

Introduction to Special Issue

International Perspectives on Team Leadership

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Introduction

During the last several decades, the rise of the global economy launched an array of social, economic, and political changes in nations throughout the world. These shifts contributed to heightened concern about the quality of schools and resulted in what “arguably is the most intense, comprehensive, and sustained effort to reform education in America’s history” (Björk, 2001, p. 19). As policymakers and economists linked academic performance of students to their nation’s long-term economic survival, the scope and duration of educational reform around the globe expanded exponentially (Daun, 2002; Pang, 2013; Zhao, 2009). In retrospect, efforts to ensure national economic wellbeing have been defined by educational policies focused on ensuring broad-based access to schooling (Means, 2018), achieving academic excellence among students (Hanushek, Jamison, Jamison, & Woessman, 2008), networking among schools and students (Bathon, 2011; Glazer & Peurach, 2013), and reconceptualizing schooling (Ball, 2009; Mullen, 2017; Osborne, 2017). In many instances, these protracted efforts altered the conversation



about education reform, particularly with regard to reconfiguring how leaders work (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011; Hairon, 2017; Nir, 2014).

The notion that leadership of schools is broad based and draws upon expertise of administrators, educators, and citizens is an essential ingredient in improving student learning. School boards and superintendents, central office staff members, principals, teachers, parents, and students collectively play important roles in creating circumstances in which every child has opportunities to become literate, numerate, and capable of solving increasingly complex problems (Björk & Browne-Ferrigno, 2012, 2014; Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Discourse on educational reform has increasingly focused on how key stakeholders have changed (Alsbery, 2008; Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009; Potterton, 2018) and are changing particularly regarding the nature and direction of leadership and teamwork focused on accomplishing systemic reform (Browne-Ferrigno, 2016; Sheriff, 2018).

Overview of Articles in Special Issue

This special issue of *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership* is devoted to the work of international scholars who conducted recent studies of educational reform focused on the nature of teamwork. They not only capture a collective sense of national commitment to education as a means for advancing national social, economic, and political wellbeing of nations and their citizens but also provide unique perspectives on the changing nature of leadership practices across a wide spectrum of organizations. Collectively, these seven articles are highly relevant to our understanding of national educational reform movements and

notions of leadership by diverse stakeholders who implemented change at the school and district levels through teamwork.

In their article, “District Strategic Teaming: Leadership for Systemic and Sustainable Reform,” Thomas Alsbury (Northwest University) and colleagues Margaret Blanchard (North Carolina State University), Kristie Gutierrez (Old Dominion University), and Chris Allred and Dell Tolin (North Carolina State University) report key outcomes of their six-year project funded through a National Science Foundation grant to transform high-need rural schools serving children living in abject poverty. Their reform process, known as *District Strategic Teaming*, involved a representative vertical cross-section of administrators and support staff at the district office as well as administrators, teachers, and support staff in participating schools. The process aimed at building district capacity for sustainable innovation focused on improving program quality and subsequent student success. Implementation of the District Strategic Teaming model, which included leadership development for school personnel through an innovation academy, provided the four participating districts with a flexible, responsive leadership collaborative focused on building and sustaining capacity for innovation and reform.

In “Superintendents as CEO and Team Leader,” Lars Björk and Tricia Browne-Ferrigno (University of Kentucky) and Theodore Kowalski (University of Dayton) present updated conceptions of roles assumed by superintendents to address the scope, complexity, and intensity of education reforms in the United States of America over recent decades. While superintendents remain responsible for managing their district’s education enterprise, new challenges and opportunities for educating children in the 21st century require engagement by and support from knowledgeable experts. Teamwork



that integrates distributed leadership, actionable planning, and creative solution finding allows superintendents to respond quickly and knowledgeably to new conditions in P12 education.

In the third article of this special issue, David Gurr and Lawrie Drysdale (University of Melbourne) report findings from their longitudinal work on system leadership and school leadership that includes requisite conditions for improving schools and enhancing student learning. Their article contains descriptions of two research-based models proven to support successful change, which they use to frame the presentation of a successful initiative that involved closing three under-performing schools in Australia and supporting a principal in opening and leading what ultimately proved to be successful schools.

Preparing today's children and youth to become active and responsive adults in transforming global societies require schools to change dramatically. To achieve that goal in most countries is daunting due to educational policies and structures within schools that hinder teamwork and creativity in classrooms. In "Teacher Leadership and Teaming: Creativity within Schools in China," Carol Mullen (Virginia Tech) and Tricia Browne-Ferrigno (University of Kentucky) report preliminary findings from data gathered over two years in China that suggest teacher leadership, teamwork, and creativity can thrive in settings often perceived by outsiders to be robotic learning environments.

Justin Bathon (University of Kentucky) and Jean van Rooyan and Rika Jobert (University of Pretoria) assert in their article, "Comprehensive Platform Networks for School Reform: A Leapfrog Strategy for Struggling State Systems," that digital networks of schools are emerging as an innovative way to tackle the challenges of

supporting leaders and teachers who implement structural and instructional models of school. Networks have always been a central element to public education because schools rely on relationships and connections to both inspire new ideas and implement existing concepts efficiently. New digital-based networks permit schools to connect with others nationally and internationally, thus stimulating transformations in learning and teaching. The article presents successes and challenges of digital-network use in the United States of America and in South Africa.

The school system in the State of Arizona is unique within the United States of America due to its mature education market with approximately 600 charter schools, tax-credit programs for public and private schools, and open enrolment policies promulgated over the past 25 years. Amanda Potterton (University of Kentucky) presents findings from longitudinal research conducted within a public school district in her article, "Market Pressure and Arizona Public School Leaders: 'That Package is Like a Brand New Cadillac!'" She reports how members of district- and school-based teams responded to efforts to counter market challenges on public schools. In particular, stakeholders understood and prioritized notions of *community* in various and sometimes contradictory ways as they discussed school choice issues.

Although the concept of student voice has been explored for quite some time, it is often overlooked in the field of educational leadership. To address that gap in research, Victoria Sherif (University of Kentucky) invited students in a rural school district to share their perspectives on leadership and how they might participate in the governance of their schools. Findings from her longitudinal qualitative study presented in this article reveal that



youths perceive leadership as a complex construct that integrates various skills, abilities, educational learning, and change opportunities. They assert that team and management processes can be utilized to improve the world and people in it but doing that requires responsibility, active and purposeful self-direction, inspiration, desire and willingness to make a difference.

In the final article, "Reflections on Education Reform and Team Leadership," the special issue co-editors Tricia Browne-Ferrigno and Lars Björk (University of Kentucky) synthesize seminal literature on organizational processes and key findings from the articles in this issue. They assert that leadership by teams has become an indispensable characteristic within modern organizations, and as such, must be utilized broadly in education to address effectively externally mandated education reform and internally created education renewal.

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