Practicing Successful and Effective School Leadership:
An African Perspective

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In this paper, an in-depth analysis was undertaken to determine what factors contribute to practicing successful and effective school leadership. Educational leaders should guide their schools through the challenges posed by an increasingly complex environment. Curriculum standards, achievement benchmarks, and policy directives generate complicated and unpredictable requirements for schools. Principals must respond to increasing diversity in student characteristics, including cultural background and immigration status, income disparities, physical and mental disabilities and variation in learning capacities. They must manage new collaborations with external stakeholders involved in school education. Rapid developments in technologies for teaching and communication require adjustments in the internal workings of schools. These are just a few of the conditions that make schooling more challenging and leadership more essential.

Research studies show that there are a fundamental set of leadership practices that form the nucleus for successful leadership in almost all educational contexts. At the core of most definitions of leadership there are three broad categories of practices that have been identified as important for leadership success in almost all education settings and organisations: setting directions, developing people and developing the organisation. Each of these categories encompasses more specific competencies and thrusts that contribute to effective schools. From an African perspective, Navahandi (2000: 4) asserts that leaders are effective when their group performs well and when followers are satisfied. Effective leadership is determined by the upliftment of the villagers/community and the way that they progress (Masango, 2002). Leadership is a function to be shared by all (distributive leadership) rather than leadership invested in one person. Central to this perspective is that the philosophical traditions of Africa offer an important contribution to the theory and practice of effective leadership in the world today. African humanism or *Ubuntu* evokes both reason and empathy as the basis for ethical leadership. *Ubuntu* means that a person is a person because of other people (Khoza, 2012). It is further contended that the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the social collective stimulates caring and progressive thought and action. Nowhere is this more apt than in the relationship between leader and followers.

An empirical investigation was undertaken to determine the perceptions of principals in both primary and secondary schools of the essential characteristics required for practicing successful and effective school leadership. Findings reveal that while new organisational structures and new leadership roles matter to instructional innovation, what seems most critical are the ways in which leaders enact their roles.

References
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