

ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND SCHOOL-COMMUNITY INTERRELATIONSHIPS IN HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-POVERTY, RURAL CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOLS

Rural California high schools are impacted by disadvantages of poverty, non-English speaking students, limited resources, changing demographics, and challenges of rural context. Despite the odds, a few high-poverty rural California high schools are succeeding at surpassing federal and statewide accountability measures. Focusing on contemporary leadership theories and school-community interrelationships, this qualitative study examined the leadership practices of educational leaders in three high-performing, high-poverty, rural California high schools.

The first chapter of this dissertation presents an overview of the study, followed by a full literature review in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explains the selection criteria and the case study methodology used for the research including context and need for the study, research questions, research design, sampling procedure, data collection and data analysis. Chapter Four provides a thorough description of research findings for each of the three rural high schools studied, emphasizing leadership practices and school-community interrelationships as well as thematic contributors leading to school success.

Chapter Five summarizes the discussion and conclusions of the study. Cross-case findings of the three case studies identified that leaders of the successful rural high schools had effectively employed multiple instructional, distributed and transformational leadership practices to improve student outcomes.

Furthermore, educational leaders in all three cases had established multiple formal and informal linkages with sources outside of the school and/or community to accomplish their missions. Finally, thematic findings identified three consistent contributors to school-wide success in each case: clear and direct focus on instruction, standards and expectations; strong teachers; and multiple support systems for students with varying needs.

An evolving theory, the *whole school, whole community rural leadership theory*, is proposed. The theory suggests that rural educational leaders overcome disadvantages of poverty and rural circumstances through effective application of instructional, distributed and transformational leadership practices with a focus on instruction, high standards and expectations, enhancement of instruction by *all* teachers, establishment of multiple student support systems, and developing formal and informal linkages with multiple sources across *all* sectors of the community to improve outcomes for *all* students.

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