

Challenges and Lessons of Mentoring Processes for Novice Principals: An Exploratory Case Study of Induction Programs in Chile

Authors : Carolina Cuéllar, Paz González

Abstract : Research has shown that school leadership has a significant indirect effect on students' achievements. In Chile, evidence has also revealed that this impact is stronger in vulnerable schools. With the aim of strengthening school leadership, public policy has taken up the challenge of enhancing capabilities of novice principals through the implementation of induction programs, which include a mentoring component, entrusting the task of delivering these programs to universities. The importance of using mentoring or coaching models in the preparation of novice school leaders has been emphasized in the international literature. Thus, it can be affirmed that building leadership capacity through partnership is crucial to facilitate cognitive and affective support required in the initial phase of the principal career, gain role clarification and socialization in context, stimulate reflective leadership practice, among others. In Chile, mentoring is a recent phenomenon in the field of school leadership and it is even more new in the preparation of new principals who work in public schools. This study, funded by the Chilean Ministry of Education, sought to explore the challenges and lessons arising from the design and implementation of mentoring processes which are part of the induction programs, according to the perception of the different actors involved: ministerial agents, university coordinators, mentors and novice principals. The investigation used a qualitative design, based on a study of three cases (three induction programs). The sources of information were 46 semi-structured interviews, applied in two moments (at the beginning and end of mentoring). Content analysis technique was employed. Data focused on the uniqueness of each case and the commonalities within the cases. Five main challenges and lessons emerged in the design and implementation of mentoring within the induction programs for new principals from Chilean public schools. They comprised the need of (i) developing a shared conceptual framework on mentoring among the institutions and actors involved, which helps align the expectations for the mentoring component within the induction programs, along with assisting in establishing a theory of action of mentoring that is relevant to the public school context; (ii) recognizing through actions and decisions at different levels that the role of a mentor differs from the role of a principal, which challenge the idea that an effective principal will always be an effective mentor; (iii) improving mentors' selection and preparation processes through the definition of common guiding criteria to ensure that a mentor takes responsibility for developing critical judgment of novice principals, which implies not limiting the mentor's actions to assist in the compliance of prescriptive practices and standards; (iv) generating common evaluative models with goals, instruments and indicators consistent with the characteristics of mentoring processes, which helps to assess expected results and impact; and (v) including the design of a mentoring structure as an outcome of the induction programs, which helps sustain mentoring within schools as a collective professional development practice. Results showcased interwoven elements that entail continuous negotiations at different levels. Taking action will contribute to policy efforts aimed at professionalizing the leadership role in public schools.

Keywords : induction programs, mentoring, novice principals, school leadership preparation

Conference Title : ICEL 2018 : International Conference on Educational Leadership

Conference Location : San Francisco, United States

Conference Dates : June 06-07, 2018