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Philosophy of Leadership: Leading through Relationships

At the center of school leadership is the role that people play. People do the work necessary for initiatives to become successful. The work done does not occur in isolation, however. Leaders and staff must work together with colleagues, students, and the community at large for a school to function properly and initiatives to become most effective. Other than interpersonal relationships, it can also be said that people form relationships with change initiative, concepts, and the school's mission and vision. Therefore, inherent to leadership, is the management of relationships. An adept leader is skilled at building, navigating, and leveraging these relationships.

A leader that understands relationships leads by connecting stakeholders to school initiatives, new concepts, and a common vision and mission. This can occur when a leader introduces topics in such a way as to make abstract ideas more concrete, hence more understandable to those being led. Further, when a topic is introduced in a manner in which a positive emotional response is elicited in stakeholders, it will have a better chance at being perceived as positive, which acts as a form of motivation.

In order to lead, a school leader must form a relationship with staff consisting of trust, authenticity, and clarity. Staff, students, and the community must know exactly what the mission and vision of the school are, trust that the leader can be innovative enough to reach those goals, as well as trust in their own abilities to perform the work necessary. Leaders provide professional development to build capacity. All decision making is done jointly and compared to the mission and vision of the school to ensure authenticity. When leaders and staff are unified in this way, and students included when possible, all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities within the systems that are built.

Furthermore, leveraging relationships within a school community allows for distributed leadership. A leader that delegates gains access a plethora of various talents that may otherwise remain hidden among stakeholders. Emergent leaders may begin to appear as they take ownership of the initiatives they are leading. From this type of leadership, more diverse teams are created that offer different perspectives.

It is easy to lead oneself, but to lead others requires knowledge of relationships. School leaders that are adroit at building, navigating, and leveraging these relationships create an environment that is conducive to success. Teachers feel accomplished and developed. Students feel heard and valued. The community views the school as an asset to the neighborhood. In effect, good management of relationships creates a cohesive school community - with student, and all stakeholder success, at its core.