Leadership for School Improvement

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1980s, western countries began another wave of education reform (Bolam, 1993; Caldwell, 1993; Pan, 2003). This wave of education reform is more systemic and comprehensive than before. It calls for second-order changes instead of first-order changes (Cuban, 1988). First-order changes are initiatives for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently done, without disturbing the basic organizational features, without substantially altering the way that children and adults perform their roles. And second-order changes seek to alter the fundamental ways, affecting the culture and structure of schools, restructuring roles and reorganizing responsibilities of school participants (Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 1982).

Under the impact of globalization and localization, Taiwan's education has gone through great changes driven by the ideology of educational deregulation. So, the movement of school-based management emerged, in which schools own more autonomy, so as the teachers. After the set up of Teachers Review Committee and Teachers Association, the power structure of schools has been altered. And the promulgation of the New Grade 1 to 9-Year Curriculum Guideline changes the teacher's role as a curriculum implementer into a curriculum designer. Being a school leader, the principal faces a very challenging task, which is much more difficult than ever before. New roles, such as curriculum leader, and new styles of leadership, such as transformational leadership and empowering leadership, are needed for the principals. And second-order changes have to be done in order to successfully implement reform policies.

Thus, facing this new wave of educational change, how the principals adjust themselves leading schools for innovation, and how they create schools as a changing agent for ever-lasting development and self-renewal are the foci of this study.   This

paper will present some preliminary findings of a one-year research project.

METHODS

In order to address the above research questions, twelve principals of elementary and junior high schools were recruited using reputational criteria. Administrative officers of local Educational Bureau were invited to rank principals using the following criteria:

- Having good effects while implementing the New Grade 1 to 9-Year Curriculum.
- Having positive relationships with Teachers Association and Parents Association.
- Having good performance in administrative, curriculum and instructional leadership.

It ended up to having 6 principals each from elementary schools and junior high schools, and 6 principals each from Taipei City and Taipei County in the study. Every principal was individually interviewed twice; each lasted for two to three hours. An interview guide was used and it was given to the principal before the interview. The interview guide covered the questions: 1. background information such as the principal's personal demography, and school background, including school size and the history of school development et al.; 2. the principal's perception of this wave of education reforms; 3. the principal's leadership practices; 4. the principal's career development.

Perspectives of transformational leadership and empowering leadership were used for analysis. Bass and Avolio (1994) suggests that transformational leadership has several characteristics of charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. And Leithwood, Jantzi and

Steinbach (1999) also proposes that transformational leadership covers the components of setting directions, such as visions, goals and high expectations, developing people using individualized support, intellectual stimulation and modeling, redesigning the organization, including culture, structure, policy and community relationships. Concerning empowering leadership, Reitzug (1994) has analyzed it into three empowering behaviors—supporting, facilitating and providing possibilities. In addition, Conger and Kanungo (1988), using a psychological perspective, illustrates that the psychological process of empowerment covers the dimensions of participative management, goal setting, feedback system, modeling, job enrichment and competence-based reward.

RESULTS

Two parts of findings are illuminated. The styles of principals are analyzed, followed by leadership practices, which indicates transformational and empowering strategies principals employed in the study.

Two Styles of Principalship

The style of principalship school leaders demonstrated depended upon their personal characteristics, such as knowledge, skills, experiences and traits, and school factors of school size and school level. In this study, the styles of principalship might be classified into administrative-oriented and curriculum-oriented. Administrative-oriented principals had good administrative skills and using administrative management as a tool to support teaching. The curriculum-oriented principals had their own curriculum philosophy and worked with teachers to develop school curriculum. Three out of twelve principals in the study were classified into the category of curriculum-oriented principalship since most school leaders still had no

solid knowledge foundation of curriculum development and philosophy. Besides, the pressure for high school entrance exam also caused hindrance for junior high school level to develop its curriculum.

The Leadership Practices

Steering schools with visions and goals. Every school in Taiwan was requested to construct school visions under the Guideline of the Grade 1 to 9-Year Curriculum. Principals in this study used either "bottom-up" or "top-down and bottom-up integrated" approach to develop school visions. The visions were communicated through meetings, internet and booklets. A principal said that *"I would like to inform parents in my school district that our school has a new principal coming, so I wrote articles, a kind of "soft article," to let people know what I think."* Another principal responded: *"We had teachers and students make bookmarks. Each school member got one bookmark, through which they would know our school vision."* It indicates that principals made school visions clearly to school participants through different approaches.

Stimulating teachers for professional growth. Reflections let teachers break habitual ways of recognizing and dealing with situations (MacKinnon & Erickson, 1992) and discover their existing frame of thinking. Principals in the study asked teachers to reflect on their routine teachings. Thought provoking questions were asked by principals. For example, a principal who played a heavy role of curriculum leadership usually probed teachers by asking questions of *"What kind of educational philosophy you used?" "What kind of instructional theory you used in your teaching?" "What kind of teaching activities you designed?" "What kind of teaching*

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methods you used?" This type of probing did stimulate teachers having an alternative perspective of framing a problem.

Systemizing teachers' knowledge. Most teachers, after graduating from college, use textbooks as the main guideline for teaching practices. They seldom think about on what educational philosophy their pedagogy is based and what theories are behind their teaching activities. However, teachers are no longer viewed as knowledge consumer, instead, they may play the role of knowledge producer. By doing so, teachers have to systemize their professional knowledge and it is the job that principals in the study tried to do. The method doing this is shown as Figure 1.
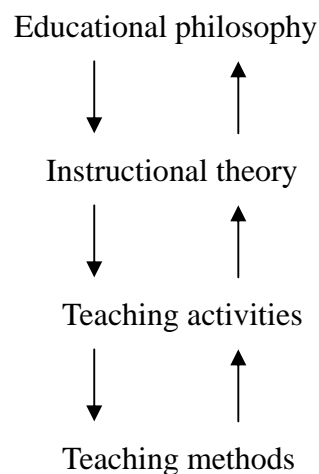
Educational philosophy

Instructional theory

Teaching activities

Teaching methods

Figure 1. The process of systemizing teacher knowledge

Developing professional learning community. Teachers traditionally work alone. Isolated culture is the common phenomenon observed (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). Their classroom is described as their kingdom. The teacher is like the king when the door of classroom is shut. However, the new curriculum policy encourages team teaching and peer collaboration among teachers. Therefore, how to develop professional learning community becomes a challenging task for schools. The

principals in the study were found to use the team of learning areas such as "Language," "Math," "Social Studies," "Science and Technology," "Health and Physical Education," and "Arts and Humanities" to promote organizational learning of teachers. There is a period of fixed time arranged school wide for teachers' professional dialogues. And agenda for discussions was set up before meeting. In order to promote the quality of dialogues, reading materials were sent out to teachers periodically. And the products of curriculum development were posted on the internet for knowledge sharing.

Encouraging teachers to participate in decision-making of school affairs. Only classroom teaching is the business for teachers, which is a common thought prevalent in schools. When talking about teacher empowerment, in addition to enable teachers, we need to let teachers be willing to step out of their classroom and get involved in school affairs especially relating to curriculum decisions. Blasé and Blasé (1994) defined "teacher empowerment" as "decision participation, authority over issues concerning professional life both at the classroom level and at the school level, and opportunities to acquire knowledge necessary to warrant such authority" (p. 8). By empowering teachers, principals need to alter how they conceptualize power. "Power with" becomes a new concept in place of "power over" for school leaders in this wave of education reforms.

Since principals in this study served their first terms after the promulgation of Teacher Act in 1994, which is an Act altering the power ecology of school, they were used to participatory management. So, different committees were set up for teachers participating in making decisions of school affairs. Principals mentioned:

I am not like the older generation, who thought the power is theirs. I

tend to believe that the power belongs to the whole school community.

The power is delegating to teachers.

I am in the process of releasing power and creating room for public discourse. Public discourse is an important mechanism for teacher decision-making.

Setting performing stage for teachers. The best reward for teachers is to get positive recognition from parents, community and the professional circle. Principals in the study led teachers doing good jobs earned them positive feedbacks. Providing teachers opportunities to share experiences of curriculum development with outside people is another strategy principals employed. And it was proved as an effective way to inspire as well as empower teachers.

Providing supportive conditions for teacher growth. For teachers engaging for their growth, it needs the school to offer necessary supports. In the study, common time for teacher discussions were arranged and facilities for curriculum development were offered. Internet system was built for knowledge storing and sharing. And the courses of professional growth were planned based on teacher needs. According to one principal:

We've already transferred in-service training activities into workshops. We do not emphasize inviting scholars for lectures. Instead, if we need external support in the workshops, we'll let the experts get in. Or we may have professors working with us all the year round, and establishing long-term partnership with the school. Having fragmented and piecemeal knowledge is rather dangerous. Sometimes it causes a kind of interruption since they are out of your context to give recommendations.

Thus, school-based professional development based on teachers needs became a new approach for schools in the study.   Professor lectures are not the most preferred strategy anymore.   Exchanging ideas among teachers, having workshops with university professors playing resources roles, and even principals discussing arranged topic with teachers were found as alternative ways used for teacher growth.

In conclusions, principals in the study were found to manage their schools effectively. Transformational and empowering leadership were shown in the principals. Steering schools with visions and goals, stimulating teachers for professional growth, synthesizing teachers' knowledge, developing professional learning community, encouraging teachers to participate in decision-making of school affairs, setting performing stage for teachers, and providing supportive conditions for teacher growth were the strategies principals utilized. These preliminary findings provide a basis for further analysis of the project.

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