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Successful School Leadership in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic: Fostering Resilience in Teachers and Schools in Poland

Skuteczne przywództwo w szkole w czasie pandemii COVID-19: Wspieranie adaptacyjności nauczycieli i szkół w Polsce

Introduction

A number of high-quality studies on the experience of teaching and learning during the different waves of COVID-19 lockdowns since March 2020 have now been released, addressing how school principals and teachers at different levels of education experienced their work and how school children and youth were educated during this period, but also what effect it had on their wellbeing and learning outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic caused one of the greatest disruptions to education systems in the world. In Poland the temporary closure of schools and universities (firstly, introduced March

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11, 2020, and prolonged until May 24, 2020) affected approximately 512,400 teachers (full-time equivalents) and 4,900,000 children and young people at schools, which was 12.8% of the country's population (GUS, 2019, p. 28). The sudden shift from 'face-to-face' teaching and learning to emergency distance teaching and learning, for which no one was prepared, has – in fact – created a new area of research, relating, for example, as outlined in this paper, to the role of educational leadership in building school and teacher resilience in adverse contexts.

Educational leadership, school and teacher resilience is still a relatively recent area of investigation. It provides us with the understanding what enables schools and teachers to meet up the challenges, especially in contexts of challenge and change. It offers a complementary perspective to the studies of school development, teachers' stress, burnout or attrition. At the same time such research allows for a deeper examination of teacher professionalism and conditions which are essential for schools and teachers to be successful.

This paper takes a broad approach, drawing largely on a social-ecological perspective of resilience (Ungar, 2012) and the strategies to support it. Teacher resilience from this viewpoint considers teachers' beliefs and capacities, features of the contexts where teachers as individuals live and work, and the strategies initiated by the teachers and by the social and organisational contexts that sustain teachers' wellbeing, commitment and job satisfaction. Resilience is understood as a "complex, idiosyncratic and cyclical construct, involving the dynamic processes of interaction over time between person and environment" (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011, p. 196). It is perceived as not only as a psychological construct, especially as a personal attribute or trait, determined by nature, a person's ability to bounce back in extremely adverse circumstances, but as a multidimensional and socially constructed concept (Gu & Day, 2014). At the heart of the presented considerations is the assumption that developing resilience in teachers helps them to cope better with the conditions of crisis and uncertainty within a system of education and school contexts.

The presented study is part of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP). The project began in 2001 with representatives from eight countries: Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden and the USA. The original participants of the ISSPP were keen to use their expertise in the area of educational leadership and their motivation and belief that "the quality of principal leadership makes a great deal of difference

to school improvement” (Day, 2014, p.6). They agreed to create a database of successful principals from each country to identify “the characteristics, processes and effects of successful school principalship in their own country” (Day, 2014, p. 6). The group of countries has since risen in excess of 20 and the researchers involved in this project have generated up to 200 publications of work, including four project books and seven special issues of international journals. Having moved through several phases of research, the ISSPP has undertaken one of the most comprehensive and coherent international comparative study of the successful school leadership. Currently, the ISSPP investigates the issue of successful school principals with regard to creating and sustaining success in different contexts.

The study presented in this paper focuses on the chosen aspects of the ISSPP project and it refers to one of the project issues called “Leadership for Teacher Quality/Capacity Building”. Although teacher and school resilience are an important area of study in the field of education, yet little is known or has been researched within this area in Poland. A study presented in this paper can have an important potential for advancing knowledge and school leadership practice in this field of work. This research could also be of interest to aspiring school leaders, policy makers and university lecturers delivering courses to our next generation of school leaders.

Building on the work completed by members of the ISSPP project, the paper is proposing an answer to the question: “What are the main ways of successful leaders in supporting resilience in schools and teachers for maximising the possible positive outcomes of remote education in times of the COVID-19 pandemic?” The purpose of the presented study is to explore the role of the successful school principals and to provide greater insight into how successful school leaders support the development of the capacity of schools and teachers to harness personal and contextual resources to sustain the teachers’ wellbeing, commitment and job satisfaction for quality teaching in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Successful school leadership and fostering resilience in teachers and schools

Regarding successful school leadership, we can say that we “know” already what successful leadership in school and successful school principals look like.

The past 20 years of research on successful school leadership has identified an increasingly common set of core practices, often in the context of exploring the effects on schools, teachers and students of at least partly distinct models or approaches to leadership. A summary of well documented understandings of this phenomenon was prepared by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) with the indication of the “core” leadership practices. These have been developed into seven strong research-based claims for successful school leadership (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008, pp. 27-28). These seven claims find support in varying amounts of quite robust empirical evidence. They were developed into ten strong research-based claims for successful school leadership, as part of a government funded project in England (Day, et al., 2010). Day, Sammons, Harris, Leithwood, Hopkins, Gu and Brown, summarising their findings of a three-year study, found that a successful school principal looks beyond academic success and considers more holistic achievements of the school, including such things as social and personal outcomes, engagement and wellbeing, and the school’s contribution to the community (Day, et al., 2010).

The recent insights in successful leadership on the role and work of successful school principals, especially the research that makes an effort to understand the role of school principals from an international or cross-cultural perspective, shows that leadership of school principals is an enormously powerful influence on the school improvement, the quality of schools, the quality of teachers and their teaching, and the learning of pupils (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Hallinger & Huber 2012; Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2017). Successful school leadership is perceived as dynamic and emergent, dependent on clear sets of humanistic values, and the interaction of several variables.

The educational leadership and school and teacher resilience literature has identified individual and contextual level factors that may foster resilience in teachers and build school capacity for resilience (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Mansfield et al., 2012; Mansfield, et al., 2016; Peters & Pearce, 2012; Day & Gu, 2014). The research suggests that contextual influences, including school principals’ leadership, on teachers’ ability to thrive within the profession are just as important as individual factors. Resilience in teachers, as it is shown by Day and Gu (2014), can be nurtured by the intellectual, social and organisational environments in which teachers work and live, rather than being simply a personal attribute or trait, determined by nature. School as an organisation has a significant role to play in developing teacher resilience. Formal processes

such as ongoing induction, mentoring and professional development are commonly recorded as factors that can enhance teacher resilience. However, informal support, including the support provided by personal and professional networks, especially the support given to the groups of early career teachers, is also perceived as important factor that has huge influence on teacher resilience (Paptraianou, & Le Corne, 2014). Therefore, school leadership for building school capacity for resilience and building resilience in teachers should focus on improving the professional environment as well as looking at ways to enhance teachers' personal resources, which is especially important at critical times that can change declining trajectories of teachers' commitment. Supportive school leaders who create collaborative school cultures, where teachers' professional learning and wellbeing are promoted, enable teachers to feel respected and valued and they can positively impact on teachers' job satisfaction and commitment (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Cameron & Lovett, 2014; Peters & Pearce, 2012).

Methodology and methods

As Bryman (2004) notes, it was not until the 1980's that qualitative research became common practice when investigating educational leadership. This approach began with the common practice of single case studies. Whilst the rich descriptions of these case studies were of great benefit to researchers, the limitation of using only one site did raise concerns of "representativeness" and "generalizability" of the findings (Bryman, 2004, p. 749). This is in contrast to this study, which is based on five case studies. The inclusion of multiple cases "offers the prospect of producing results that are less likely to be deemed to be idiosyncratic" (Bryman, 2004, p. 750). A multi-level, multi-site case study method allows for an analysis of what the cases have in common or the differences between them (Flick, 2014). This approach is consistent with those conducted by the ISSPP many times before, and is based on the ISSPP assumption that the concept of 'success', when applied to the leadership provided by principals, is a contextualised and relationship construct, as well as an attribution on the part of those who experience such leadership.

The presented study comprises two stages (studies) of data collection between February and June 2021. At the first stage (study 1, February – March 2021), data were collected through document analysis, which is a form of

qualitative research in which different types of documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009; O'Leary, 2014). The following types of documents were taken into account: (i) school documents, e.g. newsletters, annual reports etc; (ii) the strategic plans for the development of education, which are the official public records of the local governments; and (iii) the electronic copies of school questionnaire, which documented the 'best practices' and contains open questions about the policies and strategies that schools initiated, developed and implemented in response to COVID-19 outbreak. A thematic analysis approach was applied to the policy documents and to the questionnaire collected from the schools.

At the second stage (study 2, February – June 2021), semi-structured in-depth, on-line individual interviews with 5 successful school principals were conducted. Each interview took between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews included sets of extended questions around successful school leadership in nurturing teacher and school resilience over the twelve-month period of unanticipated disruptions and discontinuities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were partly based on the outcomes of the survey data analysis (collected through study 1).

The interviews (research stage 2) were video-recorded, with the permission of the study participants. The recordings were transcribed and anonymised. The data collected through the interviews were analysed through employing a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2003; Denscombe, 2007), where the focus was on exploring inductively and reconstructing the study participants' experiences of their leadership in nurturing teacher and school resilience in times of risk and uncertainty. The phenomenological approach allowed to focus on how successful educational leaders interpreted their lived experiences and constructed the meanings of their experiences within the contexts in which they worked, and it was, therefore, suitable for the purposes of this study. Interview transcripts were analysed through an inductive thematic analysis procedure and openly coded to establish broad themes and issues (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Using the themes discovered from each case study, meta-themes were conceived to provide further consideration in response to the research questions. This approach was consistent with those conducted by the ISSPP many times before.

Selection of School Principals

The criteria for selecting school principals were based on a range of evidence that the school has been successful during the period of their leadership. Principals were selected using evidence of students' achievements beyond expectations on region tests or national tests, principals' exemplary reputations in the community and school system. Principals were selected against the following three main criteria: (i) schools which have received a positive external and independent Evaluation/Inspection Report by external inspection with regard to student progress and attainment, the quality of educational processes and learning at schools; (ii) schools which, on the basis of examination results, could be shown to be improving performance over time; and (iii) schools in which the school principals were widely acknowledged by their professional peers as being 'successful' leaders.

Guided by the above criteria, in the end 5 school principals took part in the study, including 3 successful school principals of primary schools and 2 successful school principals of secondary schools, serving different socio-economic communities in Poland. All study participants are female with more than 10 years of serving as school principals.

The key research findings

Data analysis showed that the school principals, who took part in the study, having to respond to the unprecedented challenges of the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, focused on:

1. Sustaining education service delivery and innovations;
2. Planning in a context of uncertainty and responding to changes in national policy;
3. Re-framing and extending "Health & Safety" policies based on health and education data;
4. Leadership across the school;
5. Provision of an inclusive curriculum;
6. Inclusive partnership with children's families;
7. Teachers' motivation, commitment and professional development.

The themes are illustrated with quotes.

Sustaining education service delivery and innovations

During the COVID-19 pandemic, like in any form of emergency, the continuity of education should be treated as a priority and it was clearly articulated by the participants in relation to the schools' re-opening after the first, second and third national lockdowns (respectively in March 2020, October 2020, and March 2021). One of the major concerns that study participants encountered was the maintenance of the quality education continuation. They pointed out their ongoing work across their schools on inclusive education, out-of-school children and dropout prevention, and overall education policy planning support at the schools. They frequently stressed the importance of a first rapid response to sustain education service delivery in the face of the fast-changing demands and increasing insecurities. This issue is depicted, for example, in the following quote: "I will remember this for the rest of my life. March 2020 was full of completely unexpected situations. It was a time filled with fear and concern for life and health. First lockdown, first questions about what would happen in the near future, where we are and what next. Like everyone professionally connected with school, we had to learn quickly how to organise education in a new way" (SP 5).

In addition, the school principals faced the urgent need to re-frame and extend their safeguarding approaches in order to provide satisfactory support to all students, and especially to those from vulnerable groups as their situation had worsened during the period after March 2020. For example, one of the school principals said that: "The key challenge for us was to support the most vulnerable children. We tried to do our best. We tried to make them be present in the whole process of remote education. We did not want to lose any child. Positive relationships with their parents, families were our priority" (SP 3). The other school principal said: "we know that we should not allow any child to be without the adequate support and care. The issue is how to help the families to be with their kids and to help them in the process of education. Sometimes, the level of uncertainty, anger and hopelessness is so high. For the schools it is difficult to grapple with and turn around" (SP 1).

The solutions for sustaining education service delivery were based on innovative actions, as the pandemic period made changes necessary. The previous solutions proved to be impossible to implement them or ineffective in the new reality. The applied solutions concern, among others, changes in: (i) the organisation of the work of schools and teachers, and (ii) the organisation

of psychological and didactic assistance or support for students with special teaching needs. Changes have also occurred in the area of cooperation with parents and their role in the education process. “In the emergency situations, the solutions needed – as said one of the study participants – should go beyond the standard set of instruments. We were aware that innovative solutions were needed. We quickly decided to sustain education and act on our own as responses from the government were rather slow. The issue was to ensure education continuity and access, focusing on the most vulnerable groups at our school” (SP 2).

Planning in a context of uncertainty and responding to the changes in national policy

The successful school principals’ responses to COVID-19 outbreak were immediate and based on planning. However, the task of forward-looking planning occurred to be very demanding because it had to deal with uncertainty. For example, three of the participants reflected upon their leadership strategy by saying: “It was extremely important to set priorities and engage my team in creating a plan based on rapid situation analyses and needs assessments. We were in a very close relationships with our teachers and students’ families and asked about their needs” (SP 4); “I must confess that we were not prepared for managing such a crisis. But, for sure, we were determined to do our best for the pupils. We prepared the operational plan with hope for agility and comprehensiveness while supporting our students, their families, and of course our teachers in those difficult times” (SP 2).

According to all participants, designing and implementing the policies and strategies in response to national policy changes was often viewed as a major challenge. These policy changes were mainly connected with organization of the education for children and the temporary restrictions of the operation of units of the education system in order to prevent, counteract and combat COVID-19. However, the frequency of the government-driven policy changes, the unpredictability of many of these changes, and the overall perception of lack of effective communication channels between the government and local education governments and schools made the process of responding to the changes in national policy at the school level very complex and demanding. The participants reflected on this process and indicated in their narratives that ensuring compliance with government guidelines became one of the major aspects of their work and leadership function after March 2020. Inconsistencies

in government policies became evident and the issue was how to deal with them. The slow and contradictory leadership from the Ministry of Education and Science was criticized by the school leaders. During the interviews they shared their feelings of frustration. Their experiences of a lack of clear communication and direction from government were stressed out in the interview conversations: “Sometimes, I had the feeling that we could manage better without the national policy at that time. The policy changes did not allow us for the proper planning, and it blocked our actions” (SP 1); “We were looking forward to clarity from the national policy, but without success” (SP 52); “Our system made things very difficult for us to plan for. We have learnt about new changes in the national policy from the media” (SP 3); “As you know, the situation was very complex. Changes in the policy for the education system were firstly announced on the television for everybody. Local education authorities and schools were not informed in advance about them” (SP 4).

Re-framing and extending “Health & Safety” policies based on health and education data

The research findings indicate that the pandemic COVID-19 exposed the urgent need for the school principals to strengthen risk analysis and establish risk reduction strategies in educational planning for their schools in order to make them more resilient. In parallel to these activities, the school principals directed their attentions to update and redesign School’s Health & Safety policies and guidelines. It was done by them for providing adequate support to all students, and especially to the students from vulnerable groups.

School principals pointed out that they focused on data to monitor, guide, and institute their local school responses to the COVID-19 crisis and the unparalleled education disruption. For example, one of the participants said: “for us, essentially it was in any planning for re-opening the schools to analyse relevant data collection and generate appropriate evidence. It was around health and safety” (SP 2). The other leaders said: “Our immediate responses and future preparedness depended on education data to better assess risk. Without this, it would be difficult to design any reasonable policies and implement them” (SP 3); “This had to come first for us... This enables us to consider how to implement the localized reopening plans and it went together with the attempts to maintain appropriate education provision for children” (SP 4); “Safe school operations, children and teachers’ health and wellbeing were integral for safe school reopening” (SP 5).

Leadership across the school

In the study, the imperatives of sharing leadership, building a collaborative culture, and motivating colleagues were regarded by the participants as three important core elements in their school leadership practice. All study participants referred to the sharing of leadership as crucial in bringing about cultural change and sustainability in their schools. They stressed that their teachers regarded the growing of shared leadership and innovation through the process of leadership inclusiveness as being very high across the school.

The cultural change that happened at their schools before the pandemic time was mainly connected with building a collaborative culture. A positive approach to the significance of school leadership for learning and development helped the school leaders to lead the schools in the time of crises caused by pandemic COVID-19. For example, one of the school principals of primary school stressed that such positive approach towards leadership, observable among the teaching staff, was helpful in collegial working and shared decision-making to lead to the school success: "Pandemic time has shown how much leadership is important. It was very influential on what has gone on in the space of distance education. Our outcomes would be impossible without the leadership. Good quality teaching at lessons has also been achieved through the leadership of the school" (SP 1).

In the literature, the importance of leaders acting as role models to build collaborative cultures, develop teams, bring about positive cultural change, and provide motivation are all major themes. The significance of school leadership has been rightly emphasised as an aim and way of working in the analysis of the narratives of the study participants. One of the school principals of secondary school remarked (SP 4) "we used different, possible tools for our communications. Very helpful were WhatsApp's groups, on-line meetings and phone calls. For sure, we tried listening to and sharing with others, encouraging, supporting and appreciating teams". The other participants said: "we paid attention to leadership and all leadership qualities in teachers that help individual members of staff feel valued" (SP 5); "After all, in tough times it is crucial that school leaders could harness the skills and energy of the whole school team. The rule is that teams not individuals change schools, no matter under what conditions we have to work" (SP 3).

Provision of an inclusive curriculum

In the study, there is agreement that during remote education major curriculum innovation and a determined approach stand the best chance of including children effectively. Participants referred to the need to draw on the assets of children and avoid a “deficit model”. At the same time, they put in the centre of their leadership work the necessity for providing exciting learning opportunities for children, meeting their individual needs, and creating flexible and innovative learning spaces. For example, one of the school principals of a primary school spoke of inclusive teaching, involving students fully in the process of learning, was inspired and engaged, even though this process had to take part at the students’ homes and in virtual spaces. She said that she wanted “to keep children hooked into learning” (SP 1). She believes that a role for school leaders is to “guarantee that there is good quality teaching in every virtual classroom”. To ensure this, leaders need to model and encourage both rigour and inspiration underpinned by positive relationships with pupils and their families. The other principal reflects curriculum areas for innovation, and national and international moves to make learning more relevant to pupils during the closure of the schools by pointing out the need to “make the learning exciting and children learning at their own rate” (SP 2).

The school principals stressed that one of the priorities in their schools was to implement the curriculum innovations. The move to personalise learning in order to maximise opportunities of children learning was very significant. In their school teachers make the attempts to provide diverse curriculum opportunities relevant to the children. Proper learning environment where the children can learn more easily and, in fact, they are encouraged to learn is one of the most important targets for these school principals. In addition, they reflected the current concern to include more disadvantaged children and young people in the process of education through developing “a need for learning”, and it is a very challenging task for the schools that have to operate during the pandemic time.

Aiding the process of all children being encouraged to learn was the widespread attempt to provide more diverse curriculum opportunities. In addition, rather than seeing children in disadvantaged communities as “deficient”, they regarded their best leadership practice as the recognition that children’s experiences are “assets rather than problems”, that can be drawn upon as powerful resources for teaching and learning. Such approaches where

children and young people's everyday lives and experiences are valued in the school setting, and where they are treated as partners in the learning enterprise are arguably likely to encourage pupils' inclusion.

Inclusive partnership with children's families

In the study, there is agreement that a school should aim to include children's families in the process of remote education. The study participants are keen on the move to greater co-operation between schools and children's families and to create the environment for the partnership with them. It was especially important in the cases of more vulnerable students, who do not have the necessary conditions at home to learn. The school principals recalling their teachers' experiences, said for example: "including parents can help children to overcome the current barriers to learning" (SP 3); "our pupils do not have the proper conditions for learning at their homes. When teachers asked them to turn on the cameras and microphones, a lot of noises was heard. Sometimes their parents watched the movies during the school lessons and they did not even want to turn down the TV volume so as not to disturb the children's learning..., unfortunately" (SP 2).

One of the school principals was keen to point out that a down-to-earth approach has been adopted with local parents before the pandemic time "they're not interested in coming in to talk about visions, about the wider good. Most of the parents in our school will come in when it's about their own child ... it's about finding out what parents are interested in and actually bringing them into school that way" (SP 4). The COVID-19 time shows how much this approach has been important. As two of the study participants point out, "as a school leader I have to have an inclusive vision where teachers, parents and pupils are brought on board with a commitment to learning" (SP 2); "So, school, working even closer with parents, has a much more flexible and creative approach to on-line learning that's much more tailored to meeting individual needs. And it is crucial for our work during these pandemic times" (SP 3). The school principals believe that without parents, without shared aims and values, children will not to be included effectively in the learning process, especially when this process is directly connected with remote education.

Teachers' motivation, commitment and professional development

In the study, issues of teacher motivation and commitment, cooperation among teachers, helping to raise teaching quality during the on-line education, teachers as individuals requiring support, and how arrangements for teachers' professional development can best foster teaching quality and teachers' wellbeing, are all emphasised. For example, the school principals referred to these issues as follow: "Our work in the way of direct face-to face contact between teachers and students stopped overnight. We started to mobilise our resources to sustain education for our kids and everyone was concerned on children, what would happen to them and their education. However, the questions are: What about teachers? What about their wellbeing and readiness for on-line teaching?" (SP 1); "For us and for our students it is a challenge to get used to distance learning, most teachers are also novices in being distance mentors for their younger colleagues" (SP 2); "We see the pressure placed on teachers. They are confronted with a new reality and they in the majority are not ready for it" (SP 3); "March 2020 and we suddenly entered the different world with very high expectations. We were not prepared for it, but now – June 2021 – I could say that we managed. We learnt how to work on-line and how to be with our kids and their families as close as possible. The proper trainings were very helpful. We decided not only on the trainings on new technologies. They were important. But we have recognized how important is building relationships among staff and with kids in the virtual classrooms" (SP 3).

The school principals devoted a lot of time in their narratives on describing how they try to inspire teachers and help them to feel motivated and energised in hard times where their job is not an easy one. The participants seemed to be fully aware that teachers' job requires considerable resilience to overcome adversity and make a positive outcome. The time of COVID-19, new conditions of teacher work and expectations directed towards teachers, all of this has made teachers' resilience even more significant than ever.

School principals perceived the teacher's motivation and commitment as a key for their resilience. Therefore, they regarded teachers' motivation and commitment stimulation as one of their major tasks. They saw their roles in building an inclusive and collaborative culture in schools as being very important, no matter if the teachers work on-line or they work at the school site. They organised for their school teachers different professional development opportunities associated with resilience in online learning environments as

a primary source of their professional learning and development during the COVID-19 times. The professional development activities enable teachers to gain knowledge and skills seen as beneficial for them. School principals mentioned that the workshops and the informal daily talks among teachers, who form their own networks, devoted to the nature of teaching work occurred very needed for their teachers.

These formal and informal activities helped teachers to remind themselves of why they became teachers and why they enjoy teaching as a job and a career choice. Having a strong, clear sense of the purpose of teaching it is very important to sustain not only early career teachers, but teachers of all range of experience levels.

Conclusions

The presented considerations direct our attention to the issue how can resilience in school and resilience in teacher be supported by school principals under conditions of uncertainty and risks in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on leadership, what can help teachers to thrive in the profession and how resilient school can be built in the time of unanticipated disruptions and discontinuities in school-based teaching and learning made possible to identify seven core successful school leadership practices. Among them were such core leadership practices as follow: sustaining education service delivery and innovations; planning in a context of uncertainty and responding to the changes in national policy; re-framing and extending “Health & Safety” policies based on health and education data; leadership across the school; provision of an inclusive curriculum; inclusive partnership with children’s families; and teachers’ motivation, commitment and professional development.

The structural limitations of this paper prevent a comprehensive coverage of this unfolding blight upon the important phenomenon of successful school leadership and its role and practices in supporting resilience in teachers and nurturing resilient schools under conditions of uncertainty and risks. There is certainly a need for further research, in which it would be useful to place emphasis on exploring what are generally considered to be the foundational values, principles and norms underpinning the true supportive leadership in creating the proper conditions for teachers’ resilience and resilient schools.

The presented research and its findings direct our attention to the issues of successful leadership practices in challenging times and models of educational leadership and school governance that we need for the 21st century. Observable changes in the organization of the education systems show educational leaders' role in the new light in building back more resilient education systems. Therefore, for the sake of future considerations, we can ask the following questions: What will successful school leadership look like in the 21st century? What public institutions and modes of organization are needed for schooling in times of crisis and uncertainty? What policies are needed to enhance the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders in building resilient education systems?

Abstract: This paper analyses the successful school principals' leadership practices in supporting school and teachers' resilience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research reported in this paper asks the question: what are the successful leaders' main ways of supporting resilience in schools and teachers in Poland for maximising the possible positive outcomes of remote education in times of the COVID-19 pandemic? Drawing on five case studies, the paper shows seven core successful school leadership practices – sustaining education service delivery and innovations; planning in a context of uncertainty and responding to changes in national policy; re-framing and extending “Health & Safety” policies based on health and education data; leadership across the school; provision of an inclusive curriculum; inclusive partnership with children's families; and teachers' motivation, commitment and professional development. The paper concludes with implications for further research and with questions on school principals' role in building back more resilient education systems.

Keywords: educational leadership, successful school leadership, leadership practices in nurturing resilience, education and school leading during the COVID-19 pandemic, school principals, education in Poland

Streszczenie: W artykule podjęto problematykę skutecznych praktyk przywódczych dyrektorów szkół w zakresie wspierania zdolności adaptacji szkół i nauczycieli w czasie pandemii COVID-19. Prezentowane analizy skupiają się wokół odpowiedzi na podstawowe pytanie badawcze: jakie są główne sposoby działania skutecznych liderów na rzecz wspierania adaptacji szkół i nauczycieli w Polsce do nowych warunków w celu maksymalizacji możliwych pozytywnych rezultatów zdalnej edukacji w czasach pandemii COVID-19? W badaniach wykorzystano metodę studium przypadku. Odwołując się do pięciu studiów przypadków, przedstawiono siedem podstawowych praktyk skutecznego przywództwa w szkołach: podtrzymywanie świadczenia usług edukacyjnych i wprowadzanie innowacji; planowanie w kontekście niepewności i reagowanie na zmiany w polityce krajowej; przeformułowanie i rozszerzenie polityki bezpieczeństwa i higieny pracy w oparciu o dane dotyczące zdrowia i edukacji; przywództwo w całej szkole; zapewnienie integracyjnego programu nauczania; inkluzywne integracyjne partnerstwo z rodzinami dzieci oraz motywację, zaangażowanie i rozwój zawodowy nauczycieli. W artykule zaprezentowano implikacje dla dalszych badań oraz pytania dotyczące roli dyrektorów szkół w budowaniu bardziej odpornych systemów edukacyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: przywództwo edukacyjne, skuteczne przywództwo w szkole, praktyki przywódcze w pielęgnowaniu adaptacyjności szkół i nauczycieli, edukacja i przewodzenie szkołom w czasie pandemii COVID-19, dyrektorzy szkół, edukacja w Polsce

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