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DELIBERATIVE ACTS: A THEORY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Enhancing the classroom teaching and learning culture through contemporary learning pedagogy that has a positive influence on student achievement.

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Abstract

This thesis explores primary school leadership in a contemporary learning context to examine the influence that leadership has on teaching and learning and the raising of student achievement. Four models of leadership will be examined – Appreciative, Authentic, Instructional, and Pedagogical Leadership. In addition, school culture, community engagement, and leadership dispositions are discussed in order to understand how particular models of leadership can effect positive change.

Case studies from the United Kingdom and Aotearoa New Zealand provide a context for discussion. Both case studies are situated in low socio-economic schools and involve schools that had been identified as under-performing. In both cases new school leaders were appointed. In a short period of time these schools underwent significant positive change that resulted in a change of school culture, pedagogical growth for teachers, and raised student achievement.

Through the examination of the *deliberative acts of leadership*, key qualities and dispositions of these successful leaders are identified. Commonalities and similarities across the case studies also identify that of the four models of leadership, the school leaders in this thesis identified most closely with Pedagogical Leadership. Contiguous with Pedagogical Leadership, it was found that high relational trust and community engagement were necessary in bringing about the genuine, sustainable change that resulted in raised student achievement.

Sitting alongside the *deliberative acts of leadership* are the social and political drivers that effect school life both here in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally. It is important to find a solution for not only improving educational outcomes for children but also for the pervasive inequities that exist within and beyond the school gate. One solution worth consideration is Sahlberg's work on how Finland is able to provide comprehensive, equitable 'holistic education'.

Finally, with the very recent change in government, the possible changes that might occur in education and what these changes will mean for leadership and education in Aotearoa New Zealand are explored in a tentative way.

Foreword

This thesis is the culmination of a 25 year educational journey that started in a low socio-economic early childhood centre as a volunteer where I worked my way to lead as director. My path deviated to become a classroom teacher in primary, followed by middle management and finally principalship. Most of these 25 years saw me teaching and leading in either low socio-economic areas (in Australia) and low decile in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a seven year detour as a teaching Deputy Principal in a Decile 10 school – quite the contrast!

Over these 25 years I have been fortunate to work with passionate and knowledgeable educational leaders as well as lead teams of teachers and staff who have honed their craft, influencing and enhancing the lives of hundreds of children. For this dairy farmers' daughter, growing up in a small rural school, it has been a privilege.

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