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Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited

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In 2008 we published an article in this journal entitled *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership* (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins 2008). The article was based on a major literature review that was summarised in a paper published by the National College for School Leadership in England.¹ Both the National College paper and our subsequent article proved to be far more popular than we anticipated and both have been extensively cited over the past 10 years. This article revisits each of the seven claims, summarising what was said about each in the original publications², weighing each of the claims considering recent empirical evidence, and proposing revisions or refinements as warranted.

At the outset, the 7 claims were introduced with the following caveat:

These claims are not all strong in quite the same way, as we shall explain, but they all find support in varying amounts of quite robust empirical evidence, the first two having attracted the largest amount of such evidence. Those in leadership roles have a tremendous responsibility to get it right. Fortunately, we know a great deal about what getting it right means. The purpose of this article is to provide a synopsis of this knowledge. (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins 2008, 27)

The sections that follow therefore revisit each claim in turn offering new insights, perspectives and analyses based on the more recent empirical literature. Our purpose is not to produce a new literature review but rather to test the validity of the 2008 claims in the face of more recent empirical evidence. Claim 1 is the most widely cited and it is where this article commences the review.

1. Claim 1: School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning

We considered this claim controversial at the time but have been surprised by its wide acceptance and endorsement within the leadership field. Indeed, this is one

of the most frequently quoted claims we have made in our respective careers (e.g. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis 2016). To justify this original claim, we drew on four sources of evidence: qualitative case studies of successful leaders; large-scale quantitative evidence of overall leader effects, as well as specific leadership practices; research on leaders' significant contributions to student engagement in school (a strong predictor of achievement); and, finally; results of research demonstrating the negative effects on pupil achievement of (especially frequent) school leader succession.

Three features of the evidence relevant to this claim reported over the past ten years warrants revising this claim:

- (1). The original claim implicitly limited influences on pupil learning to factors within the school's walls. Indeed, the evidence continues to accumulate to demonstrate the positive effect of specific, high quality teacher behaviours on student achievement (Hattie 2008). Clearly however, pupils' cognitive, social and emotional growth is influenced quite substantially by other factors as well, including, for example, socio-economic factors (Domina et al. 2018), features of the home and relationships between the home and school (Jeynes 2011; Goodall 2018).
- (2). The original claim is limited, in our view, because it restricts the influence of classroom teaching on pupil achievement to the day-to-day, moment-to-moment interactions that occur between teachers and pupils. While this claim is empirically correct, as a within school factor (Good and Lavigne 2017), the evidence would also suggest that factors outside the school also account for significant variations in pupils' academic progress and attainment (Chapman et al. 2015). As we describe in relation to Claim 5, there is now significant evidence about the effects of a number of external, school-wide factors and classroom factors making at least comparable contributions to pupil learning and progress than 'classroom teaching' as, for example, Academic Optimism (Hoy, Tarter, and Wolfolk-Hoy 2006) Academic Culture (Leithwood and Sun 2018), Collective Teacher Efficacy (Berebitsky and Salloum 2017) and Disciplinary Climate (Sortkaer and Reimer 2018).
- (3). As compared with 2008, there is now a much larger corpus of high-quality quantitative evidence available which demonstrates the modest but consistently significant indirect contributions of school leadership to pupil learning, as well as the catalytic effects of such leadership on other consequential features of the school and its community (e.g. Grissom, Loeb, and Master 2013).

To more accurately reflect this new evidence, the original claim has been revised as follows:

Revised Claim 1. School leadership has a significant effect on features of the school organization which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning. While moderate in size, this leadership effect is vital to the success of most school improvement efforts.

As this claim underscores, the function of leadership at all levels, or distributed leadership, is to build the organisational conditions that foster high quality teaching and generate improvements in learner outcomes. Performing this function depends on opportunities for discretionary decision making by those enacting leadership.

2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices

Our 2008 article offered a justification of this next claim (page 29) with the assumption that:

... the central task for leadership is to help improve employee performance; and that such performance is a function of employees' beliefs, values, motivations, skills and knowledge and the conditions in which they work. Successful school leadership, therefore, will include practices helpful in addressing each of these inner and observable dimensions of performance – particularly in relation to teachers, whose performance is central to what pupils learn.

The article then described four sets of effective leadership practices emerging from several syntheses of research conducted in both school and non-school contexts. Since 2008, evidence in support of this original claim has continued to accumulate and strengthen. For example, relevant evidence generated up to 2012 was reviewed in order to craft a leadership framework for the Canadian province of Ontario (Leithwood 2012).

At the same time, two very large-scale multi-year studies reported data confirming the effects on student achievement of these categories of practice (Leithwood and Louis 2012; Day et al. 2011). More recent evidence is available from a systematic review and synthesis of five comprehensive leadership frameworks (Hitt and Tucker 2016), a series of meta-analytic reviews (Leithwood and Sun 2012; Sun and Leithwood 2015; Sun and Leithwood 2017) and several quantitative empirical studies that test parts or all of this conception of leadership (Leithwood, Sun, and Schumacker 2017; Liu and Hallinger 2018).

Collectively, this evidence continues to endorse the four domains of leadership practice identified in the 2008 article and identifies 21 specific practices within those domains. Table 1 outlines the four domains of practice including: *Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Redesigning the Organization to Support Desired Practices, and Improving the Instructional Program*. While our original Claim 2 needs no revision, Table 1 indicates that the number of effective leadership practices, grounded in the available evidence, has grown from 14 to 22 over the past decade; the last of these practices (Participate with teachers in their professional learning activities) has been added to acknowledge a key finding from a widely cited review of leadership research reported by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008).

Table 1. What successful school leaders do.

Domains of practice	Specific leadership practices
Set Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a shared vision** • Identify specific, shared, short-term goals • Create high-performance expectations • Communicate the vision and goals**
Build Relationships and Develop People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff • Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members • Model the school's values and practices** • Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents** • Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives
Develop the Organization to Support Desired Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build collaborative culture and distribute leadership** • Structure the organization to facilitate collaboration** • Build productive relationships with families and communities** • Connect the school to its wider environment** • Maintain a safe and healthy school environment • Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals**
Improve the Instructional Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff the instructional program** • Provide instructional support • Monitor student learning and school improvement progress** • Buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work

The dependent variable in most of the research justifying the leadership practices in [Table 1](#) was primarily school-level student achievement results on national, state or provincial tests. Such school-level achievement measures do not, of course, reflect the full range of outcomes for which schools are now held responsible. Equity is arguably the most prominent of these outcomes.³ Our 2008 article had little to say explicitly about equity, so we revisited the four sets of leadership practices through the lens of recent research about forms of leadership which contribute to equitable outcomes for all students. This also, of course, reflects the recent PISA emphasis on excellence and equity within education systems (OECD 2016).

Especially useful for this purpose was a comprehensive review of literature by Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) identifying, among other things, ten leadership practices for equity. Each of these practices may vary from making little or no, to considerable contributions to equitable outcomes for students depending on how it is enacted (more on this in the section about Claim 4).

The practices in [Table 1](#) with asterisks beside them (**) are close approximations to the labels awarded the ten equity leadership practices by Ishimaru and Galloway (2014); [Table 1](#) includes all of the equity practices, as well as considerably more, although the fuller account of each of the ten equity practices by Ishimaru and Galloway also touches on the many of the remaining 11 practices outlined in [Table 1](#). The relevance of the four categories of successful leadership practices to both achievement and equity goals provides additional justification for retaining the original version of Claim 2.

3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work

The 2008 version of our article argued in claim 3 that successful leaders are sensitive to the contexts in which they find themselves but do not enact significantly different leadership practices as contexts change. Rather, they ‘apply contextually sensitive combinations of the basic leadership practices described above’. Evidence about the successful leadership of ‘turnaround schools’ was used to illustrate and consolidate this claim.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of leaders being responsive to context and highlighted how effective school leaders understand and respond appropriately to the different contextual demands that they face. The evidence base about contextual influences on school leadership practices has expanded significantly since our 2008 paper. For example, Hallinger (2016) has identified several types of school contexts (institutional, community, socio-cultural, political, economic, school improvement) that shape leadership practice. A growing body of research now highlights how cultural, economic and contextual factors directly influence, and to some extent restrict leaders’ actions, practices and behaviours (e.g. Lee and Hallinger 2012; Walker and Hallinger 2015; Harris and Jones 2018). In addition, recent research on school leadership has encapsulated more studies in contexts outside the Western world, with a growing range of international perspectives on school leadership practices (e.g. Waite and Bogotch 2017; Barber, Whelan, and Clark 2010) and reviews of the literature from various countries (Hallinger 2018; Harris, Jones, and Huffman 2017; Walker and Hallinger 2016).

Research about leadership for equity, as described in Claim 2, provides another illustration of how the enactment of core leadership practices needs to be responsive to the context in which leaders find themselves. ‘Building a shared vision’, the first practice in Table 1, is a leadership practice generally useful and effective in most contexts. Enacting this practice in schools serving mostly low income, diverse families and students, for example, may require greater communication and engagement with parents (Goodall 2017, 2018). In contrast, building a shared vision in schools serving largely middle and upper – income families typically may not have the exact same communication and engagement challenges.⁴ Contexts such as these reflect the ‘situated contexts’ included in a relatively recent, comprehensive classification of contexts (Braun et al. 2011) demanding acknowledgement by leaders if they are to be successful.

These categories include:

1. Situated contexts (such as locale, school histories, intakes and settings);
2. Professional contexts (such as values, teacher commitments and experiences, and policy management’ in schools);

3. Material contexts (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure);
4. External contexts (e.g. degree and quality of local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions);
5. Legal requirements and responsibilities (p. 588).

Variations within each of these sets of contexts, including different cultural contexts, have significant consequences for how those engaged in leadership work in schools select and enact their practices if they are to be successful.

The number of contextual factors that potentially could influence leadership work and the complexity of determining how they interact means, however, that some general and generalisable features of successful leadership remain important. A school leader's main question should always be 'Under these conditions, what should I do?' Indeed, there is credible case to be made that the role of research is to identify forms of leadership that will be helpful across many different contexts and that the prime role of school leaders is to figure out how best to use that information as they craft their responses to their own unique contexts. In other words, the focus should be on the precision with which school leaders adapt pedagogic strategies and curriculum considering their diagnosis of the learning needs and challenges of their students, in their context, in order to create evermore more powerful learning experiences for them (Hopkins and Craig 2015)

Of importance here is how leadership adapts to the 'growth state' or 'development phase' of the school (e.g. declining school performance, stabilising the decline, beginning to improve performance). There is a significant literature that focuses on the different leadership strategies necessary at each different phase of development (Gray et al. 1999; Day et al. 2011; Hopkins 2013). This approach has also been adopted for analyses at the system level (Barber and Mourshed 2007). Furthermore, there is practical guidance available for school leaders that builds on this empirical evidence, such as the 'School Improvement Pathway' (Hopkins and Craig 2015). This brief synopsis of recent evidence related to context illustrates why we think that Claim 3, in its original form, is still justified and is likely to remain so into the distant future.

4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, ability and working condition

This next claim is built on the widely endorsed premise that most school leadership effects on students are indirect (Bossert et al. 1982; Hallinger and Heck 1996) and draws upon three sets of variables that mediate those effects. In our 2008 article, the results of several large-scale studies carried out in both England and the U.S. were invoked as evidence to justify this claim.

Although not cited in the original article, earlier work on creating the school, classroom and student conditions for school improvement supported this argument and amplified its practical applications (Hopkins 2002). Since 2008, additional work aimed at identifying the most promising mediators for the attention of school leaders (e.g. Hallinger and Heck 2010; Bryk, Harding, and Greenburg 2012; Heck and Hallinger 2014; Sebastian, Huang, and Allensworth 2017) has aimed to be more specific about the nature and impact of such mediators. Although not specifically addressing the work of school leaders, Pink's (2009) articulation of the leadership and organisational determinants of intrinsic motivation provides additional support for the argument here. In addition, we refer to our own recent work to illustrate the direction of such research (Leithwood, Sun, and Pollock 2017; Leithwood, Sun, and Schumacker 2017; Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi 2010).

The central outcome of this body of empirical work is the identification of eleven specific mediators which satisfy two main criteria: they have significant, typically direct effects on students and they are relatively malleable by school leaders. Largely for heuristic reasons, these eleven mediators (or conditions) have been grouped into four categories – Rational, Emotions, Organizational and Family conditions – and conceptualised as 'Paths' along which the influence of leadership 'flows' to exercise influence on student learning.

Mediators or conditions on the *Rational Path* reflect the knowledge and skills of school staff members about curriculum, teaching, and learning – the technical core of schooling – along with features of the school culture which directly support the technical core. Four individual conditions populate this path including Classroom Instruction, Teachers' Use of Instructional Time, Academic Press and Disciplinary Climate. The *Emotions Path* encompasses those feelings, dispositions, or affective states of staff members (both individual and collective) shaping the nature of their work including Collective Teacher Efficacy, Teacher Commitment and Teacher Trust in Others.

Conditions on the *Organizational Path* include features of schools that structure the relationships and interactions among organisational members. Among the most significant of these conditions are Safe and Orderly Environments, Collaborative Cultures and Structures, as well as the Organization of Planning and Instructional Time. The *Family Path* is populated by three conditions which, taken together, represent educational cultures in the home that contribute most to students' success at school. Fostering development of the knowledge and dispositions families need to productively work with schools in the interests of their children's success, these conditions include Parent Expectations for Children's Success at School, Forms of Communication among Parents and Children in the Home and Parents Social and Intellectual Capital about Schooling.

This further specification of variables or conditions mediating school leadership effects on students is a considerable expansion on the three mediators discussed in our 2008 article and the addition of three family-related variables

warrants a modification to the original claim. This modification to claim 4 also reflects the considerable research literature on the contribution of parental engagement to improved learner outcomes (Goodall 2017, 2018).

Revised Claim 4: School leadership improves teaching and learning, indirectly and most powerfully, by improving the status of significant key classroom and school conditions and by encouraging parent/child interactions in the home that further enhance student success at school.

5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed

Claims 5 and 6 are about the nature and importance of distributed forms of school leadership. A considerable body of relevant evidence has been reported since 2008 significantly increasing certainty about the validity of these claims. Contemporary research about distributed leadership now explores, in far greater depth, than research prior to 2008, the relationship between distributed leadership and specific organisational and student outcomes (Harris 2008, 2013a, 2013b; Spillane 2004).

There are critics of distributed leadership (e.g. Hartley 2010; Hall 2013; Lumby 2018) who highlight some of important limitations and reservations associated with this form of leadership. Ironically, much of this analysis highlights the potential shortcomings of distributed leadership as normative and not soundly based on evidence, yet many of these critiques tend toward the ideological rather than the empirical. A recent critical review of the literature by Tian, Risku, and Collin (2015) concluded, that the positive impact of distributed leadership on organisational change and learner outcomes remains questionable. This review, however, omitted important contemporary empirical pieces about the effects and impact of distributed leadership (DeFlaminis 2009, 2011, 2013; Louis et al. 2013; Hairon and Goh 2015; Woods and Roberts 2016) thus calling into question the legitimacy of this conclusion.

A great deal of contemporary research has, in fact, inquired about the effects of distributed leadership on a wide range of organisational conditions, as well as student outcomes. For example: Camburn and Han (2009) explored the relationship between distributed leadership and instructional change, highlighting positive outcomes; Hallinger and Heck (2009) and Heck and Hallinger (2010) corroborated the positive influence of distributed leadership on school and student improvement, as has Leithwood and Mascall (2008); Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009a, 2009b); Leithwood et al.(2009c); Cole (2008); DeFlaminis (2009, 2011, 2013); DeFlaminis (2013, 2016) Giombetti (2009) and Gravin (2013).

The knowledge base on school leadership has also broadened to include considerations of shared leadership and team performance (D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, and Kukenberger 2016); the leadership of school-based networks (Leithwood and Azah 2016) and the well-being of those responsible for leading, at

all levels, in the school (Hopkins 2009). There is also the emerging field of system leadership that originated in England, where school leaders were encouraged to take greater responsibility for neighbouring schools, particularly those that are failing and underperforming (Hopkins 2009; Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews 2009). This wide range of recent evidence provides considerable support for the original Claim 5 which has been revised only slightly, as follows:

Revised Claim 5: -School Leadership can have an especially positive influence on school and student outcomes when it is distributed.

The next claim focuses on patterns of leadership distribution. It states:

6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others

Recent evidence provides further justification for this claim. Both the patterns of leadership distribution and how leadership practices are enacted, when distributed, influences organisational performance (Yoak 2013; Hargreaves, Boyle and Harris,). Evidence indicates that the most productive patterns of distribution inevitably differs from school to school, as contexts vary (Claim 3) but that it is the enactment of distributed leadership *in practice* that, evidence would suggest, makes a positive difference to organisational performance (Spillane and Orlina 2005; Harris and Spillane 2008; Supovitz 2009; Supovitz and Riggan 2012).

Hulpia and Devos (2010) found that distributed leadership effects on teachers' organisational commitment were influenced by the quality and distribution of leadership functions, social interactions, cooperation of the leadership team, and participative decision-making. Teachers reported being more strongly committed to the school if informal leadership responsibilities were distributed or shared by patterns of expertise.

DeFlaminis (2013) similarly found that open patterns of leadership distribution were established by flattening the hierarchy and creating new opportunities for those at school and district levels to lead based on their expertise rather than their position. The creation of new teams to solve specific problems was part of the structural re-organisation and a critical component of distributed leadership in action. Results of research by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) and Harris (2013b) consistently show that patterns of leadership distribution tend to be based on patterns of expertise within an organisation and that new roles and responsibilities will inevitably emerge from an authentic distributed leadership model.

Distributed leadership is premised on interactions rather than actions along with the establishment of new teams, groupings and connections for specific purposes. Consequently, the effectiveness of distributed leadership, research shows, depends upon the particular pattern of distribution and this pattern will depend upon organisational need(s) and levels of expertise within the

organisation, which will vary from school to school context (Claim 3). Hence, we propose that the original claim 6 remains valid and important. Finally, moving to the last of our 7 claims.

7. A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness

The deep background to this claim is the off-again, on-again interest in leadership traits by the broader leadership research community. After decades of effort to identify important leadership traits, a review of evidence in the late 1940s by an influential leadership scholar (Stogdill 1948) declared the effort to be largely a waste of time; excessive numbers of potentially promising traits were a large part of the reason for this judgement. However, the eventual emergence of a personality theory that addressed this problem, the five-factor model Digman (1990), breathed new interest into research about leadership traits. Among the personality traits in the five-factor model, significant effects on both leadership emergence and effectiveness have been consistently reported for four of the five traits – extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness – but not neuroticism (Colbert et al. 2012). The specific contribution of Miles and Huberman (1984) in relation to the leadership of school improvement and more generally Collins's (2001) specification of Level Five Leadership and Covey and Merrill's (2006) discussion of Trust add texture and ballast to our original contention.

Our 2008 article acknowledged that there had been only modest amounts of research about the traits of school leaders. Partly reflecting conclusions from research on the five-factor theory, however, our article concluded that at least under challenging conditions, there was evidence to suggest that:

the most successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. They are also flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), resilient and optimistic.

A 2012 review of evidence, undertaken in support of a set of provincial leadership standards (Leithwood 2012), introduced the concept of 'personal leadership resources' (PLRs). This concept was intended to include the non-behavioral, non-practice-related components of leadership, (including traits) which significantly influence the nature of leaders' behaviours or practices. Table 2 lists the three categories of PLRs identified by the review. The Cognitive category of PLRs includes domain-specific knowledge (e.g. knowledge about how to diagnose and improve the status of leadership mediators such as those discussed as part of Claim 4 (above)), expert problem solving and systems thinking, none of which fit common definitions of traits. Similarly, the Social category of PLRs, including perceiving and managing emotions, as well as acting in emotionally

Table 2. Personal leadership resources.

Cognitive Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem-solving expertise • Domain-specific knowledge • Systems thinking
Social Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceiving emotions • Managing emotions • Acting in emotionally appropriate ways
Psychological Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Self-efficacy • Resilience • Proactivity

appropriate ways, captures much of what has been learned about ‘social appraisal skills’ or ‘emotional intelligence’ not typically viewed as traits. The Psychological category of PLRS, however, does include qualities normally considered to be traits – optimism, self-efficacy, resilience and proactivity.

Our original Claim 7 referred to ‘traits’, as they are typically defined, whereas PLRs encompass a much larger proportion of the covert qualities giving rise to especially effective leadership practice. While traits of the sort identified in Table 2 are alterable, as compared with domain-specific knowledge or expert problem solving, for example, the challenge for their further development is of another order of difficulty. For such practical purposes as leadership selection, evaluation and development, therefore, we argue that the results of research about leadership traits by themselves has quite limited value and that the results of research about the full range of non-behavioral, non-practice qualities underlying effective leadership practices (PLRs) is likely to be much more useful. Indeed, explaining the roots of effective leadership practice will entail much more research about how PLRs interact with one another.

So, what are the implications of this line of argument for our original Claim 7? Consistent with evidence about associations between leader effectiveness and traits included in the five-factor personality model (Colbert et al. 2012), the claim that personal leadership traits, by themselves, explain a high proportion of variation in school leadership effectiveness cannot be justified: however, the full range of PLRs outlined in Table 2 may well do so. But further research will be needed to fully justify this claim. So our revised claim is as follows:

Revised Claim 7: While further research is required, a well-defined set of cognitive, social and psychological ‘personal leadership resources’ show promise of explaining a high proportion of variation in the practices enacted by school leaders.

Conclusion

The conclusion to our 2008 paper began by noting that:

A recent publication sponsored by Division A of the American Educational Research Association (the largest association of its kind in the world, with many international members) claimed that research on school leadership has generated few robust claims. The main reason cited for this gap in our knowledge was a lack of programmatic

research; a paucity of accumulated evidence from both small- and large-scale studies, [failure to use] a variety of research designs, and failure to provide evidence in sufficient amounts and of sufficient quality to serve as powerful guides to policy and practice. (Firestone and Riehl 2005)

The main conclusion to be drawn from revisiting the original 7 Strong Claims is that Division A's earlier depiction of the field is no longer accurate or appropriate. For example, new evidence has significantly reinforced four of the original claims (2, 3, 5, 6), prompted moderate revisions to two claims (1 & 7) and significant refinements to another (4). These results are encouraging for several reasons. First (in contrast to Division A's claim) there was enough robust evidence available in 2008 about several problems central to the educational leadership field to provide a solid foundation for both practice and future research.

Second, a considerable proportion of educational leadership research since 2008 has been evolutionary; that is, researchers have continued to deepen our understanding of key problems in the field by continuing to accumulate enough evidence to count as real progress. A common criticism of the educational leadership field in the past, that novelty is valued much more than strong evidence, may no longer be valid – the sign of a maturing field of study. During the past ten years, scholars also have improved the strength of their research designs including more longitudinal designs, stronger mixed-methods designs, stronger quantitative methods, and more large scale studies.

Revisiting the 7 Strong Claims is therefore important because a decade later, much of our initial analysis of the literature in 2008 still stands. Our analysis, based on scanning the available evidence, has consolidated a significant proportion of what we know about successful school leadership and confirmed that the original 7 claims remain with minor revisions in only a few cases. Our initial analysis in 2008, and this analysis a decade later, suggests that the field is now strongly established from both an academic and a practical perspective.

A systematic review of various studies on leadership models from 1980 to 2014 by Gumus et al. (2018) concluded that distributed leadership, instructional leadership, teacher leadership and transformational leadership continue to be the most studied models of leadership. Empirical interest in these models has significantly increased over the past decade. This analysis found that distributed leadership is the most studied model in educational research with all other models also receiving considerable empirical attention. This review reinforces how the research base on school leadership has expanded and strengthened since the 2008 review.

Looking ahead, with such a firm empirical footing, the next stage of scholarship on school leadership needs to extend what is known to explore in greater depth *how* school leaders enact certain practices, what those practices are and their resulting impact. The 7 strong claims, unequivocally, point to the fact that school leadership matters greatly in securing better organisational and learner outcomes. The evidence underlines the importance of certain leadership

practices, conditions and models of enactment and engagement that make a significant difference to outcomes. This has also led to the increasingly practical specifications of evidenced based strategies and frameworks to enhance the practice of school leaders (Hopkins and Craig 2015).

The future challenge for scholars in this field is to design empirical enquires that move away from describing 'what successful leaders do' to illuminating 'how they do it and measuring the resulting impact'? (Leithwood and Sun 2018). Inevitably, this will require more complex, sophisticated research designs and larger-scale studies that are multi-method and potentially, interdisciplinary in nature.

Re-visiting the 7 strong claims has provided an opportunity to take stock and to re-evaluate what we know, categorically, about successful school leadership. The conclusion from this analysis is that this field is now in a much stronger empirical position than in 2008. For those scholars entering the field there is a great deal of certainty about what is empirically known and huge potential for future studies that venture deeper into the nature, enactment and outcomes of successful school leadership.

Notes

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/327941/seven-claims-about-successful-school-leadership.pdf
2. For the evidence supporting the original claims see the 2008 paper. We do not repeat those citations in this paper.
3. We use the term 'leadership for equity' to mean much the same as social justice leadership and culturally responsive leadership.
4. For extended discussions of this issue see, for example, Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016), Thrupp and Lupton (2006) and Hallinger and Kantamara (2001).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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