

Educational Leadership Paper

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October 19, 2018

ABSTRACT

In this 21st century, we would like to prepare our learners to be ready and skilled in their chosen career. School leadership must examine how students will be able to meet the demands of today's academia. However, it is imperative to identify some key factors needed in providing learning opportunities for today's students. A teacher from a public elementary school named some critical issues faced by educators. These issues concern increasing test scores, increasing parent involvement in school activities, and increasing intervention on academic struggling students (C. B. Aldy, personal communication, September 21, 2018). School leaders and educators must be aware and proactive in managing these problems at its early stage. Our young learners will eventually be in a competitive world where they need to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Keywords: student learning, learning environment, teaching, teaching environment, leadership

“The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA)” (Common Core, 2018, para. 2). In order for the schools to prepare the students, common core must be highly regarded as it embodies students’ knowledge, academic performance and skills. Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative seems complicated but excellent and very useful and supportive (Fullan, 2016). These standards guide teachers on what to teach. However, students learn differently as some learn faster than the others. If students are struggling in certain areas, educators should provide some strategies or programs to help them. Ignoring this issue shows that a teacher is not engaging with the students. Furthermore, the situation may escalate leading to student disengagement.

Parent’s guidance and participation are also crucial in a student’s educational journey. Particularly in primary and secondary education, students expect their parents to be involved in school events/activities or show their support in any way they can. Although communication is usually in a form of newsletter, school letter or email, having a face-to-face interaction is better because it is personal. And, it is also essential to increase or strengthen intervention on academic struggling students.

Technology Utilization

Using technology to maximize student learning is another significant issue to consider. Curriculum and instruction have been adapted the time when the use of technology became a part of the system. Schunk (2016) described “technology as the designs and environments that engage learners” (p. 499). At a young age, students are already familiar on how to use a tablet or iPad. Schools provide children chrome book for their lessons or educational games. The library is also equipped with computers for students to do a research. Through technology, research task is much easier compared to a non-digital era. The benefits you get from using technology are

students acquire skills in information literacy, media literacy, and information, communications and technology literacy (ICT) (P21).

Christensen, Horn, and Johnson (2011) described “technology as the process used by which organization transforms inputs of labor, capital, materials, and information into products and services of greater value” (p. 11). Teachers should thoroughly monitor students’ use of technology. Furthermore, technology is a tool to enhance learning and a great resource. However, personalized instruction is provided. With teacher’s input, students practice deep learning. “Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments” (Psalm 119:66, ESV).

Student Needs

Students’ needs must be met by the schools whether it is for standard education or special education. There are different types of learners, so it is essential that teachers know how to tailor their instruction. As much as there are various instructional practices available, there is no ‘one fits all’ approach. For instance, if a teacher uses a specific approach in one class and it works well with that class, it is not guaranteed that he will have the same result with the other class. The dynamics of each class may vary; therefore, a teacher needs to be competent and adaptable. Thus, students must have a say in implementing instructional practices.

As part of common core, students are expected to pass the quizzes and tests. But when students perform poorly in academics, it becomes a school problem. Therefore, teachers should immediately communicate with the students. When teachers interact with their students in a form of giving feedback, support, and expectations, it has significant effects on students’ learning and motivation (Schunk, 2016). According to Garner, student’s intelligence is demonstrated through

their ability to solve problems that occur in real-life situations and the ability to generate new problems to solve (Christensen et al., 2011).

Schunk (2016) claimed that to be successful in learning, we need to follow the four processes – attention, retention, production, and motivation. Students need to focus or pay attention to relevant tasks/activities (attention), have the ability to restore information and relate new materials to prior information (retention); then, students demonstrate their learning through practice, listening and analyzing feedback (production). Finally, when students are motivated, there are outcome expectations. They are more engaged in the activities and develop self-efficacy and self-confidence.

Educator Roles

Educators must have a shared responsibility for student achievement, learning, and success. Teachers provide guidance, learning strategies, adequate knowledge for students to succeed. A teacher's role is not only to teach students, but to guide them to their educational journey and train them to be responsible learners. "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2, NIV).

Fullan (2016) described a principal as lead learner with two critical dimensions – one is the internal role to the school and the external role which is referred as system player. They are expected to be working with teachers on student achievement. If a principal only cares about establishing a vision, obtaining instructional resources, or working with individual teachers, he or she is not learning to invigorate ongoing organizational improvement (Fullan, 2016). He reckons to understand teacher learning and continues to work on his own learning as well. "System players are school leaders who contribute to and benefit from the increased performance

of other schools in the district and of the system as a whole” (Fullan, 2016, p. 135). Therefore, a principal works with the district and state, other schools, and aspire partnerships with the community.

Educators must acknowledge ethical school culture. The school functions with values, attitudes and beliefs, norms and rituals. These elements were structured from communications, relations, and exchanges in the school environment. For that reason, educators, staff, and students are expected to acknowledge them to sustain an exemplary school environment (Brierton, Graham, Tomal, & Wilhite 2016). Furthermore, everyone knows their individual responsibility and embraces diversity as well.

Connection between Learning vs. Teaching

Teaching and learning are different compared to decades ago. People may have different views on understanding the concepts of teaching versus learning. We are not just talking about educational practices, textbooks, or testing materials. Schunk (2016) wrote, “learning occurs enactively through actual performances and vicariously by observing models, listening to instructions, and engaging with print or electronic content” (p. 156). There are eight elements to consider in order for students to be motivated in a learning and teaching environment (Kember, Ho, and Hong, 2010). These are: establish interest, allow choice of courses, exhibit relevance, types of learning activities, teaching for understanding, assessment of learning activities, close teacher-student relationships, and sense of belonging between classmates (Kember, Ho, and Hong, 2010).

Schunk (2016) claimed that effective learning environment reflects good organization and management. As students develop their intellectual abilities and skills, their understanding is widened and may have acquired different perspectives on any matter. Through student-centered

learning, students become more of active participants and autonomous learners as they continue to explore various ways of learning. In contrast, the focus on a teaching environment is the teacher where the main task is to deliver information that students should know. Thompson (2010) described teaching environment as a physical environment where students understand the rules and procedures to be followed. Students learned but not challenged in this type of environment, and student interaction may be limited. “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9:9).

Conclusion

In a competitive world, schools, universities, and libraries need to meet the needs of our 21st learners. School leaders, faculty and members and staff should partake in the process of making any change. Identifying, analyzing, and working on issues that impede students’ progress is every educator’s responsibility. Teamwork and work collaboration are effective techniques to foster shared responsibility. Professionalism and ethics are other aspects that educators should be aware of as well. Hence, we should set a good example for the students. A common set of goals established by the team require teachers to be accountable to each other and adaptable to change and innovation. In addition, educators are also agents of change. It should be a firm and wise decision to consider change especially if it will uplift learning and innovation.

By implementing a new system on learning English Language Arts (ELA) and Math at the earliest school level, we are gradually preparing students to tackle difficult tasks as they progress. It is very important to have activities where we see students are really engaged. As student engagement is an integral part of student’s performance, teachers are responsible for designing interactive activities. In a student-centered classroom, students can explore learning, discover new concepts, and draw conclusion. The primary role of a teacher is to facilitate

learning. Moreover, it is crucial that intervention or remedial program be available to students who are struggling with their studies. And students' strengths and weaknesses should be recognized so teachers can give meaningful feedback.

Parental involvement is of paramount importance. A regular meeting with the parents or guardian establishes connection to update student's standing in school. Thus, it makes a big difference in a student's school life when parents' support is present. The lack of family support may cause a student to drop out of school. Educators and parents should work side by side to ensure students' interest in pursuing their studies and be successful in the future. Therefore, factors that hinder to students' learning must be eliminated. It can be done when school leaders, faculty, staff, and parents are fully involved in monitoring students' activities and progress.

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