

Washington State University

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Will defend the dissertation

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Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend.

EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF COLLECTIVE MINDFULNESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS IN VERADALE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Chair: Sharon Kruse

The challenge facing educational leadership is to create schools that have the capacity to react effectively and courageously, not only to current problems but also to emerging issues over time. This advocates for school leadership to be transformative toward ensuring pedagogical practices and deep learning environments. Therefore, educational leaders need to consider the organizational approaches that transform systems and sustain improvement so that schools can develop deep learning for now and tomorrow. In an attempt to take a step forward in this issue, this research examines the nature of leadership practices in approaching collective mindfulness of high reliability organizations (HRO) as described by Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (1999). Using qualitative methods, data were collected during the 2018-2019 school year in a Northwestern U.S. school district.

While collective mindfulness in organization is often difficult to process, this study offers a distinct story. Although it addresses the significance of collective mindfulness in attending to school operations, it also suggests some limitations in the theory as aligned with the school setting. Findings evidenced the kind of preoccupation with system efforts to reach goals, which is a hallmark of high reliability organization theory. Yet, this preoccupation does not evidence mindfulness across the district in coherent or consistent ways. Data suggested that the leadership practices of the research participants fell along a continuum of variations in the levels of collective mindfulness in schools. Additionally, the data showed mindful behaviors varied depending on the issues faced and the ways in which problems were defined.

Examination of study findings surfaced three synthetic themes. These themes were (1) attention solely to learning standards may limit broader organizational understanding(s) (2) classroom contexts matter; and (3) and missing learning details as it relates to limited knowledge in data use process in schools may hinder rather than support collective mindfulness. In general, defining and assessing student learning by depending solely and unthoughtfully on standards, procedures, and routines has the potential to hide problems and may cause further deterioration in the teaching and learning process. Instead, leaders and teachers should uphold dynamic, continuous learning in order to create deep organizational understanding.