

Recruiting School Leaders and Supporting their Work

Charles Ungerleider reviews a 2013 OECD study of teaching and learning and writes that ministries and school boards can make a substantial contribution to recruiting successful principals and vice-principals by clearly articulating core system goals and creating the conditions necessary to enable them to focus on those goals and functions.

School boards say recruiting principals and vice-principals is becoming markedly more challenging. Many report that those whom they recruit have less prior teaching experience than those whom they recruited ten or more years ago. No one familiar with public schools is surprised by this state of affairs. What has always been a demanding professional challenge – school leadership – has become increasingly difficult.

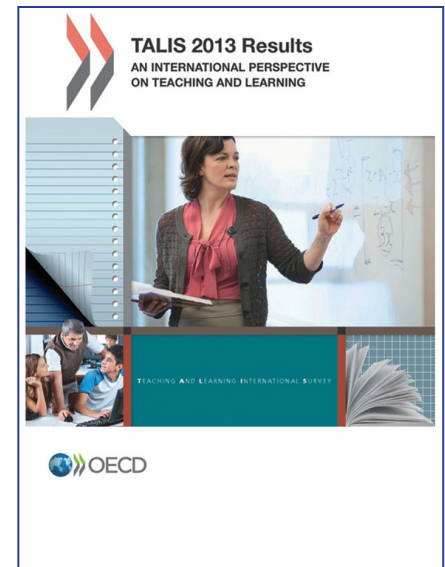
One source of the challenge faced by school principals is meeting what they see as increasingly incompatible demands. There is little consensus about the purposes of schooling and the means of accomplishing those purposes among teachers, students, parents, superordinate bodies for whom they work, and the communities they serve.

Compounding the challenge is the devolution of decision making authority from superordinate bodies to schools

and the demand for accountability. When coupled with challenges of greater social diversity, the inclusion of students with special educational needs, demands for retaining students until graduation and ensuring that they have the knowledge they need to further their education or seek gainful employment, the job seems incredibly daunting, if not impossible.

Principals are increasingly the focal point for improving student outcomes and for improving schools that appear to underperform. Few school leaders deny the importance of these responsibilities, but they realize that their influence on students is indirect and exercised primarily through their influence on the organization of teachers' work, school organization, and their management of the relationships between the school and the school systems of which they are a part and the communities in which the schools are situated.

What principals do and how they do it



<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm>

are increasingly informed by the available evidence. That evidence suggests that effective leaders are ones who are able to establish and maintain a school atmosphere or climate conducive to teaching and learning and who can foster community support for the challenging work that teachers do. For example, principals collaborate with teachers to solve classroom disciplinary problems, encourage teachers to take responsibility for their teaching and for student learning, and provide parents with information about the school and about the student performance.

The 2013 Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS) conducted by the OECD asked principals whether they took action to (1) support cooperation among teachers to develop new teaching practices, (2) ensure that teachers take responsibility for improving their teaching skills, and (3) ensure that teachers feel responsible for their

Principals who showed high levels of instructional leadership were more likely to use student performance and student evaluations in school planning and goal setting. They were more likely to report they had created a professional development plan for their school ... [and spent] more time on curriculum and teaching related tasks and in direct observation of classroom teaching.


students' learning. These items formed an index of instructional leadership.

Those principals who showed high levels of instructional leadership were more likely to use student performance and student evaluations in school planning and goal setting. They were more likely to report they had created a professional development plan for their school. High levels of principal instructional leadership were also associated with spending more time on curriculum and teaching related tasks and in direct observation of classroom teaching.

It is not surprising that principals with high levels of instructional leadership tended to work in schools where the school climate was characterized by high

levels of mutual respect among administration, teachers and students. Nor was it surprising that principals who reported high levels of instructional leadership also reported higher job satisfaction.

There is little doubt that we must recruit successful practitioners to the positions of school principal and vice-principal, help them to succeed and to experience high levels of job satisfaction. The superordinate bodies govern-

ing education – ministries and school boards – can make a substantial contribution by clearly articulating core system goals and creating the conditions necessary to focus on those core goals and functions. Defining the core goals and setting the conditions necessary to focus on them may help reduce some of the ambiguity of this important leadership position and help make it more attractive to potential recruits. 

Charles Ungerleider, Professor Emeritus of Educational Studies at UBC and Managing Partner of Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, LLP, was responsible, along with Dr. Zohreh Yaghoub Zadeh, for the analysis of the TALIS principal survey in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2014), *Talis 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, TALIS: OECD Publishing.

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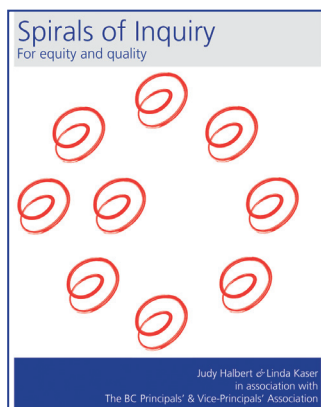
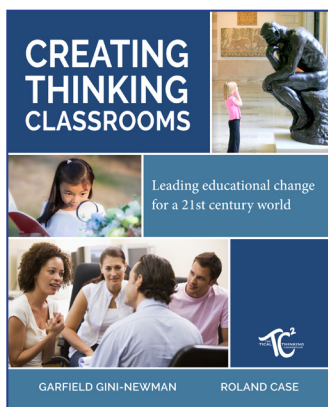
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