

Public Abstract

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The role of the principal has been complex since its origin (Rousmaniere, 2013). The publishing of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 stated, "principals must play a crucial leadership role in the development of school and community for reform" (Weiss, 1992). Accountability was placed on the principal for the overall effectiveness of their school (Weiss, 1992) in the areas of climate, personnel, curriculum, student achievement, and change agents. Within the next two decades, reform concerning student achievement would continue to have an impact on the role of the principal.

The No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), ignited school reform efforts for more accountability based upon student achievement. All stakeholders in the educational field were looking at ways to ensure students were achieving by exploring programs and resources to promote student achievement, closing achievement gaps between low socioeconomic schools and higher socioeconomic schools, and paying high costs for these efforts (Barton, 2004; Reeves, 2004; Rothstein, 2004; Whitaker, 2003). The leadership of school buildings, or the principalship, was now more critical than ever to lead through school reform (Kafka, 2009).

Today, the many demands on educational leaders have evolved into a complex role for the principal position (Kafka, 2009). Defining a leader as successful, by student achievement alone, is not reflective of the traits of successful leaders (Chastain, 2007). Identifying the traits of award-winning leadership at the elementary level provides school leaders and school district administration a guide for selecting the best candidates possible for principal positions (McEwan, 2003).

Eight Missouri Distinguished Principals were interviewed, provided documents reflecting their leadership, and took the Leadership Trait Questionnaire (Appendix D; Appendix E) in regards to their leadership traits. The researcher triangulated the data from the participants and found the common themes of leadership traits among them: a) building relationships with all school stakeholders, b) communication is key, c) belief systems build culture, d) seeking the right traits in teachers, and e) the structured leader.

The author of this study was a subordinate of one of the participants, but used an etic perspective when conducting research with this participant. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). The researcher designed the research, collected data, and constructed themes through the collective case study approach (Merriam, 1998).

The research of this study adds to the body of knowledge about traits of effective principals. Research implications could assist school leaders designing instruments and interview questions for hiring principals, to assist principals in revitalizing their practice with mentoring and coaching, or university or college level programs using the data to implement curriculum design.