EXISTING KNOWLEDGE BASE AND PERSPECTIVES OF PRINCIPALS ON WEAKER LINKS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION IN KERALA

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Conference on Educational Leadership Preparation and Practices in India

(sponsored by University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India; in collaboration with

Department of Educational Administration, Howard University , Washington DC, USA)

11-13 June 2009

Organised by

Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Education

Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

Background : lack of preparation programmes relevant to the job demands of school administrators and a lack of sequence, modern content, and experience in preparation programmes continues to plague educational leadership preparation. **Purpose:** of this study is to gauge the perspectives of principals on the strengths and weakness in educational leadership programmes, especially in the weaker links of educational leadership as perceived by teachers, and to identify experienced and successful practices. **Setting:** is secondary school in Kerala state of India. **Study Sample:** constitute 570 teachers from 50 schools, 30 books on educational administration and four highly experienced principals. **Research Design:** used secondary analysis of survey data, content analyses and semi- structured interview. **Data Collection and Analysis:** used Leadership Behaviour Scale, Content Analysis of books on educational administration, Semi-structured interview with principals. **Findings:** School administrators lack ability in planning, controlling, effectively communicating with and providing motivation to teachers. Principals get confused when many things are planned simultaneously, they worry about the outcome of anything newly implemented and fail to predict the trends of different events and they are prone to make last minute changes in decisions including decisions taken in the school council by the influence of external forces. They fail also to maintain a balance between observing the official rules along with instilling confidence in their colleagues and to express creative criticism harmoniously and in providing humanitarian consideration to colleagues. Content analysis revealed that there is not enough accumulated body of knowledge and practice to foster the competencies expected from an educational leader for realizing the current

visions on education in the local context of Kerala. Experienced Leaders are characterised by a time-bound daily, terminal and annual plan; use of distributed leadership to ensure control; and emancipatory leadership to make school a real part of the community. **Conclusion:** educational leadership preparation in Kerala, as elsewhere around the globe, suffers from, a lack of a definition of good educational leadership; a lack of leader recruitment programmes in the schools; a lack of systematic professional development for school administrators; a lack of quality candidates for preparation programmes; a lack of preparation programmes relevant to the job demands of school administrators; a lack of sequence, modern content, and experience in preparation programmes and a lack of certification and licensure systems to promote excellence.

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Introduction

The most important threats facing our world today is leadership of our human institutions. Solving other important threats will not be possible without exemplary leadership. An understanding of how to develop such leadership will have serious consequences for the quality of our health and our lives (Bennis, 2007). Although leadership is extraordinarily important, research in this field is yet to arrive at a generally accepted definition of what leadership is, create a widely accepted paradigm for studying leadership, or find the best strategies for developing and practicing leadership (Miller, 2007). Hackman and Wageman (2007) attempted to address this problem by reframing the questions we have been asking about leadership effectiveness. Two among the five questions reframed by them were "What should be taught in leadership courses?" and "How can leaders be helped to learn?" The complexity of education, including teaching and learning, adds to the enormous influence of the role of school principals on the field of education and the quality of the life of this nation.

Educational management as a field of study and practice was derived from management principles first applied to industry and commerce (Bush 1999). The same principles were then adapted to the educational scenario. There are a great diversity of requirements for educational leaders, because they should promote the success of all students by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional programme conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. They should also

collaborate with families and community members, responding to diverse community needs and interests (Murphy and Shipman, 1999)

Need and significance

One of the bottlenecks in educational leadership preparation is the lack of preparation programmes relevant to the job demands of school administrators and a lack of sequence, modern content, and experience in preparation programmes. The field might benefit considerably by addressing some fundamental questions: What are the most significant educational leadership issues, and why and how do we train competent personnel to apply these methods to educational leadership issues? (Levin, 2006). Although the topics of educational management and leadership have generated a great deal of scholarly interest internationally over the years, reviewers have generally suggested it has not been an area with rigorous empirical investigation and knowledge accumulation (Bridges, 1982; Erickson, 1967). A reluctance to evaluate the worth of contrasting conceptual and methodological approaches according to an accepted set of scholarly criteria leaves practitioners to fall back upon individual judgments of what is useful and valid knowledge (Heck and Hallinger, 2005). In their review paper 'The Study of Educational Leadership and Management: Where Does the Field Stand Today?' Heck and Hallinger noted that the knowledge development has not been equally potent across all domains of educational leadership.

One of the objectives of this study is to examine the knowledge base of the field of educational leadership available in the local context. Debates over the knowledge base on the nature of expertise and the pre-service and in-service formal study related to the

enhancement of expertise have become increasingly common and influential in the field (Hart, 1999).

In Kerala the state provides educational leadership training to principals as an in-service professional development program. In addition to this, competent heads of educational institutions attempt self development through effective communication with peers and review of relevant literature. Such headmasters and principals identify deficiencies in various strategies practised in their schools and take initiatives to reform them.

In this context, the present study is an attempt to gauge the perspectives of principals on the strengths and weakness in educational leadership programmes, especially in the weaker links of educational leadership as perceived by teachers, and to identify experienced and successful practices related to the weaker links in education leadership performance.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

The major objective of the study is to identify the leadership preparation needs of heads of institutions in the perceived weaker links of educational leadership in kerala. This major objective is satisfied through the following specific objectives.

1. Identification of teacher perceived weaker links of educational leadership behaviour of principals.

2. Content analysis of books on educational administration to identify strategies to improve educational leadership and to examine the knowledge base of educational leadership available in the local context.

3.   Identification of successful practices of experienced principals of schools in kerala through a semi structured interview.

4.   Identification of educational leadership preparation needs as perceived by experienced principals of schools in Kerala through a semi-structured interview.

Sample

1.   A stratified random sample of 570 teachers from 50 schools distributed all over kerala provided teacher perceived weaker links in educational leadership in kerala.

2.   A randomly selected sample of 30 books on educational administration published since 1990 was used for content analysis. The list of books is appended.

3.   Four experienced principals (two women and two men) whose teaching experience varied from 15 to 33 years and experience as principals varied from 3 to15 years were interviewed. They are,

1. Principal 1, 33 years as school teacher and 5 years as principal in   Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.

2. Principal 2, 14 years as school teacher and 15 years as principal in   Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.

3. Principal 3 Mathew, 28 years as school teacher and 5 years as principal in Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.

4. Principal 4, 26 years as school teacher and 3 years as principal in   Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala

Tools and Techniques employed

1. Leadership Behaviour Scale – by Mumthas and Nisar (2005)

2. Content Analysis of books on educational administration.

3. Semi-structured interview with principals on their practices and the needs to improve educational leadership preparation programme.

Procedure

I.   Identification of weaker links in educational leadership behaviour by secondary analysis of data on leadership behaviour of principals as perceived by teachers working under them. This secondary analysis was done in the following procedure.

1. The average value of the mean scores obtained for different items were calculated.

2. All the items whose mean score was much less than this average was selected.

3. The components of leadership behaviour which was assessed by these items was then identified as weaker links in educational leadership.

II   In the light of the identified weaker links in educational leadership, content analyses of books on educational administration was done to find out whether there exists a theoretical framework for the development of these dimensions of leadership in educational personnel.

III   With reference to the identified weaker links in educational leadership and what exists as published material to foster them in the local context, a semi- structured interview of four experienced principals was done to identify their good practises which

could be exemplified and their views on the needs to improve the existing educational leadership preparation programmes.

FINDINGS

Weaker Links in Educational Leadership

Analysis of data collected on leadership behaviour of principals as perceived by school teachers reveal that our school administrators lack ability in planning, controlling, effectively communicating with and providing motivation to teachers.

Detailed analysis of the responses from teachers revealed that principals are not efficient in planning because they seem to get confused when too many things are to be planned simultaneously. Even if they plan some activity, they worry about the outcome of anything that is newly implemented and fails to predict accurately the trends of different events. They are prone to make last minute changes.

Analysis further revealed that there is a lack of competency in the principals of Kerala when it comes to controlling and decision making because unanticipated problems confuse them and they often make changes in decisions taken in the school council by the influence of external forces. They often fail to maintain a balance between observing the official rules and providing humanitarian consideration to colleagues during emergency.

Another weaker link in educational leadership of our principals as revealed by the data is in communication and motivation. This is because they fail to instil confidence in their colleagues and   to express creative criticism harmoniously. They do not even make use of the school assembly and staff meetings to encourage students and teachers. They do not seem to aspire rapid development of their institution, their colleagues and students.

Knowledge Base of Educational Leadership Available in Local Context

On the basis of the identified weaker links content analysis of 30 books on educational leadership were made to identify whether there is a theoretical framework to foster those dimensions of educational leadership which are lacking in our principals.

It is observed that there is a trend in the themes covered by books published in 1990s and those published after 2000. Most of the books published in 1990s describe educational management, different types of supervision, management theories, their evaluation and reporting and, democratic traditions in leadership. While the books published after 2000 deals with major challenges in educational management, their national and global views, different perspectives in practice and the scope for research in this area. Some of the books published after 2002 are a collection of research findings by scholars in the field. Some of the sub headings in the books on educational administration are promising but a deep analysis revealed that they do not present strategies which can be followed or practiced to improve educational leadership.

In short, the content analysis revealed that there is not enough accumulated body of knowledge and practice to foster the competencies expected from an educational leader for realizing the current visions on education at least in the local context of Kerala.

Good Practices in educational leadership

In the light of the identified weaker links and content analysis of books, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the author with four experienced heads of educational institutions in Kerala. These interviews helped to identify several good practices of educational leadership related to the areas of planning, controlling, effectively communicating with and providing motivation to teachers and students. The principals interviewed had undergone educational leadership preparation programmes

and even played the role of resources persons in such programmes. They made valuable suggestions to improve such programmes on educational leadership.

Experienced Leaders have a time-bound daily, terminal and annual plan

A principal, being the leader of an institution with a large member of students, teachers and office staff will have to play too many roles and plan many activities simultaneously every day. According to all the four principals the routine work of a principal in a normal working day includes inspection of the whole school (i.e. school premises, punctuality of staff and students, etc..), addressing students and staff in the assembly, assigning special duties for teachers, observing the teaching strategies and student behaviour, inspection of office records and communicating with staff and dealing with visitors.

Ms. Principal 4 suggests that the best way to plan for multiple activities is to allot specific time for each task. For example Principal 3 states that she reserves the first two hours of the day for inspection and assigning duties to the staff and last two hours for record works in the office. Principal 4 states that she prepares a time chart in advance to observe classes of teachers and for providing proper written feedback etc….

 Principal 4 states that she plan for the whole academic year in advance by proper discussion with the staff. "It includes preparation of a separate school calendar in addition to the academic calendar provided to the schools. While preparing such a school calendar teachers and non teaching staff should be assigned duties related to different curricular and co-curricular activities to ensure their co-operation in advance"

Distributed Leadership as a means to ensure control

The structure of a society is not determined by the majority, but its leaders. They are the persons who should balance the internal and external forces acting on the

institution to maintain an equilibrium. They should also have the proficiency and tactics to solve any unanticipated problems. Such problems may arise in relation to the teachers, students, parents or the community members. These experienced principals suggested various methods to ensure cooperation between students, staff, parents and community. According to Principal 1 duties should be assigned however small ,to each and every member of the teaching staff during each and every program conducted in the school. The overall charge should be then given to a single person for proper coordination. He also suggests that every academic strategy and disciplinary measures should be implemented in the school after proper discussions and finalisations made in staff council or PTA meetings.

Emancipatory Leadership makes school a real part of the community

Behind the success of any institution lie the co-operative efforts of all personals involved in it. The skill of communication is a necessary criterion for an educational leader to instil confidence in teachers and students, and in order to motivate them towards achieving higher goals. The principals who were interviewed expressed different strategies to reach this goal. Some of them are discussed here.

. Principal 4 believes in bringing community to school and also going out to the community and mingling with their life situations as the best means of ensuring cooperation especially in rural areas. She used to visit houses of children to understand their real life condition and needs. She also used to celebrate all local festivals in the school inviting parents and community members.

Principal 4 suggests that students and teachers will be motivated if every successful strategy implemented in the school and special achievements of school,

teachers and students are published annually in a booklet. She has done that and it had tremendous effect on the motivation level of teachers and students.

Need for Improving Educational Leadership Preparation Programmes

Educational leadership preparation programmes for school principals are conducted by the state governments. Resource persons are from DIET, or other educational departments in universities. Areas concerned under such programmes are mainly academic administration and maintaince of office records. Duration of such programme may vary.

Principal 4 seems to be satisfied with such programmes. She appreciates the conferences held in Deputy Directorates of Education offices and the offices of District Educational Offices to inform school principals about each new strategy that is being introduced by the state. She also considers it beneficial to the schools the ways in which discussions are held regarding the implementation strategies in different schools.

However, three of the four principals interviewed are not satisfied with the preparation programmes. Principal 3 and Principal 2 suggest that such programmes should be conducted regularly and each person who aspires for the post of a principal should be given a training programme before taking up the post. . Principal 2 suggest that "the government should make a policy regarding such programmes. Any teacher with 10 years of teaching experience should be considered eligible to apply for training programmes conducted by the government. Only those persons who have attended such programmes should apply for the post of principal in a school. (i.e., it should be a compulsory criterion). Such programmes should also provide training in personnel management, student (especially adolescent) psychology etc."

Principal 3 identifies that a proper follow up of the activities of school principals should be conducted by the government to ensure uniformity in the implementation of different state initiated strategies in schools.

Conclusions

It appears that educational leadership preparation in Kerala, as elsewhere around the globe, suffers from, a lack of a definition of good educational leadership; a lack of leader recruitment programmes in the schools; a lack of collaboration between schools and universities; a lack of systematic professional development for school administrators; a lack of quality candidates for preparation programmes; a lack of preparation programmes relevant to the job demands of school administrators; a lack of sequence, modern content, and experience in preparation programmes; a lack of certification and licensure systems to promote excellence; and a lack of a national sense of cooperation in preparing school leaders.

Suggestions

The findings suggests the need for development of content on educational leadership that suits the local and national requirements and encouraging a model of emancipatory leadership along with the policy driven training programmes that rule the field today so that those who are experienced in educational leadership roles and development can have a say, in proportion to their experiences, in this field. In this respect the below mentioned methods and techniques will be useful :

Compulsory training module on Strategic Leadership and Management, Certification/ Licensure, problem-based cognitive models that draw on apprenticeship, project based learning, the case method, cognitive based learning in concert with practice

experiences, Internships, In-service resources for educational administrators such as participate in group work and discussions, Access for research on-line, Problem-provided exercises which include interfaces with the available databases, and action researches.

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APPENDIX A

The List Of Books Analysed For Content

1. English,W,Fenwick.(2008). The Art of Educational Leadership. London:SAGE

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