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Leadership for Learning in Indian Private Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on leadership for learning of principals of successful private schools in India. This study followed the qualitative approach involving open ended questionnaire and interview. Fifty five principals from reputed private schools in India participated in this study. The questionnaire was sent through email followed by interview using msn or Skype. The interview focused on three themes namely concept of leadership for learning, role of principal as leader and benefits of leadership for learning. As for the conceptualization of leadership for learning of the participant principals, the findings supported leadership of learning involving learning beyond curriculum, developing moral values , entrepreneurship and national character while principal's role to be distributed leadership for overall development of students, shared decision making, involving supervisory models and continuous professional development. Findings also advocated the benefits of leadership in terms of fulfilment of higher needs of recognition, self-esteem and self-actualization of students, teachers and the principals.

Key Words: Instructional Leadership, Distributed Leadership, School Principal, Leadership for Learning

1. Introduction

In last two decades the area of leadership has been studied more extensively than any other aspect of human behavior (Kets de Vries, 1993; Goffee and Jones, 2000; Higgs and Rowland, 2000). Leadership has been the most significant area of research in education especially principal ship. Various researches have linked the school effectiveness with the leadership of school principals. In view of Sharma, Sun & Kannan (2012) success for school effectiveness, relies on the role of principal. Research findings from various countries and different school systems have revealed powerful impact of leadership in assuring school development (e.g. Hopkings 2001 a; West Jackson, Harris and Hopkings, 2000). Effective leaders are proactive and seek help that is needed. They also promote an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Nevertheless, effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes (Hoy and Miskell, 2008). Such researches have put emphasis on instructional leadership aspect of principals. School education in India is governed by three types of schools- purely government , government aided and purely private. School effectiveness researches on relative effectiveness of public and private schools had to rely on achievement tests carried out by researchers themselves in the small sample schools (Bashir 1997; Govinda and Varghese 1993; Kingdon 2007; Tooley and Dixon 2003). It has been observed that irrespective of levels primary or secondary and locale urban or rural , private school students have outperformed in their academic achievements than their government counterparts (Govinda and Varghese 1996 ; Murlidharan and Kremer 2007; Kingdon 2007). Since school effectiveness is linked to school leadership and India is a vast nation blessed with good number of reputed schools in private sector with exemplary high reputation , hence it's justified to conduct study on their principals to strengthen the views of Barth (1990) , *"Show me a good school and I'll show*

you a good principal”. Also a vast amount of literature on school leadership and subsequent models on leadership comes from western context like USA, UK and ANZ (Hallinger 2011) reflecting the perspectives of public school principals as merely government officers and instructional leaders Hallinger and Murphy(1985),Leithwood (1994) and Zepada (2003), it’s necessary to study school leadership from the perspectives of principals of effective private schools in India. The study aims to explore leadership for learning in private schools in India by arguing on the following three areas.

- 1) Understanding of private school principals regarding concept and importance of leadership for learning .
- 2) Role of the principal as a leader towards leadership of learning?
- 3) Benefits of leadership for learning as envisaged by private school principals?

2. Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative technique to data collection. Its qualitative nature arouses from the use of open ended questions and interview.

2.1 Open Ended Questionnaire

A seven item questionnaire was developed based on research questions to explore the leadership of the principals. The questionnaire was tested in five different schools to determine the appropriateness and level of difficulty to the respondents. The findings of the open ended questionnaire are to provide an overview of the principals as well as to serve to formulate guidance /prompts for qualitative interviews.

2.2 Interview

The interview questions were framed from the questionnaire used for studying leadership practices by the principal. Keeping in mind the responses obtained from pilot testing of questionnaire, the interview questions were developed and tested on the same five principals to ensure clarity of responses on they explain about their leadership. It is believed that both of the data collection techniques helped provoke thoughts and allowed respondents the opportunity to express their opinion in greater detail, thereby revealing more information that the researcher may not be aware of.

2.3 Participants

The participants of the study comprised 55 principals from fifty five different private schools in India. All these principals are well recognised principals based on their attributes and success of school in their respective societies. All these principals are from the schools which have not only proved their effectiveness in teaching and learning through public examinations but also in co-curricular activities in local, state national and even international context. All these participants were provided with questionnaire through email. All the participants were kind enough to return the responses on time, keeping hundred percent rate of response. The interviews were conducted using msn or Skype.

2.4. Data Analysis

The analysis focused on the selection of items from the open-ended questionnaire and the interview schedule that related to issues on leadership for learning of principals. The discussion is focused on three research questions to sort answer on: (1) Leadership for learning as concept and importance and (2) Role of principals for leadership for learning (3) What are the benefits of leadership for learning?

3. Findings

Responses from interview and open ended questions are reported together because the same questions applied to both. The response rate and participation rate for questionnaire and interview was hundred percent. The following are the findings of the study.

3.1 Concept of Leadership for Learning & Importance

It's noteworthy that all of the principals have similar ideas on leadership. Their comments are reflective of leadership of learning to be a team work , a key feature of distributed leadership than merely handled by a single principal. Some of the responses include:

"A principal must have a good leadership team, involving each teacher in one or other school activity as a leaders. Developing and sustaining effective school is not a person's cup of tea."

This indicates that leadership for learning in these successful school is rather distributed and in accordance with (Harris, 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2007 Gron, 2002). All of them stated leadership for promotes effective learning in classroom, out of class room, learning of values and ethics, responsibilities , learning to sustain culture and develop national character. The reflective comments were

"Principal should not limit learning to curriculum but beyond that."

"Leadership of principals should never reflect mere academic achievements. It should also reflect values inculcated in students and sense of responsibilities."

It clearly indicates that principals from these private schools in India do have a different understanding on leadership than the western scholars Leithwood (1994) and Zepeda (2003). Their comments are reflective of importance of leadership for learning beyond class room, beyond prescribed curriculum.

3.2 Role of Principal as a Leader

Various researchers have interpreted role of principals as instructional leadership. While Zepeda (2003) describes it as making commitment to learning, providing connectivity and cohesion, developing team of teacher leaders and understanding change, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) advocates on class room observations. In contrary to this all the principals from private schools in India have put emphasis on (1) Committing leadership for student's overall development (2) Incorporating teachers and students in leadership process (3) Effective and authentic supervision (4) Continuous professional development of all. The reflective comments are

"Our vision begins with overall development of students and is never ending. Periodically we plan, do, check and act to accomplish the vision. Each one of us is responsible and committed for the cause of vision. Overall we consider that it is our vision not merely principal's vision".

"Certainly for development of students their involvement is must. We invite and encourage them with their ideas and seek feedback on our actions".

"Since we believe in distributed perspective of leadership, we arrange a quite number of professional development activities which helps both me as principal and my teachers".

3.3 Benefits of leadership for learning

All of the principals in this study advocated for benefits out of their leadership that includes students satisfaction with outcome, students high recognition, self-esteem and self-actualization; teachers high morale, recognition, self-esteem and actualization and such fulfilment of needs for principal too. Their comments include:

"Not only in academics our students bring laurels for school in sports, olympiads and other competitions held locally, nationally and globally. Its outcome of our distributed leadership, where teachers encourage and help students to face competitions. My role is mere supervision".

“Though various schools are in the town, district magistrate invited our school students and teachers only towards eye camp, blood donation camp, each one teach one scheme. It’s the recognition of our school in society.”

These comments clearly reflect the high recognition of schools and teachers and students with high self-esteem. All of the principals proudly admitted that they, their teachers and students are always ready to work for their nation, society and would even commit to bring laurels for them. This finding deviates slightly as we compare with the studies in western world that emphasizes academic achievement through effective leadership.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

There is little doubt that this study gives a new outlook for leadership for learning. Throughout the study it has been observed that principals from the Indian private schools have advocated learning beyond classroom, beyond curriculum and beyond text compared to the literature from western scholar Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Leithwood (1994) and Zepada (2003). While the western researchers (Leithwood 1996, Hallinger and Murphy 1985) on identified school goals defined or determined by a single principal and followed by teachers, the Indian principals’ approach of involving teachers and students in framing school goal leads to a new understanding on leadership for learning. The leaders’ willingness to involve teachers and students in framing school goals thus adds up to their sense of recognition, self-esteem and self-actualization. School principals really have achieved moral leadership which is described as top level of leadership (Owens, 1998).

5. References

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