Public Abstract

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Title:Leadership Challenges to Public Secondary School Principals in the Era of Education Reform and Cultural Unrest in Border Provinces of Southern Thailand

This qualitative study examined leadership challenges of public secondary school principals in era of education reform and cultural unrest. It also explored the nature of principals' leadership emerged under the two phenomena. Participants were eleven public secondary school principals in Southern border provinces, Thailand. Data analysis drew on constant comparative method associated with grounded theory technique.

Working under the complexities of educational reform policies associated with the new National Education Act (NEA) of 1999, principals encountered three main leadership challenges. Those leadership challenges were: a) working on new administrative structure and management systems, b) dealing with financial management, and c) dealing with challenges relating to parental expectation and relations.

In working in the era of cultural unrest, principals encountered challenges in securing schools and patrons from potential harms. This included challenges in maintaining their school administration and management. In dealing with challenges in providing safety and maintaining school administration, principals provided two main responses including a) expected, and b) unexpected responses.

Leadership perspectives developed by Western scholars and logics of action of principals were used as preliminary framework in exploring the nature of principals' leadership in the era of education reform and cultural unrest. This study found three main characteristics of the nature of principals' leadership in dealing with education reform and cultural unrest including: a) increasing participation, b) transforming visions and producing changes, and c) recognizing ethical foundations.

By using the Western perspectives on leadership theories, this study found that they helped explain and examine the nature of principals' leadership in Southern Thailand, but those leadership theories are not panaceas to unfold all of the phenomena of their leadership. On the other hand, the Westerners' perspectives seems to fail to unfold the nature of public secondary school principals' leadership since they do not account multifaceted factors that lie the nature of their leadership that was influenced by unstable environments and also intertwine with different school contexts especially the complex bureaucratic systems, cultural issues, and specific contexts of schools in the region.