Leadership in Context: How Superintendents Understand, Take Action and Shape the Context of Their Work

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“There is no such thing as the superintendency; instead, there are many superintendencies.”

“We concluded that it is virtually meaningless to study principal leadership without reference to context.”

“The more research I do on the superintendent, the less inclined I am to generalize, and that is due to context.”
A portal for viewing superintendents’ work in context

**Work Priorities**

- Managing the district mission/vision and direction
- Supporting and developing principals and/or a team
- Fostering relationships, communicating with s’holders
- Managing resources
Contributions

- Personal
- Organizational
  - Child-centered
  - Focused on mission/vision
  - Built capacity

Colleagues’ Jobs “Similar but Different”

- Geographic location
- School board relations
- Tenure of board members
- Existing cultures
- SIZE
Biggest challenges

- Budgeting
- Political and community influences
- Student Development and Student Achievement
Research Questions

- How do aspiring superintendents and practicing administrators become context-responsive leaders?

- Which learning environments and socialization experiences support the development of context-responsive leaders?
Context-Responsive Leadership is:

- Practical wisdom in action

- A complex mix of knowledge, skills and dispositions

- Expressed through interaction with dynamic contextual variables
Effective Context-Responsive Leaders:

- Are contextually literate
- Engage in fluid conversation with context
- Recognize that contextual dimensions and their influences vary
- Understand that contextual variables can both enable and constrain their behaviour
- Respond to contextual constraints in appropriate time and manner
- Take action to shape their contexts
Personalized Role
Professional Knowledge

Propositional
Procedural
Personal
Process
Tacit
People
Purpose

Major
Definite
Purpose

Talents and Abilities

Passions

Interests
The Path to Context-Responsive Leadership

Practitioner  Superintendent  Preparation  On-going

Practitioner  Preparation  On-going
The Path to Context-Responsive Leadership

- Pre-service Preparation
- On-the-job Preparation

Flags of Sweden and the United States
How do aspiring superintendents and practicing administrators become context-responsive leaders?

A combination of settings:
- Formal learning
- Informal learning
- Job-embedded learning
- On-going professional development

Time
Resources
Supportive social interactions
Motivation & willingness to learn
Which learning environments and socialization experiences support the development of context-responsive leaders?