



## **Doctor of Education: Leadership, Learning and Community**

An Exploration of Cultural Competence in School Leadership in International Schools

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Dissertation Defense: July 18, 2020

**Introduction:** This study included interviews with 14 Heads of School in international schools, to explore the ways in which they are engaging in culturally competent leadership, including diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work. The purpose of this study was to explore the successes and challenges that school leadership are experiencing when engaging in and promoting cultural competence in the international school population.

**Problem of Practice:** International schools bring together students and staff from different cultures, countries, and belief systems, with the objective to provide an international education and nurture global citizenship. However, not all international school leaders prioritize or support devoting time and energy to diversity, equity, inclusion and cultural competence.

**Research Method:** This case study included interviews with 14 heads of school from countries around the world, as well as a document review of materials submitted by some of the participants. Participants self-selected to be a part of the study, and were also invited to submit documents that support and triangulate their work as a culturally competent leader.

**Summary of Findings:** The findings reveal that many school heads are finding success in the areas of the mission, vision, and anchor documents, school policy, and related programming for students, such as inclusion programs, service learning, and student clubs related to social justice. However, there were also several areas that need further development and growth. These include a need to expand diverse staffing, the creation of more intentional structures for culturally relevant pedagogy and curricular practices, providing ongoing and targeted support and professional development for educators related to cultural competence, and more explicitly developing strategic goals related to diversity, social justice, and cultural competence.

**Limitations of Study:** A limitation in this study is that only heads of school were included, and not all geographic global regions had representation. Another limiting factor is that the criteria for being a participant in this study involved heads of school self-selecting and sharing their willingness to participate. This meant that there were potentially highly culturally competent school heads that did not participate, or that some of the participants were not as culturally competent as they might have perceived.

**Implications/Significance of Study:** The head of school is essential in providing strong, culturally competent leadership in international schools. This leadership influences the ability to expand diverse staffing, support teachers with professional learning related to culturally relevant pedagogy training, and influence the conversations related to policy, strategic planning and the hiring practices of the school as related to cultural competence, equity, inclusion and social justice.