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CAN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP LEAD TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS?

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Abstract

This article examines the link between transformational leadership and collaborative school cultures, in promoting school improvement and school effectiveness. The author seeks to highlight the importance of transformational leadership with teachers, parents, and school heads' co-operation as critical factors in school improvement and school effectiveness. The author's main argument is that, transformational leadership can make a difference in terms of school improvement and school effectiveness. This will depend however, on what people value, effective school-community partnership and collaborative leadership. Transformational leadership can be achieved not only in developed countries, but also in third world countries where traditionally, leadership has tended to be hierarchical and autocratic.

1. Introduction

Cultural values vary across nations. While it is still debatable whether school leadership can make a difference to school improvement and school effectiveness, this article raises questions that will take us beyond the basic issues of school leadership. Firstly, what exactly is transformational leadership, and how is it linked to, not just cultures, but collaborative school cultures? Secondly, what is involved in school improvement? Thirdly, how do we measure school effectiveness? Lastly, what is the link between these concepts. There is an attempt to contextualise the debate in terms of developments in developed as well as Third World countries, as the author

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

has studied leadership in a developed country, and practised as a leader in a developing country.

2. 0 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership encompasses almost all the techniques involved in creating, cultivating and managing change. It is the type of leadership best suited to the post modern educational environments that tend to be characterised by reforms in both developed and Third World educational settings. Transformational leadership, as noted by Diron (1994, p.8) "is, leadership for change, a process concerned with values, beliefs, feelings and shared vision, that lead to positive change". One might wonder how these values can be shared leading to positive change. Sergiovanni (1990, p.23) points out that, "in transformative leadership, leaders and followers are united in pursuit of higher-level goals common to both", thus leadership for school improvement could be the higher level goal being pursued.

Transformational leadership can be linked to collaborative school culture, as school culture also involves the shared set of norms, values, beliefs and assumptions that influence people's social outlook (Campo, 1993). Unlike transactional leadership, where leaders manage a series of transactions, transformational leaders according to Bass (1985) raise the community's consciousness about values. Both leaders and the followers are involved in meeting the needs of the school organisation. In developing countries such as Zimbabwe, collaborative school cultures are reflected, as many rural schools draw upon the local expertise of parents, involve them in some learning sessions and other developmental programmes. Local parents are invited to come and hold discussions with pupils on topics like local history, as well as aspects of traditional healing practices and other forms of knowledge. This makes learning more interesting and meaningful to pupils as stated by Deal (1987, p.5), that "Culture, is an all-encompassing tapestry of meaning". Culture, as noted by Owens 1987; p.167) "is shared and learned, it is a social invention, it is concerned with the way people do certain things, it gives meaning to life, . . . it shapes and structures people's experiences and thoughts". By giving parents the opportunity to share what they know about

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

their own culture, parents feel respected and in the process, positive relationships are created. On the other hand, children learn to appreciate, respect and value their own parents as well. It is only through shared understandings such as this, that teachers, parents, school head and the pupils can work together. However, whether this kind of effectiveness has ever been considered by those in developed countries, is something yet to be questioned. A sense of community, parental involvement, order and discipline are important to maintain a positive climate and an atmosphere conducive to learning (Austin & Reynolds, 1990; Berreth & Berman, 1997).

Whilst in transformational leadership, the purpose of a leader and group members becomes closely linked as they pursue mutual goals, one characteristic is that all educators are treated as active participants. This leads to positive culture building in schools (Diron 1994). Whilst cultural values vary across nations, Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) also indicated that culture tends to shape the institutional and community context within which the school is situated within a nation, and hence becomes the source of values that people share in that society. New Zealand schools for instance, work in partnership with parents in pursuit of higher goals, suitable for their culture which is different from countries like Zimbabwe. Parents participate in school projects such as fund raising programmes, curriculum designing and budget planning. Their goals are mostly related to the direct learning of the pupils. The money raised, is put mostly towards buying material resources such as library books, computers and other useful teaching/learning equipments for improving the learning conditions of pupils. Some parents assist in the actual classroom teaching. Thus, if leaders combine the characteristics of transformative and collaborative leadership, the outcomes should lead to improvement. Whilst Sergiovanni (1984) observed that the dynamics of leadership revolve around the issue of culture building, Deal (1987, p.5) noted that the school's culture is essentially "the way we do things around here". Whatever people do, if it leads to improvement and is effective in the way it is done, this should be acknowledged or celebrated as school effectiveness.

3. School Improvement and School Effectiveness

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

Culture building in many instances, constitutes only a part of what leaders do (Beare et al 1989; Duignan 1988). Therefore, transformational leadership can be linked to, but is much more than culture building. Whilst change may simply mean any alteration of the curriculum, teaching and learning styles, school improvement is more than just classroom change as Hopkins (1990) noted. It involves all aspects of change such as clear goals and commonly shared high expectations, pupils' performance, social behaviour, teachers/parents and school head relationships, resources, the buildings and anything related to the learning conditions of the pupils. School improvement actually leads to school effectiveness. However, to achieve effectiveness Austin and Reynolds, (1990) noted that there is need to improve both the learning, and internal conditions, through collaborative planning, a sense of community and collegial relationships.

In Zimbabwe there is what is called 'hot sitting', that is a school having double sessions leading to students taking classes in the open space due to shortage of classrooms. It is the responsibility of parents, in government assisted schools to put up the required school infrastructure such as classroom blocks. For instance, in Zimbabwe at a school where I spent my year of practical teaching for my diploma in education course, the school head, despite financial problems, worked in partnership with the community to mobilise support for putting up additional classrooms. This was an instance of school improvement since school improvement, according to Marsh (1990), aims at changing positively the learning environment. Parents in the school were driven by team spirit and worked in pursuit of one goal, with the school head being a purposeful leader as noted by Sergiovanni (1990). Mortimore and Sammons (1987, p.7) also observed that, "purposeful leadership occurs where the school head understands the needs of the school and is actively involved without exerting total control over staff". With effective school leadership, schools develop the potential and capacity to have a positive influence on educational improvement programmes and school effectiveness. Parents with different skills, in the Zimbabwean school, volunteered to work in accordance with Barth's (1990) belief that every person is an expert at something and a learner as well as a leader in some other contexts. From the moulding of

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

bricks, to planning the classroom block, to the actual building and completion of the classroom block, parents contributed in terms of material, financial as well as building skills identified from within the community. People had the opportunity to share ideas as Limbert (1995) noted, "successful change is based on shared meanings and values among peers".

From the above experience, it can be argued that Glickman's (1991, p7) comment that "principals should strive to be 'not an instructional leader', but rather a leader of instructional leaders" matches well with transformative leadership, in which "the best principals are not heroes; they are hero makers" as noted by Barth (1990, p.145). The school head in the above school worked as a facilitator in organising financial and material resources.

The process was successful partly because there was positive interaction among the staff and the community. The little rural school got additional infrastructure, thereby positively contributing to the uplifting of the quality of learning and the improvement of the school in general. School effectiveness is also a measure of the quality of school-community partnership. It thus focuses on the quality of relationships as well as students' performance. It would be assumed that children learning from the inside of a building would have less outside interruptions and hence benefit more, than those learning from an open space. Can people not celebrate the highlighted experience as school improvement! How then, is effectiveness of the school measured?

What is clear from the above example is that change is a process that takes time, the improvements at this small rural school did not take place overnight. However, with transformative leadership, supportive school culture based on school-community partnership, school improvement ultimately leading to school effectiveness occurred. Hence, it follows that leadership is an essential ingredient in creating and maintaining change. The importance of collaboration has been demonstrated as central, in the creation of a positive climate, and culture of educational change (Fullan, 1992, 1993; Hargreaves 1997).

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

Although Scheerens' (1992) definition of school effectiveness, simply related to student performance, the way the school operates in general, that is, positive relationships between school leaders, staff, parents, pupils, and the community, can also be linked to school effectiveness. According to Mortimore (1997), school effectiveness which is linked to school improvement, requires an examination of school climate, staff behaviour, pupils' attitudes and institutional relationships. School effectiveness goes beyond the ordinary delivery and instructional requirements of the school curriculum. It encompasses 'education for a living'. It is not simply measured in terms of student grades, but is inclusive of other aspects of life such as their physical, social, spiritual and moral well being.

Transformational Leadership, School Improvement and School Effectiveness, differences in leadership style and communication systems contribute to variations in school cultures, and these in turn, have effects on school improvement and school effectiveness. Sergiovanni (1984) points out that schools with clearly defined goals, a clear vision, high expectations of their students, and a strong sense of collegiality, tend to have supportive school cultures, that have a positive bearing on school effectiveness. The example of the rural school given earlier on highlighted some experiences in schools within the Zimbabwean context which clearly show the effectiveness of communication, shared vision and high expectations. Campo (1993) links school improvement processes and effectiveness of schools to variations in collaborative cultural patterns. This view is supported by Hayes (1995) who noted that, with collaborative decision-making, it is the approach that promotes change. The importance of relationships between school values and teachers' feelings are major determinants of school effectiveness. As Sergiovanni (1990, p.25) points out, a "successful leader is also a good follower, one who is committed to ideas and values and beliefs".

The successful school head is one who constantly introduces systems which involve trying out things that contribute to the school's improvement in different ways. Largely it is only through shared understandings that teachers, parents, the school head and the pupils can work together as Barbour, Tipping and Bliss, (1994) and other authors have indicated. Parents can assist

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

children when doing homework, participate in school projects such as fund raising programmes and can participate in actual classroom teaching processes. The importance of school head's approaches to the complex task of working with teachers and the community is underlined by Fullan (1992), who suggests that interactive/collaborative techniques contribute to school effectiveness. Leadership qualities associated with effective school management include positive school head/teacher interaction, trustworthiness and ability to motivate. With effective school leadership, schools have the potential capacity to have a positive influence on educational improvement and school effectiveness.

In a discussion, of factors that have a bearing on school effectiveness, Rutter (1979) stresses that the school environment characterised by good working conditions, responsiveness to pupils' needs and good care of school buildings, contribute to favourable outcomes in schools. The relationship between dynamic leadership and school effectiveness tends to be a positive one. Moreover, the combination of parents' and teachers' efforts tend to increase children's performance. Through collaboration and co-operation, teachers, pupils, the school head and parents can work together to achieve favourable outcomes. In an effort to solve a similar kind of problem some schools in Zimbabwe introduced study groups which helped those children who had no opportunity of getting parental help in terms of assisting with homework.

4. 0 Conclusion

From the discussion in this paper it is clear that transformational leadership is leadership for change, that is, it encompasses almost all techniques which promote school improvement. The discussion has shown that the effectiveness of the school depends on the approach to leadership and what people value within the culture of the school. All these concepts are best suited to educational environments under changing conditions. Each of the concepts discussed in this article is useful to our understanding of the other variables. Although cultures differ, what is clear is that transformational leaders with collaborative leadership can make a difference in terms of school improvement. What is important to remember is that school improvement is a

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

change process, therefore, it takes time. What has been discussed in a day, takes years to be successfully implemented.

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

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