LEADERSHIP AND EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOL

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Introduction. There are evident differences between schools (and their management) defined as ineffective, and those which are expert and excellent. Schools with ineffective and unskilled principals simply do not function as they should. They operate ineffectively and in a disorderly manner in their human climate, and of course – have lower standards of student achievement. In most cases, the teachers do not provide full return for their teaching day. Other possible problems: student absences, lack of discipline and violence, as well as tension and disagreements in the interpersonal relationships among the staff, or between them and the inspectors. Parents may feel disconnected from what is happening in the school.

In contrast, effective schools meet all these, and additional, standards to a satisfactory degree. They function well. And these excellent schools exceed the expectations for "achieving the required level". Their students go further and their teachers usually work harder than what is expected from them.

Sergiovanni (1984) believes we must first focus on school principals, so as to promote and nurture school excellence [3]. The involvement of school principals is very important regarding cooperation, selecting outstanding students, and particularly, in their commitment to set nurturing excellence as a primary vision. Principals must do the following to be defined as nurturing excellence:

- Believe in a vision and goals for nurturing excellence;
- Be capable of forming teams of teachers from a wide and varied range of fields;
- Examine the needs of the population of outstanding students;
- Harness interested parties and central bodies in the surrounding community;
- Create commitment among everyone to succeed at their task.

School principals who are capable of committing themselves to carrying out key actions for which they take personal responsibility for guaranteeing success, such as: declared willingness to participate in the programs, personally leading the programs, effective and intelligent appointment of a coordinator for school excellence, setting aside effective time within the school schedule for topics studied within the programs, appointing teachers with suitable goals to teach and specialize in these programs, ability to make high-level and proven demands from the teachers regarding the programs and their obligation to take courses on the subject, while working in the field and on a permanent basis.

Characteristics of principals who nurture excellence in Israel and worldwide. These principals are like leaders who infuse their schools with a sense of human drama, allowing people to rise above their daily routine. They are blessed with the talent to discern the significance of what the group is doing or capable of doing. They have a sense of the dramatic possibilities which most situations incorporate, and the ability to push people forward beyond the mundane, to burst out of the box to something more vibrant and daring. Symbolic leaders who are capable of transmitting their vision verbally or by personal example. They utilize easy to remember lingual symbols with the power to arouse emotion, originality and freshness. These efforts create opportunities for the other people in the school to feel this vision and adopt their own sense of purpose and goals, and to experience greater participation in control over the school activities.

Fullan (1997) notes that school principals who participate in the process of change need to concern themselves not only with their own school's rapid progress, but also with that of the other schools. Successful educational reform on a national scale requires gradual advancement, and not gaps in the progress between schools [2]. Positive national reform must not nurture competition between school principals, as has often occurred in school districts in Great Britain, but ensure cooperation between principals in the same region.

The principal, like the leader, is involved with building the heritage: he creates forms and teaches the "legends of the place," which mark the uniqueness of the school within the culture around it. The closest term which seems to fit this context is a "tribe". The leader's activity is connected with the cultural forces, and includes expressing the school's objectives and mission, the socialization of new members into its unique culture, reinforcement of stories of the past, tradition, myths and beliefs, explanations of "how things work with us", the development and presentation of a system of symbols which have been designed and integrated over the years, and awarding prizes to those presenting and promoting the school's singular culture.

The power of such a cultural leadership connects the students, teachers and others as a group of believers, to the point of honor and admiration for the school's work and goals, which are not at all distant from the ideological system devoted to a sacred mission. All those who become members of this strong and connective culture benefit from opportunities to enjoy feelings of personal importance and significance. Their work and lives become filled with new vitality, which is full of meaning, as well as a broader sense of identity: this is a **feeling of belonging to something special**. All these circumstances arouse **great motivation** and organizational commitment to the school.

The foundations of successful leadership. The most successful school leaders are those who are open-minded and willing to learn from others. Their thinking is flexible within a framework of core values and they are characterized by sticking to their goals, expecting high-level motivation from the staff, commitment, study and being infused with the wish for everyone to reach high levels of achievement, great stamina and optimism. Effective leadership arouses motivation and commitment among school staff members, since if it doesn't, it may reduce the required effectiveness. Therefore, leadership like this requires particular character traits.

The character traits associated with successful leadership (according to the National College for School Leadership):

- Optimism and a positive temperament.
- Developmental orientation (organizations and people with the ability to improve and capable of improving).
- A firm ethical conscience – schools are intended to serve children and students and allow them to grow and improve as learners and as players in society.

The values required for successful leadership. Flintham (2003) demonstrates that successful leadership requires values, some kind of core values which will serve as an ethical compass for work [1]. A successful leader must be guided by the values incorporated in the vision which he developed for his school.

References:

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