1-1-2011

Teacher Capacity Building in Teaching and Learning: The Changing Role of School Leadership

Kamaruzaman Jusoff
Omar Kareem
Khuan Bing
Marinah Awang

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj
Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, Higher Education Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
Jusoff, Kamaruzaman; Kareem, Omar; Bing, Khuan; and Awang, Marinah (2011) "Teacher Capacity Building in Teaching and Learning: The Changing Role of School Leadership," Academic Leadership: The Online Journal: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 46. Available at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol9/iss1/46

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Leadership: The Online Journal by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository.
1. Introduction

The school’s main core business is teaching and learning. A quality curriculum and effective instruction are key elements to ensure successful teaching and learning in schools (Grigsby et. al. 2010). Thus, various activities and resources established in the schools should be optimized to ensure that teaching and learning are implemented effectively. From the human resource perspective, the main drivers of successful teaching and learning are teachers. Hence, quality teachers who can perform their responsibilities with commitment are prerequisites for successful and excellent education.

The role of teachers will continue to develop in tandem with the current developments in the world of education. Education is a social phenomenon that is not static. In contrast, it is dynamic and often subjected to change and innovation. Various innovations in curriculum and teaching will and are currently occurring. From time to time, education changes have increased in acceleration. In the globalization era, marked by its borderless world through information communication technology, this change becomes more prominent. These changes have changed the trend and profile of students, created new needs in the knowledge and technology areas and the modified role and function of schools making them more challenging than before. The globalization Era has changed the teaching profession landscape. This reality needs to be accepted by teachers including future teacher candidates. According to Goodwin (2010), at least three new norms are currently influencing the education system. The first new norm will be classrooms that are more and more diverse, almost regardless of where they are. Secondly, teachers can expect to work alongside colleagues who are not have been recruited locally, or they themselves may be the one responding to regional or international searches to fill teaching shortages. Thirdly, teachers will be instructing children who are not only diverse but may enter the classroom with very unique and challenging needs (Goodwin, 2010; Rong & Preissle, 2009).

The classroom environment and student behaviour in the past decades and now are very different. The continuous and rapid accessibility to technology and innovation effect have changed the needs of students in learning. This is further aggravated by various demands from parents and stakeholders who are working unceasingly to ensure education excellence. This phenomenon demands that teachers are always alert and involved in the continuous development process to master the latest knowledge, skills and competencies. Teachers have to be able to have the ability to handle changes to ensure their roles and functions remain relevant.

2. The Needs for a Continuous Teacher Development

Teachers who are appointed in schools have gone through pre-service teacher training. Such mandatory training for teacher appointment are prepared by universities and teaching colleges. However, it does not mean that teachers’ education ends with the pre-service training. Pre-service training is an early self-preparation process with knowledge and skills that will become pre-requisites for a teaching career. The trained teachers must be able to translate and transform the theories,
knowledge and skills into practice. How can a teacher handle these challenges if the self-development and learning processes cease with the teacher training?

Continuous learning and development among teachers is a necessity and requirement for every individual. Teachers who stop learning after their pre-service training will fail to fulfil their role effectively. Their ability to synthesize content with pedagogy, and technology to effectively generate current pedagogical-technological-content knowledge is limited. Their creativity would fade and teaching would become dull and boring. The demands for change in curriculum and teaching would not be fulfilled. Teachers are more inclined towards using pedagogical reasoning and actions that are technical rather than reflective. The most unfortunate situation would be teachers become “prisoners of their own experience”. It is the tendency to repeat technically, year after year, the same experience, approach, knowledge and skills garnered and practiced at the beginning of their careers without reflecting and innovating their teachings based on current changes and developments (Omar & Khuan, 2005). These teachers are unable to produce students who are creative, critical and innovative although changes have been made to the curriculum to match the demands of the day. According to Shulmen (1987), “teaching is a process of pedagogical reasoning and action that involves the need for teachers to grasp, probe, and comprehend an idea, to turn it about in his or her mind, seeing many sides of it. Then the idea is shaped or tailored until it can in turn be grasped by students. He further expressed that “Teachers also need to develop strategic knowledge to confront troublesome, ambiguous teaching situations and build wisdom of practice.

Change in curriculum without change in the attitude of teachers who act as implementers and assessors of curriculum would not bring about meaningful educational innovation. In fact, matters would become worse as incorrect interpretation and shaping of teacher belief in the curriculum would result in erroneous curriculum direction change. In this context, teacher belief refers to “… “the taken for granted assumption, values, and expectation that are foundational to the ongoing decisions and actions taken in our common-sense situation of teaching and curriculum planning…that are assumed unreflectively, even though one’s acting and thinking may rest upon them.” (Werner, 1981). Teacher belief influences how one thinks or acts upon what is accepted as truth. An education concept might be interpreted differently from one’s belief. This phenomenon is dominant among teachers who are less involved in the process of continuous development. For instance, misconceptualization and misinterpretation of concepts would lead to the usage of the inappropriate teaching approach. Some have the assumption that “…constructivism is student-cantered and is on the opposite side of the continuum from subject-centered or teacher-centered instruction” (Gordon, 2009). In reality, “a constructivist classroom is one in which there is a balance between teacher and student directed learning and requires teachers to take an active role in the learning process, including formal teaching” (Gordon, 2009).

Moreover, the periodical inappropriate interpretation of various curriculum change and innovation concepts would result in the deviation of the desired aims of curriculum change. In the context of Malaysia, the implementation of KBSR Integrated Primary School Curriculum) and KBSM (Integrated Secondary School Curriculum) in the 1980s is an example that can be discussed. Besides the problems in the dissemination of information, the problem of inappropriate interpretation due to teacher belief worsen the situation resulting some KBSR and KBSM concepts are wrongly interpreted by teachers. This matter caused some innovative concepts in curriculum change to revert to the original practice. The existence of uncreative and insensitive teachers towards the demands of change left a serious effect on the development of students is it in the cognitive or other domains. It is not possible
for the learning outcome of students that resulted from the teachings of such teachers to achieve the changed curriculum aims to meet current and future human capital development of the country. In addition, the lack of commitment towards the profession also encouraged teachers to take short cuts and adopt a lackadaisical attitude in their daily classroom duties. Wan Mohd Zaid (2009) mentioned that this phenomenon would produce students with “learned paralysis”. He asserted that Learned Paralysis may be produced by classroom process that is teacher dominated due to a number of factors operating on the teacher. Consequently, the behaviour of the teacher in the classroom process may become inappropriate in the pedagogical sense, thereby producing a one-way process in the teaching-learning situation giving rise to the regularity of teacher talk, student listen.

3. The Changing Role of School Leadership

The process of continuous teacher development is a strategy to sustain and improve commitment, and to increase teacher knowledge, skills and competencies. The question is, who should be the initiator of this effort? Should this role and responsibility be handled fully by the teachers through the practice of self directed learning? Without denying the commitment of teachers in this matter, there is a need to review the role of school leadership. What should the role of school principal be in establishing continuous and effective teacher learning environment? Is it appropriate for school principals to spend a large amount of their time for managerial work which is technical in nature?

For decades, literature in educational leadership has frequently reviewed and discussed this issue. Due to the current climate of school reform, principals are held more accountable for student success making school leadership even more critical (Levine, 2005). The principal is the individual best positioned within the school to evaluate the curriculum and evaluation process (Parkay et al., 2010). School leadership should change from being too focus on managerial duties, which is technical in nature to curriculum and instruction. The emphasis on technical aspect should be in balance with the instructional aspect. Helinger (2005) emphasized that this situation would require principals to be deeply engaged in the school instructional programs to ensure teachers implement effective teaching and learning. If principals are to take the role of instructional leader seriously, they will have to free themselves from bureaucratic tasks and focus their efforts toward improving teaching and learning (Jenkins, 2009). Although the purpose of this role was discussed widely and its demands recognized professionally, a lot remains to be done in terms of implementation. According to Stronge (1988), from all the tasks performed by most principals, it was found that only one tenth was allocated to instructional leadership. Some of the reasons given was lack of training, time constraint, too much paper work and community perception regarding the role of principalship as more administrator inclined (Fullan, 1991). It is interesting to note that the trend is towards insisting that the principal assume the prominent role of an instructional leader. It will be a formidable task convincing principals to relinquish their image as manager-administrators and take on the role of instructional leader. Generally, principals do not see themselves as instructional leaders and many are of the belief that anything that has to do with teaching and learning is best assigned to teachers (Phillips, 2003).

The latest study by Grigsby et. al., (2010) indicated that the level of change in instructional leadership experiences has not been fully achieved even though there has been an increase in the accountability for principals, only elementary school principals in this study provide evidence about more contemporary philosophies of leadership in curriculum and instruction. Based on the interview data, these principles exhibit a better balance of managerial and instructional leadership at this level. Middle
school principles are slowing moving in that direction while high school principals have not fully into the mode of instructional leadership.

Deep appreciation and wide practice of instructional leadership will enable principals to successfully develop teacher capacity in aspects of teaching and learning. Different definitions of instructional leadership had been given and could be found in the latest literature. Originally, (1980s) instructional leadership involved traditional tasks such as setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers (Lashway, 2000). Today Instructional leadership includes much deeper involvement in the “core technology” of teaching and learning, carries more sophisticated views of professional development, and emphasizes the use of data to make decisions (Deborah, 2002). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESPS) frames instructional leadership in term of “leading learning communities”. In NAESPS’s view, instructional leader have six roles: making student and adult learning the priority; setting high expectation for performance; gearing content and instruction to standard; creating culture of continuous learning for adult; using multiple sources of data to access learning; and activating the community’s support for school success (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). There are several specific behavior of instructional leadership such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinion, supporting collaboration, providing professional development opportunities, and giving praise for effective teaching.

Without omitting other important aspects which define instructional leadership, this paper aims to focus on two things, namely on creating culture of continuous learning and establishing teacher leaders.

4. Creating Continuous Learning Culture

Teacher learning should not happen as a one-off event. It can’t be denied that specific programs for teacher development such as courses, workshops, and seminars are important. However, the presence of teachers in such programs is not meaningful if the school environment and culture does not assist in strengthening knowledge and skills obtained. Professional learning culture that exists in school organizations enables knowledge and skills to be shared and developed. Unfortunately, in practice, professional learning culture in school context does not happen as should be. In this case, Fullan (2008a) mentioned that, “everybody knows that the culture of the organization is crucial and that purposeful, collaborative organizations are more effective (a hard fact). Therefore, the reasoning goes, we should implement “professional learning communities” everywhere (a dangerous half-truth). Professional learning communities are being implemented superficially. They give the educators involved a false sense of progress, while the deeper cultural changes required for school improvement are not being tackled. In my most recent book, The Six Secrets of Change (Fullan, 2008b), one of the secrets to successful change I identify is that “learning is the work.” It is a maxim precisely about the need to address day-to-day cultural change. Learning is not workshops and courses and strategic retreats. It is not school improvement plans or individual leadership development. These are inputs. Rather, learning is developing the organization, day after day, within the culture.”

Large amount of budget spent on sending teachers to attend training and courses would be wasted if the environment does not support and strengthen the learning obtained. In fact, through sharing activities, the knowledge garnered by teachers in courses and workshops can be disseminated to benefit other teachers. To ensure that the learning professional community exist and develop in schools, it is necessary to build close relationships and collaborations among teachers. This should be
one of the agendas of instructional leadership implemented by the school leadership. Moreover, the attitude of cooperation and helping each other among teachers should not be based on personal issues only. It should be based on the aspect of career and professional concerns. In this case, Barth (1990) explained that “relations and associations in school should be viewed from two perspectives which are congeniality that involves the personal aspect and collegiality that emphasizes the professional aspect. Congeniality refers to the friendly human relationship that exists among teachers and is characterized by the loyalty, trust, and easy conversation that results from the development of a closely-knit social group. Collegiality, by contrast, refers to the existence of high levels of collaboration among teachers and between teachers and principals and is characterized by mutual respect, shared work values, cooperation, and specific conversations about teaching and learning” (Suseela, 2002). Relations in the form of congeniality, has long existed among teachers. Now, to promote the purpose of professional learning culture, collegiality, a change paradigm in relations is needed and should be reinforced among teachers and principal.

If the congeniality and collegiality relations can be cultivated in balance, then the teacher development agenda through instructional leadership can be realised. The principal as instructional leader can determine the strength and weakness of teachers and provide the necessary guidance. It is not a one-way relationship but a complementary two-way relationship. Furthermore, teachers can also strengthen self-directed learning besides reinforcing the value of sharing of knowledge and information. Through this collaboration, the value of trust can be established and inculcated. When trust exists in the professional aspect, more challenging activities can be implemented including peer assessment, peer supervision, peer evaluation and other activities. Hence, through guidance by the principal, self-directed learning among teachers and the contributions of colleagues can establish a sustainable learning community. Collegiality also contributes to the effort of knowledge sharing practices among teachers in schools. Knowledge sharing is central to success of all knowledge management strategies. An effective knowledge sharing practice can develop knowledge at the individual and organization level. Most studies confirmed that the knowledge sharing practice is still informal among a group of organizational members (Chaudry, 2005). This noble effort should not remain just at the informal level only. It is reasonable for the organization especially the school organization to take steps to institutionalize the practice of knowledge sharing. Some studies also suggested that a system for capturing and codification of knowledge should be put in place to transform tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge for common and wider use (Chaudry, 2005). If the school has built a formal system, it is a sign of healthy professional development occurring in the school. Although this is a simple, unsophisticated and cost-saving system, it will help to establish a fine knowledge culture in the organization. Experienced teachers have contributed to various innovations in teaching and learning, these teachers will retire when the time comes, and what is left behind is their names and their deeds. All experiences, innovations and best practices which is tacit knowledge will leave with them. The following generation of teachers will not be able to benefit from the tacit knowledge and this is a loss not only to the teachers but also to their school. It is the principal’s responsibility through instructional leadership, to establish an environment where an effective system of knowledge sharing takes place. This effort will not become a reality if collegiality does not exist strongly among teachers.

5. Building Teacher Leadership

In a school setting, principals have the autonomy to develop two very different leadership models (Mulford, 2003), namely a more hierarchical and directive model. Principals who choose the
hierarchical and directive model with teachers will use orders that must be followed by teachers. Decisions made, does not involve teachers at all in certain situations or their involvement is minimum. In contrast, in the inclusive model, teacher involvement is more evident in decision making. If the inclusive model is practices especially in the implementation of curriculum and teaching, will increase the teacher acceptance towards any decision made. The chance of teacher accepting the decision is higher as compared to the hierarchical and directive model. Some teachers adhere to orders because they respect the principal or are coerced and not because they accept the decision voluntarily.

Research on decision making in primary and secondary school found that the more positively teachers viewed the decision making process in the school the higher the degree of influence and control they perceived to be exerted by education staff groups in the school (Mulford, 2003). Study also shows that where decision making is perceived by teachers in secondary school as collegial, cooperative and consultative and providing adequate opportunities for participation it will be more likely to lead to positive student perceptions about their school and teachers as well as perception about relationship and their own performance that where decision making is more top-down, executive, or does not foster widespread teacher involvement.

Based on this fact, in the context of principal leadership, the aspect of distributing the leadership role to teachers, the members of the school organization, should be viewed positively. One of the most congruent finding from studies of effective leadership in schools is that authority to lead not be located in the person of the leader but can be dispersed within the school in between and among people (Day et al, 2000). There is a growing understand that leadership is embedded in various organizational context within school communities, not centrally vested on person or an office (Mulford, 2003). For aspects of teaching and learning where teachers are leaders in the classroom, it is reasonable for principals to intensify the teacher role to lead. Teachers have credibility to identify and analyze issues in the classroom as well as teaching and learning. These inputs can certainly be information and data that can be utilized in the process of decision making to ensure that decisions are relevant and appropriate.

Teacher leadership is not only about contributing to the decision making process in schools but can also lead other teachers in the same school or otherwise. The term teacher leadership refers to skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to other within their own school and elsewhere (Danielson, 2006). Teacher leadership moves other teachers to increase performance, especially in teaching and learning. This situation exists not because teachers do not have legitimate power like the principal but it is because they have expertise and abilities as well as can influence their other colleagues. The power that they have is expert and reference power. Teacher leadership can have a significant impact on school improvement efforts. Teacher leaders are not assigned formal positions; they earned leadership by working to improve instruction, sharing their knowledge with staff and the community to build the instructional capacity of the school (Austen, 2010).

In the teacher capacity building context, teacher leaders can play an important role in assisting principals implement instructional leadership. Based on the traditional view, teachers’ work was seen as passive where teachers wait for directives and guidance from the higher authorities before proceeding. As a result, the curriculum was designed by experts whereas teachers only implement them. Moreover, teachers did not appear to have their own directions and instead hope that the principal would provide one for them. From the teacher leadership’s point of view, teaching is regarded as professional work where teachers are assisted in the implementation through research findings and the purpose that needed to be achieved. Teacher leaders also form excellent networking with other
teachers and experts in certain fields. According to Danielson (2006), teacher leadership involves the following practices: the use of evidence and data in making decisions; seeing opportunities and initiatives; moving other people to achieve shared aims; organize resources; and taking action; supervising improvements and changing the approaches when the situation changes; retain other people’s commitment; and contribute to organizational learning. This list of practices is closely related to teacher capacity development and is a great contribution to schools in achieving especially the aims of curriculum and teaching. Crowther et. al (2002) have developed a Teacher Leadership Framework that consist of main six functions; convey conviction about a better world; strive for authenticity in their teaching, learning, and assessment practices; facilitate communities of learning through organization-wide process; confront barriers in the school’s culture and structures; translate ideas into sustainable system of action; nature a culture of success.

Teacher leaders need to make autonomous decisions and actions that support student learning. School leadership especially the principal should provide trust and support to teacher leaders to enable them to carry out their duties effectively (Zepeda, et al., 2003). Studies showed that teacher leadership generally helps teachers in performing their duties especially those that are related to instruction. The research regarding the use of teachers to help implement instructional reform is twofold. In regards to teacher leaders’ ability to act as agent of change in parallel leadership with their principals the research appeared clear. Principals that establish focused goals to meet the immediate needs of the reform, and clearly communicate those goals to the teacher leaders, enable the teacher leaders to effectively implement the goals to the remainder of the staff (Austen, 2010). According to Barth (2001), “to capture the potential of teacher leaders, the profession needs to invent, expand, and honour a variety of opportunities for teacher leadership so that there will be more choices than being ‘either’ a principal or a teacher. The career ladder for teachers has precious few rungs. If more widespread teacher leadership is to be attained in our schools, educators will also have to explore multiple conception of the teacher’s role: team leader and teacher, teacher researcher, master teacher”. Malaysia has taken a step further in this respect by recognizing the teacher leaders with a ‘promotion position’ known as Guru Cemerlang (Excellent Teacher).

6. Conclusion

The teacher’s role is becoming more challenging in the era of globalization. The expectation of stakeholders and parents towards school has also increased. Innovation in teaching and learning is a must. The success of school aims depends highly on teachers being the prime movers in the implementation of curriculum, and teaching and learning. To ensure teacher success, the school principal has a big responsibility. Its role as organization manager focusing on technical aspects has changed. They should not be regarded as gatekeepers. Through instructional leadership, the principal has a big opportunity to develop teacher capacity to thrive in teaching and learning reformation and innovation to attain current demands. The establishment of learning and knowledge sharing culture is one of the strategies to enhance teacher capacity that can be achieved through school leadership. Moreover, establishing teacher leadership is one of the strategies that can alleviate the learning and knowledge sharing effectively.

References


Lashway, L. (2002). Developing instructional leaders. ERIC Digest 160 (July) 1-5.


VN:R_U [1.9.11_1134]