Chapter 54
Principal Preparation:
The Case of Novice Principals in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports quantitative and qualitative survey data from Turkey as part of a larger International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP) that examines the utility of principal preparation programs for novice principals in 13 contexts to find out what lessons can be learnt from each context. Conducted in 2010, this study sought responses from 123 principals in their first three years of appointment to identify the challenges they faced and the extent to which they perceived they were adequately prepared to face these challenges. The findings indicated that, although the participants perceived early years of principalship as challenging work, they felt that they were ready for these challenges, despite the emphasis on theory over practice in their preparation programs. Interestingly, principals who reported having greater than 10 years as assistant principals felt less adequately prepared than did their colleagues who had spent fewer than 10 years as assistant principals.

INTRODUCTION

Principal leadership has long been accepted as a key factor in school improvement. Not only are principals expected to manage their schools efficiently in the face of multiple, varied and competing and changing pressures (Thomson, 2009; Wildy & Louden, 2000), they are also required to improve the learning outcomes for students (DiPaola, 2003). The challenges are exacerbated for novice principals, when their previous training has prepared them to be classroom teachers. In some instances principals enter their role without further preparation than being an effective teacher. For novices the challenges are great: for example, understanding what it means to manage the school; what it means to lead the school; and what is to be changed to bring about improvement (Daresh & Arrowsmith, 2003).

This paper presents findings from the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP), a collaboration of researchers spanning 13 countries, seeking to identify how principals are prepared, what challenges they face in the beginning of their career as principals, and how adequately they feel prepared to face these challenges. The research reported in this paper was conducted in Turkey in 2010, using an instrument that was generated collaboratively by members of the ISPP (Wildy & Clarke, 2009). We now describe three contexts: a summary of what is known in the literature about the preparation of principals; the historical background of principal preparation in Turkey; and lastly, the ISPP study design and outcomes to date.

Research on Principal Preparation

We then proceed to examine the research literature and provide a summary of what is known about the preparation of principals from a range of educational settings. There is no doubt among educational researchers that context counts. Nowhere is this more evident than in principal preparation. What principals can do depends on what they may do and this in turn is shaped by the authority delegated to them by the educational system in which they work (Middlewood, 2010). Notwithstanding the influence of the local context, there is evidence of cross cultural and cross context benefits accruing from the study of principal preparation (Huber & West, 2002; Lumby et al., 2009; McCarthy, 1999; Smylie & Bennett, 2005).

Two issues are well recognized in the literature: one is the central role of the principal in bringing about improvement in students' learning (second to the role of the teacher); the other is that the work of the principal is changing and becoming increasingly complex and demanding. For example, Hallinger (2005) lists the array of roles for the principal, including setting the vision for improvement; actively engaging in curricular programs; developing staff as both teachers and leaders; modeling not only leading but also learning; and being accountable for students' performance.

Although there is agreement about the difficulty of the job of the principal, the need for preparation prior to appointment and support while in the job (Caldwell, Calnin & Cahill, 2003), there is less agreement about what constitutes appropriate preparation that develops the skills and knowledge to do the job (Blase & Blase, 2004; Bush, 2010; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Foskett & Lumby, 2003; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Lumby, Walker, Bryant, Bush, & Björk, 2009; McCarthy, 2002). For example, Daresh and Male (2000) are critical of the blend between theory and practice. The importance of internship and mentoring and coaching have been examined by Ackerman, Ventimiglia and Juchniewicz (2002), Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) and Sherman (2008). The role of standards, knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with successful practice in the principalship has been researched by Bellamy et al., (2003), English (2003) as well as Hackman, Walker and Wanat (2006). Others have questioned the usefulness of principal preparation programs (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Gonzaléz, Glassman & Glassman, 2002; Oplatka & Waite, 2010).

Research has reported that novice principals experienced difficulty in some areas of school administration such as leading and managing staff, professional knowledge, use of resources, self-efficacy, school-community relations, issues related to the system they act in, leading learning processes in school, etc. Some research on leadership and preparation of school leaders has also revealed that new principals felt that they were not well prepared for the role of headship and felt that there had been a lack of preparation for the demands of school leadership posts (Caldwell, Calnin & Cahill, 2003).

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