

A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN
SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION PROGRAMS FOR
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN N.S.W. PUBLIC SCHOOLS
KINDERGARTEN TO YEAR 12: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRINCIPAL
TRAINING AND PRINCIPAL SELECTION.

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by
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“ I was due to give an address on leadership a little time ago at a hotel on the shores of Botany Bay. Arriving early I sat looking toward the entrance... As I did so a huge container vessel came through the heads and berthed at the terminal. My mind went back to the very different time in 1770 when Captain James Cook’s Endeavour sailed through those same heads - the first time by any European ship. And I thought of the captains of those two ships - both leaders. Which, I wondered, was the greater feat of leadership? In what ways have the qualities of leadership required of sea captains changed, or remained the same since Cook’s epic voyage?

In terms of change, there have been new technologies, new knowledge, new forms of communication and the need for new skills. These relate essentially to the technologies of management .

In terms of continuity the captain still needs to establish shared goals and visions, delegate responsibilities, exercise trust, create a constancy of purpose, show flexibility in changed conditions, and maintain confidence in adversity. These relate essentially to the qualities of leadership .”

... I believe that most of the qualities of leadership necessary for the 21st Century, as opposed to the skills of management are those which have always been necessary,... and have endured in one form or another throughout human history...”

Prof. Fenton G. Sharpe, 1995

ABSTRACT

This study focused on those aspects of the role of public school principal which are perceived by members of the school community - the stakeholders - to be the most crucial in ensuring that integration programs for students with disabilities enrolled in regular public schools are effective, in terms of meeting both the needs of these students and the philosophical expectations for “inclusive education”. It further set out to determine whether the seven “generic” criteria currently used by the N.S.W. Department of School Education for the purposes of staff promotion are appropriate for admitting educational executives to the principalship of a N.S.W. public school integrating students with disabilities into either “support” classes or into the mainstream.

As an outcome of this study, the research sought to propose additional criteria, if these were indicated, which should be considered, either as the basis for developing “special fitness” criteria for the principalship of schools offering integration programs, or for designing training and development modules for principals undertaking their leadership roles in schools offering integration programs.

Finally, the study sought to describe the ways in which stakeholders expect the principal to support integration, and to contrast these expectations with an exposition of the ways in which principals of schools offering integration programs actually spend their time.

In the exploration of the aspects of the principal's role perceived as being most closely associated with effective integration programs, the inclusion in the study of relevant stakeholders - principals, district superintendents, special educators, mainstream teachers and parents - provided the opportunity to establish commonalities and highlight disparities in perceptions about the principal's role in relation to the management and leadership of integration programs. Issues and problems arising out of mismatched perceptions were also identified as the bases for further research.

Fourteen schools in metropolitan and rural N.S.W. were involved in the study, representing small, large, primary, secondary and central schools (Kindergarten to Year 12) and Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs). Fourteen principals and one relieving principal participated in interview and diary keeping activities, and superintendents, teachers and parents of children with disabilities from their school communities were invited to complete surveys.

Findings indicated that, while principals of larger and secondary schools indicated that there was little difference between the qualities of effective principalship of schools offering integration programs and those offering no integration, principals of smaller schools and special schools indicated the need for the principal to have additional knowledge and skills to manage and lead integration effectively. Parents and teachers perceived that the most effective integration programs were led and managed by principals who had significant involvement in the operation of the program, and who had good knowledge of disability, special education pedagogy and disability services provision.

DECLARATION

I certify that the substance of this Thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I also certify that any help received in the preparation of this Thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in the Thesis.

.....

(Signature)

F. M. MacLaurin

January, 1996.

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