teaching loads to enable more people to be employed. Each school establishes its own teaching and research unit (TRU) that works with the district TRU in organising and giving support for teachers in their schools. The young teachers learn from the experienced teachers, who are their mentors. Whilst an appearance of rigidity and conformity might occur to a western observer, each principal in the case study schools was able to subtly play out the contextual issues in their own school, within the Chinese educational system (see below for further discussion of this).

In Australia, education is a complex interplay between the commonwealth (national) and state governments and between government (67% of schools) and non-government or independent (33% of schools) The independent system is dominated by Catholic schools serving approximately 20% of all school age students. The remaining 13% of independent students attend a range of religious and non-religious independent schools and the proportion attending non-government schools is increasing. Most students (approximately three-quarters) complete 13 years of schooling and attain a Year 12 certificate.

For Norway, educational institutions are important for the survival of the small local communities, as the population is widely dispersed and largely homogeneous. Møller et al. (2005) comment that 'it is probably the many small local communities that give Norwegian society its distinctive character'. The structure of the school system is ten compulsory years, beginning at the age of six, and incorporating primary and lower secondary years, with three years of optional upper secondary education.

The system is predominately public, but recent legislature implies a liberalism that may mean more differentiation and privatisation within the education system.

Government education policy

Changes in government education policy are occurring in all seven countries. Some are more mature government initiatives, and others more recently introduced accountability systems.

In England, headteachers work within a dynamic government reform context that focuses on the compliancy of schools in meeting externally derived standards of student performance and external, independent school inspection.

The USA has a decentralised approach to the governance, policy and funding of public education which serves to both democratise and contextualise public education. As education is not one of the responsibilities granted to the federal government by the Constitution, each state holds primary authority for the education of its school age children and individual state education departments delegate considerable authority to local educational authorities (school districts). The federal government can wield greater influence over educational policy than its monetary contribution (7%) would suggest. An example is the 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) federal legislation (2002) that has all schools under far greater public scrutiny and accountability than ever before.

The Norwegian government has recently pursued accountability through a system of quality controls on schools. National test results are published on the Ministry of Education website leading to the ranking of schools. This has placed teachers and principals under stress to improve their school's national ranking in certain areas, for example, literacy and numeracy. A tension has emerged between market orientation and the 'long valued ideas of a democratic school including democratic leadership practices' (Møller et al., 2005).

The inclusion of the two Chinese case studies has offered a valuable opportunity for successful school leadership to be investigated within an Asian societal context. Leadership in the Chinese schools was shown to be exercised within an authoritarian, rather than democratic, policy framework.

This can be contrasted with the democratic values-driven schooling system in Sweden where 'all activity in schools shall proceed in accordance with fundamental democratic values, (Höög et al., 2005). In Sweden, principals are expected to develop 'a two-fold focus on both academic knowledge and on social or democratic goals for the school' (Höög et al., 2005).

In Australia, there exists increasing Commonwealth government influence through grants to both government and non-government schools, and in Tasmania and Victoria there has been major curriculum reform over the past decade.

Despite these contextual differences between the case study schools and between the education systems in which they exist, all principals are experiencing a context of change that challenges their leadership practices and their underlying core set of values. For all countries studied there exists:

- increased change
- increased levels of self-management (at various levels of maturity)
- increased marketisation of education
- increased accountability
- higher expectation of improved student performance

Common features of leadership across the countries

In all countries investigated, case study schools had improved markedly over time, and many had been transformed, due to the leadership practices of the principal. The principal was seen as the key figure in the school's success.

The most outstanding feature identified in the cross-country analysis was the passion with which these leaders modeled a commitment to education, to the development of the students in their care and to serving the community in which they worked. Moreover there was an ethical imperative underpinning this commitment that enabled or inspired school communities to work together for the common good of the students and the schools. Many of the schools were described as having challenging circumstances, however there was a commitment to student learning and principals were seen as crucial in enabling this to occur.

One of the USA case studies concerned a female charismatic principal who faced the challenges of a failing school and turned it into a successful school by adopting a cautious, inclusive and respectful approach to building relationships with all the school community (students, teachers and parents), while at the same time being ruthless in restoring discipline to make the school a safe environment (Giles et al., 2005). Five morally grounded principles were identified as underpinning her professionalism: caring, enabling, accountability, learning and success, which when applied simultaneously, enabled school improvement and student achievement (both academically and socially) to occur.

The Chinese study (Wong, 2005) identified two principals who were able to drastically improve their failing schools by acting as change agents to reorder both the curriculum and the teaching to focus on the children as the centre of the learning endeavor. Through sensitive handling of the teaching staff, the first principal introduced sport and music to revive the curriculum and provide success for underachieving students. The leadership style was one of compassion and sensitivity, characterised by high expectations, a strong vision and focus upon student success, and encouragement of teacher responsibility. The second principal introduced a teaching reform, 'Success Education', to restructure the teaching force to enable team teaching, continuous evaluation, mentoring and professional development. Both principals were driven by the belief that all students can learn given the right environment and structures.

School leadership in the English study (Day, 2005) showed that successful principals were able to manage tensions and dilemmas, such as government imposed accountability measures, by adapting them to the local context of their schools and by being driven by their individual value systems. These headteachers sustained success by building communities underpinned by an ethical commitment to students' holistic development and by attending to equity and social justice concerns. They were characterised by their ability to set directions, develop people through modeling and support, and to redesign structures to nurture staff. The headteachers were 'Lead Learners' who demonstrated the importance of defining and maintaining identity, building trust and who had an unswerving passion for the work of educating. Underpinning their work was a moral agency that fueled the integrity of their decisions.

The moral enterprise of education seems to be the guiding feature of leadership as outlined in the studies from Norway (Møller et al., 2005), while student learning was the focal point for the schools' philosophies. Collaboration was imbedded in the schools studied and school success was characterised by open and honest

communication and negotiation in professional relationships. Tensions and dilemmas, related to government accountability agendas, were addressed through the democratic principles and values of the leadership team. Characteristics such as empathy, intuition, trust and care were at the core of successful leadership in Norway.

The Swedish study (Höög, Johansson & Olofsson, 2005) identified that all principals focused on creating a good learning structure and a culture supportive of that learning in the four schools studied. Three of the principals were driven by the desire to balance the academic achievements of the students with their holistic development in response to government accountability requirements which they considered too narrow in scope. All leaders were hard-working, passionate about their vision, highly visible in their schools, self confident implementers of change and were also good managers.

In the Danish study (Moos et al., 2005), having rebuilt and restructured the school into self-governing teams, the first principal, an extrovert, was well respected and liked by the total school community. He was a pedagogical leader, demanding teaching that was individualised, student-centred and of high standard. He was a hardworking, highly visible, skilled problem solver, and delegated authority while working collaboratively with the leadership team. The second principal was shy and gentle in demeanor, a skillful administrator, excellent listener, proficient in conflict management and respected for his negotiating skills and personal integrity. His emphasis was on providing socially adjusted students rather than outstanding academic results for the school. Leadership similarities between the schools included highly developed distributed leadership and highly ethical foundations to their vision and mission. Differences included the way they structured their schools and the way they balanced the academic and social development of their students.

Across the fourteen Australian (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005) schools, principal values and beliefs included honesty, openness, flexibility, commitment, empathy, and a belief that each child is important, has unrealised potential and can succeed. Passion and goodness drove their leadership endeavours and they harnessed the school community through a common vision and by setting up structures that supported improvement in learning and teaching, and by being sensitive to the contexts in which they operated. Leadership styles were characterised by the modeling of high expectations and professionalism, by empowering staff in a supportive and structured environment, by distributing leadership and responsibility throughout the school and by remaining focused on enhancing quality education for students and families. Evidenced based monitoring, evaluation and reflection drove change and improvement.

The following conclusions regarding commonalities across countries may be drawn:

- The ethical and moral imperatives, emanating from each principal's value system, were consistent across countries and underpinned successful principal leadership.
- Improvement in student learning and student development were the core concerns of the principals and schools.
- Principals were typically able to harness the whole community to contribute to the educational vision and strategies.
- Successful principals were able to balance external pressures, such as accountability in a results-driven environment and testing regimes, with the context of their school.
- Principals were seen as responsible for three key leadership practices, namely, setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organisation as identified

by Leithwood and Riehl (2003). The competent, respectful and cohesive manner in which these practices were achieved marked the degree to which schools were successful.

- Regardless of country, culture and context, these principals demonstrated a ‘can do’ attitude in their approach to education. They were hardworking, committed, respected and trusted by their communities and remained hopeful despite the challenges they faced.
- The quality of relationships was a vital component. Working with and through others was a feature of the way the principals worked, even in those cases where principals adopted a very strong, almost authoritarian leadership style.

Factors affecting successful leadership

Two categories of factors, identified in the studies which influenced successful school leadership were those factors that were concerned with the leader themselves such as their personal characteristics, traits, qualities, and skills, and those factors that were largely contextual or environment-specific.

Personal factors

Apart from the kind of interventions that successful principals made to improve their schools, personal factors were crucial in determining the success or otherwise of those interventions. The character and quality of the person, the way they behaved, the skill set they drew upon to influence others, and the values that they stood for formed an important prerequisite to success. Who the principal was, their nature and personality, was just as important as what they did. Day (2005) notes in the English case studies that ‘it seemed that moral purposes, emotional and intellectual commitment and ethical and social bonds were far more powerful levers of leadership than extrinsic agendas’. This aspect is also exemplified by Höög, Johansson and Olofsson (2005), who quote a teacher describing a Swedish principal thus, ‘The principal contributes to the successful result by being the person she is.’

The Australian case studies add weight to the importance of personal qualities by identifying common traits such as passion, enthusiasm, persistence, determination and assertiveness. School principals were optimistic; they saw the glass as half full rather than half empty, and they saw barriers as challenges rather than impediments. In many case studies, principals were described by others as ‘visionary’ or ‘inspirational’, with creativity and lateral thinking that inspired the same qualities in others.

Personal values and beliefs were identified as important contributors to success in the case studies in all the participating countries. In the Scandinavian countries democratic values were important along with honesty, trust, and cooperation. In the United States the ‘caring principle’ was emphasised. In Australia, principals’ values were seen to be strongly child-centred, based on the belief that ‘all children can learn.’ Day (2005) notes that successful heads in England were driven primarily by individual value systems that included moral purpose and social justice.

A common element that influenced success was the way in which the principals faced and dealt with dilemmas, defined by Møller et al. (2005) as ‘a concept which captures the contradictory orientations they experience, and where there are no right answers.’ Balancing actions with tensions and dilemmas was a feature of the three Scandinavian countries. Describing the need to deal with dilemmas in the Norwegian schools, Møller et al. (2005) write that ‘school leaders

must balance the demands of being in a middle management position; they must balance between attempts to implement school change while taking into account the established culture of the institution.’ Findings in the English case studies also noted that managing personal tensions, choices and dilemmas sustained their success.

The style of leadership used by the principals was seen to be an important factor to success, yet there was no one best style identified in any of the case studies. The strong leader was mentioned in several case studies, but also mentioned was the humble leader who led from behind. Most common was the collaborative team-oriented style.

Successful principals in all countries demonstrated sound communication skills. They were able to effectively influence people and were flexible, active listeners who could read events and understand the context in which they were operating. They thought and acted strategically, having the capacity to solve problems and find creative solutions.

Environment-specific factors

Less important but still significant was the environment in which the leaders worked, but precisely how much the context matters was not totally clear from the studies. The context can be classified broadly into three distinct environments (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978): the internal environment of the school including culture, ethos, staffing, and structure; the task environment that consists of the local community, district or region in which the leader interacts; and the general environment which is made up of the national characteristics, policies and other influences. An additional (fourth) macro environment, which involves factors commonly referred to as globalisation, post-industrial society, and the information revolution, is not discussed.

Both the internal environment and the task environment influenced successful leadership to the extent that the leaders had to take these factors into account in determining their particular strategy. In many cases the schools were in challenging circumstances that required the principal to take a longer-term strategy of capacity building and a series of interventions that were implemented and embedded over time. The challenging circumstances ranged from internal difficulties such as student behaviour, staff conflict, and inadequate resources, to more external forces such as changing demographics and high poverty, and low social capital. Evidence in Australia indicated that many successful principals had taken a long-term commitment to the school and had made continuous improvements over time. Examples in other countries, such as the USA and the three Scandinavian countries, showed improvement over a shorter time framework largely because of shortened employment contracts and higher staff turnover. Not all schools were in challenging circumstances, but the impact of the environment on these principals was less clear, except for high community expectations for improved performance.

Most of the case studies were conducted in elementary schools. It seems from the experience of the researchers in each country that it was easier to find examples of so called ‘turn-around’ schools in an elementary setting. The complexity and size of secondary schools may be more influential and inhibiting on successful leadership than in smaller, less complex elementary schools.

Despite differing contexts and cultural norms, beliefs and attitudes, each of the participating countries was experiencing significant change in the general environment in respect to education agendas. Trends toward greater accountability, marketisation, and decentralisation were the most common changes. The degree and intensity of these changes varied between countries, but successful principals were

able to understand, accommodate and adapt to the changes. Successful principals understood that they could not necessarily influence the changes, but they could modify and alter how the changes were interpreted and implemented. For example, in England, successful principals made judgements about how to implement changes from the external environment within their own improvement agendas. Similar approaches were identified in Australia, the USA, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

Finally, what is significant is the interaction of the principal within the various environments. What kind of person the principal was, including their personal qualities, values, beliefs, attitudes, skills, and what they did within a particular environment, influenced their success. This reinforces the view that principals operate within a social system and success is influenced by a complex set of factors that includes personal and environmental factors.

Interventions affecting successful leadership

Whilst the social, political and educational histories of schools differ from country to country, all principals are experiencing change that emanates from social movements (i.e. changes in families, expectations of schools, attitudes of students) and the ever-increasing interests of central and municipal governments in 'performance' and 'performativity'. Such changes are testing the values, resolve and resilience of principals in all schools in all countries. These successful principals acted purposefully and strategically in creating a positive school climate, building productive relationships, garnering resources, and facilitating teacher leadership. They engaged in a series of interventions that reflected the contexts and the needs of their schools. These interventions were sometimes focussed on specific areas, while others had a whole-school focus. Such interventions included:

External pressures and accountability

Principals demonstrated an ability to 'not be confined by the contexts in which they work. They do not comply, subvert, or overtly oppose. Rather they actively mediate and moderate within a set of core values and practices which transcend narrowly conceived improvement agendas' (Day, 2005). Similarly, in the USA study, 'rather than viewing this external pressure as an obstacle to improvement, the principals instead saw it as a way to focus teachers, parents and students on raising expectations for improved student achievement, the direction they were intending to go anyway... accountability helped the principal's direction setting to move beyond being just a necessary condition for success, to become an enabling condition' (Jacobson et al., 2005). The Swedish study describes attempts of principals to 'integrate state and municipal goals as part of the school vision'. Accountability was also an issue in Norway where a potential tension between market orientation with new emphasis on ranking, especially in English and Mathematics, and the traditional democratic leadership practices, had emerged. The successful principals in this study had also been able to respond to external pressures proactively. While the national curriculum guidelines clearly influenced the schools' teaching practices, they were but one component of the student centred approach. Denmark's entry into the European Community had impacted on the education system with a move from processes to outcomes, accountability and merit pay for teachers. However one of the principals in this research project maintained that he did not see examination marks as a sign of excellence, but rather excellence should define the working conditions for both adults and students.

Building capacity

Building capacity was a common theme in all studies. School capacity was nurtured and developed through collegiality, collaboration, trust and support. Such a culture emanates from structures that promote shared decision making, and distributed leadership as described in the Australian studies. Distributed leadership and a new culture of professionalism impacted positively, in terms of building capacity in schools in the USA study. Again, in the Swedish study, a concerted effort had been seen to change the climate of a 'failing' school by introducing structures which encouraged participatory decision making and by enabling community capacity to be harnessed by linking school culture with community culture. This capacity building was shown to have spin offs into other areas; for example, building the capacity of teachers by empowering them, and building their confidence, ego and self esteem. The Swedish study found successful principals developed a learning centred approach with a focus on the leadership team, not just the principal. Leadership in their context was not synonymous with a position and quality relationships within the school community were an important construct of success.

One principal in the Danish study stated categorically that you have 'to get every teacher with you', if you as a school leader want to make changes; he saw his job as supporter and listener, one who encourages teacher enthusiasm but does not steamroll them.

Norwegian schools in the study underlined the importance of the social learning environment in order to obtain academic as well as social goals. The quality of the relationships between teacher and students was seen as crucial. Student learning was the focal point for the school philosophy as well as for their practice as indicated in the grouping of students, evaluation procedures used, and the organisation of curriculum units.

High expectations and raising student achievement

Principals had high expectations of both students and teachers. In regard to student learning, the creation of a 'can do' culture was a feature of the English study. Encouraging student responsibility for their learning and promoting change in teaching and learning practices to support this culture was a feature in the striving of these principals to raise student achievement. In Sweden, this academic success was linked with the social goals of a school as a fundamental belief in the need to educate students to be contributing members of a democratic society. In the learning-centred approach of the Norwegian study, the overarching idea was that each student has a right to learn and develop on their own terms. Similarly, the Danish study provided an example of a principal who demanded that teaching was individualised and student-centred, with high professional standards.

In one of the USA schools, the principal clearly set and modelled her expectations and used a combination of pressure and support to bring about the changes she saw as necessary to transform a failing school. So too, one of the principals in the Victorian study who was credited with establishing a 'high expectation' culture where continuous improvement was emphasised, as was developing a school-wide pedagogy, and raising student achievement levels.

It was a principal in the Chinese study who used the term 'interventions', recognising that in a failing school into which he had moved, 'repeated failure was the cause of all the problems' (Wong, 2005). His intervention was simple: create repeated successful experiences, both academic and non-academic, for all students. His four-

stage model (low starting point, small step progression, varied activities and quick feedback) was one of high expectations, a focus on student success and for teachers to accept responsibility. He believed in influencing, but at the same time showed compassion and sensitivity.

Conditions enhancing or diminishing leadership effects

The practice and behaviour of a principal clearly has an effect on students and the school organisation as a whole, although this is typically an indirect effect with certain conditions within a school having the potential to diminish or improve the connection between leadership practices and their impacts on the school. Six such conditions were identified in the country reports: student background, school location, school size, school level, designation of the school as government or non-government and lastly, extent of trust/respect between leaders and teachers and/or teachers and students. For the first five (described above in the section 'Contextual differences between countries') there is little in the reports that link the conditions with principal leadership and student outcomes. Rather these conditions are simply described for each country and are really more a reflection of each country's methodology in terms of having a rich sample, rather than an exploration of the impact of these variables. The exception was the USA paper which tentatively suggested that small school size and higher level of education for principals may be related to school performance (Jacobson et al., 2005). However, for the sixth condition, mutual trust and respect, there is evidence of impact on the relationships between principals and teachers and/or teachers and students. This evidence is now described.

The English study (Day, 2005) reported that trust, a hallmark that runs throughout the research, is 'drawing upon and constructing social capital within the school and between the school and its local community'. One teacher, speaking about a secondary principal, reported 'she trusts you implicitly --- you don't feel as if you're being infringed upon in any way', whilst another spoke of the cascading of trust 'all the way through, from parents, senior management, governing bodies'. Successful head teachers 'were driven primarily by individual value systems' and 'moral purposes, emotional and intellectual commitment and ethical and social bonds' eclipsed the still-important socio, political, economic and professional contexts. These were resilient, not merely compliant, leaders.

In the Danish North School, following an emphasis by the principal on team building and the development of new physical infrastructure, teachers reported 'happier children and more opportunity to care for the individual child'. Teachers also have a feeling of having been a part of something exciting and creative and this has led to increased trust in the school. The teachers at the Islet school see the principal as a splendid listener and as reflective, calm and trusted.

Mutual trust and respect is reflected in the USA report under the heading of 'caring' where all seven principals were seen to create positive school cultures. One principal asked teachers to view students through the eyes of parents who wanted a safe, productive school and a chance at a real education. Another highlighted the importance of family-focused community by telling staff 'your family comes first; this job does not come first'. Others meet and greet parents and students on a daily basis and 'lead by walking around' and by themselves doing the hard work of teaching.

The Norwegian study showed that the strategies adopted by school leaders with regard to power and trust differed between schools and depended upon local

context. Students at one upper secondary school had great influence in decision-making processes, but that was only possible with the trust given to them by the principal. Most secondary teachers in the broader Norwegian study involved students in both planning and establishing criteria for evaluation. Power and leadership were negotiated and shared within classrooms and students in upper secondary schools were well aware of their own contribution to a successful school. Leadership teams were crucial in building conditions for mutual trust and respect.

In the Chinese study principals used words such as discipline (basic routine) and responsibility, rather than trust or empowerment as in Western schools – and those words were referring to teachers, rather than students and teachers. Both schools involved top-down management and the consultative process was in response to principal-driven initiatives. Deputy principals and middle management teachers then had responsibility to implement decisions made. But Wong (2005) concludes that this does not mean there is no trust or empowerment in Chinese schools. Trust can be implicit and empowerment can be done formally through the hierarchical system.

The Swedish Mountain School was reported as successful because of the trust between the principal and teachers, students and parents. School objectives and the vision of the principal were clarified by open discussion and the principal was seen as being present and visible by teachers and students. At the Multicultural school, the reciprocal trust between staff and their principal was evident in his comment that ‘there is great confidence in the school – they do not perceive that I need to have control’.

Within the Australian study, the Tasmanian section reported successful school leaders as promoting ‘a culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust and that this culture was firmly rooted in their democratic and social justice values and beliefs.’ Principals displayed ‘honesty and openness, flexibility, commitment, empathy with others and ... innate goodness.’ Innovation and risk-taking were encouraged and supported. Shared decision-making and distributed leadership promoted a culture of trust. In the Victorian section of the report, principals demonstrating integrity, care and respect were seen as being able to build mutual trust. Staff felt empowered within ‘a structured yet supportive environment.’

Conclusion

Drawing on the findings from countries involved in the International Successful School Principalship Project, this paper has given an overview of the findings of the first phase of the project – multiple perspective case studies – covering 63 schools located in Australia, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden and the USA. It is a unique study in that it records the views of not only principals, but of teachers, parents, students and others in the school communities across these diverse country contexts.

Many differences exist in the case study sites, both within and between countries, with quite different educational systems and government policies represented. Despite these differences, all countries have in common increases in levels of self-management, change, marketisation, accountability and expectations of higher student performance. Other commonalities include: the importance of moral and ethical concerns and the individual principal’s value system; student learning and development as paramount; genuine community contribution to visions and strategies; and hardworking, ‘can do’ principals who engendered trust and respect.

Personal factors (traits, qualities, skills) were crucial in determining principal success as was, to a lesser extent, environment-specific factors. What became clear from the case studies was the complexity of the social system in which the interaction between personal and environmental factors occurred.

High expectations, shared decision-making, distributed leadership and collegiality all had a role in principal interventions that built capacity, took external pressures into account and resulted in raising student achievement. In addition, trust and respect between principals and teachers and/or between teachers and students was crucial.

References

- BERENDS, M. (2000) Teacher-reported effects of New American School design: Exploring relationships to teacher background and school context. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 22, pp. 65-82.
- COURT, M. (2002) Negotiating and reconstructing gendered leadership discourse, *Leading and Managing*, 8(2), pp. 110-122.
- DAY, C. (2005) Sustaining Success in Challenging Contexts: Leadership in English Schools, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 573-583.
- DAY, C., HARRIS, A., HADFIELD, M., TOLLEY, H. & BERESFORD, J. (2000) *Leading Schools in Times of Change* (Buckingham: Open University Press).
- GILES, C., JOHNSON, L., BROOKS, S. & JACOBSON, S.L. (2005) Building Bridges, Building Community: Transformational Leadership in a Challenging Urban Environment, *Journal of School Leadership*, forthcoming.
- GURR, D. (1996) On Conceptualising School Leadership: Time to Abandon Transformational Leadership? *Leading and Managing* 2(3), 221-239.
- GURR, D. (2002) Transformational Leadership Characteristics in Primary and Secondary School Principals, *Leading and Managing*, 8 (1), 82-103.
- GURR, D., DRYSDALE, L. & MULFORD, B. (2005) Successful Principal Leadership: Australian Case Studies, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 539-551.
- HALLINGER, P. & HECK, R. (1996) Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical work, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(1), pp. 5-44.
- HÖÖG, J., JOHANSSON, O. & OLOFSSON, A. (2005) Successful Principals – The Swedish Case, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 595-606.
- JACOBSON, S.L., JOHNSON, L., YLIMAKI, R. & GILES, C. (2005) Successful Leadership in Challenging U.S. Schools: Enabling Principles, Enabling Schools, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 607-618.
- LEITHWOOD, K. (2005) Understanding Successful School Leadership: Progress On A Broken Front, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 619-629.
- LEITHWOOD, K. & RIEHL, C. (2003) *What Do We Already Know About Successful School Leadership?* (Paper for AERA, Chicago, April).
- McCALL, J., SMITH, I., STOLL, L., THOMAS, S., SAMMONS, P., SMEES, R., MACBEATH, J., BOYD, B., & MACGILCHRIST, B. (2001) Views of pupils, parents and teachers: Vital indicators of effectiveness and for improvement. In J. MACBEATH & P. MORTIMORE (Eds), *Improving school effectiveness*. (Buckingham: Open University Press), pp. 74-101.

- MØLLER, J., EGGEN, A., FUGLESTAD, O. L., LANGFELDT, G. PRESTHUS, A., SKRØVSET, STJERNSTRØM, S. & VEDØY, G. (2005) Successful School Leadership - The Norwegian Case, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 584-594.
- MOOS, L., KREJSLER, J., KOFOD, K. K. & JENSEN, B. B. (2005) Successful School Leadership in Two Danish Schools, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 563-572.
- MULFORD, B. (1996) Do school principals make a difference? Recent evidence and implications, *Leading and Managing*, 2(3), pp. 155-170.
- MULFORD, B., KENDALL, L., KENDALL, D., BISHOP, P. & HOGAN, D. (2000) Decision Making in Primary Schools, *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 28(1), pp. 5-22.
- MULFORD, B., KENDALL, L., KENDALL, D., LAMB, S. & HOGAN, D. (2001) Decision Making in Australian High Schools, *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 29(2), pp. 49-73.
- OECD (2001) *New school management approaches*. Paris: OECD.
- RICHARDS, R. (2005) How Leadership is Manifested in Steiner Schools. Unpublished Master of Education thesis, the University of Melbourne.
- RUDDUCK, J. & FLUTTER, J. (2000) Pupil participation and pupil perspective: Carving a new order of experience. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. 30(1), 75-89.
- SILINS, H. & MULFORD, B. (2002) Leadership and School Results. In K. LEITHWOOD & P. HALLINGER (Eds), *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration* (Norwell, MA: Kluwer), pp. 561-612.
- WONG, K. (2005) Conditions and Practices of Successful Principalship in Shanghai, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), pp. 552-562.
- ZHANG, J.H & RIBBINS, P. (2003) Art and artfulness in headship in rural China: Twenty-five headteachers from Chixiong, *Leading and Managing*, 9(1), pp. 1-17.