

Review and Analysis of the Role of the Principal in Shaping a School Culture

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Date of publication (dd/mm/yyyy): 13/09/2017

Abstract – Everyday thousands of principals are arriving to their primary work place and run schools with certain expectations. Schools need special leadership and school leaders must have distinct qualifications such as the role of management engineer, human engineer, and the ones who design. In order to understand in today’s public schools, this article examines approaches and offers a strategic plan for the future regarding purpose of the school and priorities of the school in the previous literature. While shaping school culture, the central question we need to shed light on “what are the variety of factors, success and job expectations based on their school’s dynamic”. This article seeks to answer the question “How will you answer that question and why have you chosen the answers that you have related to skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary for a principal today?”. Finally, this paper points out that six categories: Vision and Learning, School Culture and Instructional Program, Management Building School Culture: Safe, efficient, and effective learning, Collaboration with Families and Communities, Acting with Integrity, Fairness and in an Ethical Manner, Political, Social, Economic, Legal and Cultural Context. Each categories is addressed in this article.

Keywords – School, Role of Principal, Culture Shaping.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to deliver school leaders insight into approaches for managing and advocating the schools for which they are accountable. In this study, we portray previous literature, different views and approaches toward principal’s role and leadership. We also summarize previous literatures’ suggestion about meaningful improvements in academic achievement and tactics for the principal about how to be an effective instructional leader.

Sergiovanni (2007) asserts that today’s schools are very special places and “schools need special leadership” (pg. 1). Sergiovanni reasons school leaders hold the role of “management engineer” (p. 7), “human engineer” (p. 8), and “clinical engineer”. Stein (2012) also affirms that school leaders are the ones who design and draw schools’ blue prints (p. 54) like an architect. The research indicated that like an architect who reviews the requirements for fire, health, plumbing, electricity, parking, sewage system, wall, frames and air conditioning, principals should (a) create a strategic plan for the future (p. 54), (b) learn how to use data and help teachers understand data available to them (p. 55, para. 1), (c) make decisions about priorities of the school and focus on competence (pg. 55, para. 2), and (d) reminding primary purpose of the school is preparing students for college or work (p. 55, para. 3).

Knowledge in 21st Century Schools

Townes (2009) postulate that: “As our public schools become more and more culturally diverse, and our classroom teachers become more and more homogenized,

attention to multicultural education becomes pressing” (pg. 49). Masumoto & Brown-Welty (2009) address three leadership practices in today’s public schools; transformational leadership theory, distributed or collaborative leadership theory, and instructional leadership theory (pp. 1-18). Masumoto & Brown-Welty (2009) detect that there are also three major unforeseen challenges that emerged amongst today’s leaders: (a) “identity crisis” (b) “goal ambiguity, resulting from emerging culture clashes between old and new, rural and suburban constituencies “, and (c) “ambiguities in resource allocation” (p. 3).

Understanding 21st Century schooling is very important for a principal. On a panel led by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and John Klein, they said that, “The dominant power of the 21st Century will depend on human capital”. They also said “The failure to produce that capital will undermine American security.” It is very important to know and learn where our students are coming from, for they are struggling to construct their character. Most of them come from single-parent homes without enough role models. Children are constructing their world out of the dialogues of their parents, friends from movies. They are picking up the meanings of the world from everyday experiences at home, on the street and, rarely, from the school (Marzano et. al 2005, p.104).

Everyday thousands of principals are arriving to their primary work place and run schools with certain expectations. We can assume that all principals have job expectations based on their school’s dynamic. Since a principal’s expectation are defined by a variety of factors, level of experience, personality traits, environment, culture competencies, etc., teachers are facing thousands of different expectations throughout the country each day. In 1983, A Nation at Risk Report (ANAR) report that our students and our schools were not keeping up with their international peers (Ravitch, 2010, 223). ANAR (1983) stated that “citizens also know in their bones that the safety of the United States depends principally on the wit, skill, and spirit of a self-confident people, today and tomorrow.” ANAR indicated several deficiencies in education and recommended addressing those problems. Shirpman and Murphy (1996) wrote a front letter for ISLLC 1996 standards. They indicated that ISLLC 1996 standards were going to be guide for reinventing tomorrow’s schools (ISLLC, 1996, p. 3). Twenty-five years after ANAR report, ISLLC 2008 is adopted by National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA).

II. PART A – BASIC SKILLS, ABILITIES, AND KNOWLEDGE

Basic skill, ability, and knowledge are the main parts of the ISLLC 2008 Educational Leadership Policy Standards.

For each standard, school principal is expected to have knowledge, carry disposition (skills), and show performance (ability).

In order to answer the question “How will you answer that question and why have you chosen the answers that you have related to skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary for a principal today?” This would categorize our answers in six categories which are aligned with ISLLC 2008 standards. The classifications will be such as vision and learning, school culture and instructional program, management building school culture: safe, efficient, and effective learning, collaboration with families and communities, acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner, political, social, economic, legal and cultural context, knowledge, skill and ability to each group would be enlightened in the following section.

1. *Vision of Learning*

Our view of learning is that developing a shared vision for the goal-setting process is the superintendent’s responsibility. School administrators should align the educational programs, plans and actions to the district’s goals and objectives for student learning based on state standards. All results of assessments should be used appropriately to focus instruction and enhance students’ achievement. With ongoing professional development, Administrators should find new and more effective practices in school by empowering the staff members.

Their research revealed that many schools can be turned around with strong leadership, effective communication, and immediate action.

2. *School Culture and Instructional Program*

This study points out that families play an important role in one’s education; a role equal to that of the school. In practice, school administrators should provide leadership for establishing a purposeful community that provides guidance to school leadership team (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 99) focuses on continuous improvement.

Payne (2008) illustrates that “if we know a good deal about what would work, what we do not know is how to implement these things at fidelity scale, within the operative resource limits” (p. 95). Payne also notes that “extending and protecting time” is a very expensive pathway to school reform. He suggests creating pathways to “better use of time we already have” (p. 94).

Goal-setting theory could be a great tool to talk about during interview. Seyfart (2008) introduced this model as designed for experienced teachers who are able to identify their professional development needs (p. 147). In this model principal are reviewing and clarifying the goals for the year. After teacher and principal agreed on a plan, the plan is considered as a contract between parties. Following principals are recommended during goal-setting: (i) When the goals are achievable, the employees are more confident, (ii) performance goals should reflect the outcomes envisioned in school mission and strategic plans, (iii) feedback helps the staff members (Seyfart, 2008, p. 147).

3. *Management Building School Culture: Safe, Efficient, and Effective Learning*

School leaders practice their leadership at their schools in many ways, and their practice shapes the school's culture.

ISLLC standard 3 states that the teachers, support personnel and administrators should be given ample opportunities for professional development. Teachers should be included during the decision making process relative to in-service programs. During the 1st author’s first year as an administrator, he gained the experiences below. Based on the first authors’ central practice in this field, this study claims there is an indirect relationship between school effectiveness and student that is mediated by other actions of the school. One of the most important issues is hiring dedicated and invested teachers. With a viable curriculum and adequate resources, a dedicated teacher will create an effective learning environment.

Administrators must also ensure the maintenance of school buildings and grounds to provide a safe school environment. To this end, they should establish a team for environmental design and crisis management planning. Safety is a primary concern of every school; it is fundamental that schools provide a safe learning environment for their students.

4. *Collaboration with Families and Communities*

Black (2007) points out that educational success is a team effort and that leaders should collaborate with teachers, community members, and parents to build a foundation of continuous academic achievement. Education is a shared responsibility; each community is a part of a puzzle which can only be completed when all pieces are properly placed.

Educational success is a team effort and school leaders should collaborate with teachers, community members, and parents to build a foundation of continuous academic achievement (Black, 2007); success is a shared responsibility. Each community is a part of the puzzle, and the puzzle can only be completed when all pieces are properly placed. In practice, a principal should promote and support the success of all students by collaborating with families and communities in their involvement at the school (ISLLC, 2008, standard 4). Allowing diverse students to celebrate their important days and weeks at the school could be a good practice.

5. *Acting with Integrity, Fairness and in an Ethical Manner*

If we take each school as a ship, the principals of each school are the captain. The principal as a captain should display leadership to stakeholders, and run their ship flawlessly. According to Marzano (2006) principals should display leadership values (p. 18), beliefs (p. 8), and attitudes (16) that encourage others to higher levels of enactment (p. 6).

This study highpoints that school administrators should demonstrate an ethical and professional manner while maintaining and protecting the rights and confidentiality of other school members. In practice, the principal should be an inspirational leader by showing his values, beliefs and attitudes toward other community members. He should maintain that leadership by fulfilling all legal and contractual obligations. In practice, culturally responsive teaching could be one solution. Treating each and every students equally could be a good practice (ISLLC, 2008, Standard 5).

6. Political, Social, Economic, Legal and Cultural Context

Sergiovanni and Starratt (2006) postulates that “the essential task of management is to arrange organizational conditions and methods of operation so that staff members can achieve their own goals”. Culture can also be defined as a set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people. School culture is an important issue (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 2006, 342. Continuously being an advocate for future citizens is another important facet of schooling children. In this regard, administrators and teachers play an important role in children’s lives; giving opportunities to children with ongoing advocacy and support for their success is crucial.

III. PART B – PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Beyond the many problems that all school administrators experience throughout the year, urban school administrators must deal with widespread poverty, public transportation, student behavioral issues, and other social and environmental issues commonly found in urban areas that their counterpart school systems are not faced with. Like all administrators, they have the additional challenges of lack of funding, resources and time.

Seyfart (2008) said, “The principal depends on the performance of others. The principal bears ultimate responsibility, he or she must be able to select employees who are knowledgeable and competent, and must provide guidance and supervision to ensure that they perform effectively” (p. 62). For a principal, it is important to know the meaning of the culture in a school and the dynamics of the school culture where he/she will serve. Krouse and Louis (2009) highlights that “a school’s culture is characterized by deeply rooted traditions, values, and beliefs, some of which are common across school and some of which are unique and embedded in a particular school’s history and location” (pg. 3). From this sentence, it can be finalized that one of the dynamic is the people who work in a school create their own culture. New staff members are generally adapting themselves to the culture that they are new. Since the people create their own culture, than school leaders should play role in the creation of a good school culture. Fullan 2007 indicates that “changing working conditions is an important duty of school leaders that is practiced through successful organizational changes.” (p. 292). Leadership plays important role in changing the structure of the schools. Sergiovanni (1992) concludes that the school leader should pay attention to teaching, learning, chatting, facilitating and monitoring every activity, and that they must do these things “on the ground.” Sergiovanni also agrees that “the more crucial role of principal is as head learner, engaging in the most important enterprise of the school house – experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils do” (p. 80).

Kelly and Peterson (2007) consider that “school leaders are the key to initiating, implementing, and sustaining high-quality school” (p. 356). Having a key personnel is not

always solution. Kelly and Peterson (2007) claimed that schools also “need a well-conceived curriculum, quality instructional strategies, good assessment strategies that will guide instructional planning, and a good school improvement effort” (p. 355).

The culture of the school should be open for such social networking in the organization.

Krouse and Louis (2009) point out that: “The concept of organizational learning (OL) suggests that continuous improvement through collective engagement with new ideas will generate enhanced classroom practices and deeper understanding of how organizational improvement occurs” (p. 8).

Sayfarth (2008) cited Thompson (2003) on the high performing school system, where administrators promote a learning environment that is safe, efficient and effective. The features of such a system are: (1) Standards-based while challenging the standards; (2) a clear mission; (3) the school climate is safe and conducive to learning; (4) school performance assessments are used to guide instruction; (5) there is high quality professional development; (6) there are powerful resources; (7) data is analyzed, organized, and interpreted correctly; and (8) there is communication with both internal and external stakeholders (Seyfhart, 2008, p. 5).

Trust

Krouse and Louis (2009) stated that trust is the most important element holding social networks and relationships together. PLCs are a type of social network where associates are socialize and collaborate. Krouse and Louis (2009) stated several ways to observe and evaluate trust in an organization: 1) Staffs are collaborating; 2) dialogues are open and reflective on student achievement; 3) decentralized decision-making is happening; 4) the community is integrated with the school; and 5) rules and regulations on resolving issues are in place (p. 9).

Leaders should be believed by the people surrounding them. Each staff member should have confidence and competence in order to achieve success.

Organizational Learning through Professional Learning Community Programs

Fullan (2007) stated “professional learning is not about workshops and courses, or meeting high standards and qualification frameworks. He said that it is primarily remodeling teachers working conditions (p. 283) and changing school culture (p. 291). It is the duty of the principal to introduce and implement successful models and programs (Sundell et. al., 2012).

Blasé & Blasé (2004) cited in Hord (1997a, 1997b) acknowledged five features of effective specialized education communities; Supportive and shared management; Shared values and vision; Cooperative learning and application of learning; Supportive conditions (common talking time); Inputting of individual performs (teachers held peer reviews of colleagues) (pp. 178-179).

Peer Collaboration for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

True peer collaboration happens teachers are learning from each other. Blasé & Blasé (2004) said in their research that teachers should learn from each other to make progress

in their profession; while they are collaborating, they model each other's positive teaching strategies. While collaborating, Blasé & Blasé (2004) recommend that leaders motivate groups toward collaboration. Motivation and inspiration should be part of professional development (Blasé & Blasé, 2004, p. 187).

Peer collaboration happens in several ways:

Mentorship Programs: In many schools' first year, teachers are assigned to a veteran teacher who models instructional behaviors. Seyfarth (2008) said that teachers respond more rapidly to mentors than to principals and supervisors, and that mentors are sometimes more accessible than administrators. It is interesting for new teachers to find out the facts regarding mentors' teaching experience, sensitivity, approachability, and positive outlook.

Department meetings: Departments can be established by grade level, by the subject that is taught, and/or by subject and grade. Departments can meet every other week to discuss curriculum, instruction, daily plans, and student achievement/grades.

Common planning time: Common planning time will help teachers who are teaching similar subjects. They can meet once per week in a common planning session.

Task force meetings: These teams are established for specific reasons and work around a narrower theme, such as data interpretation, discipline-hearing teams, textbook committee, after-school committee and etc.

Krouse and Louis (2009) said that collective identity is important for collaborative work. They also indicated the importance of shared norms, shared values, and working together towards resolving problems of practice during discussions. They said that in collaborative workplaces, teachers are developing shared memories to assist new learning and change (pg. 84).

In order to establish a professional development school leaders should work on 4 components; teacher leadership, resource access, developing a leadership program, and teacher empowerment.

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