Review of the Role of Leadership in Promoting Change in Education

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Abstract

This paper reviews the role of school leadership in promoting change in education, with a particular focus on developing and supporting professional learning and teacher development. The study examines how the "below" and "above" forces are brought together to make an effective and lasting force to generate and sustain change. The study approach used for this research is a literature review project. Reliable scholarly articles and various books in the field of education have been studied. The findings of study conclude that the role of school leadership in developing organic leadership that combines a "change from below" approach with "support from above" is of utmost importance to help teachers demonstrate collective and shared responsibility for their students' learning outcomes. It also discovers that the constructive interdependence of school leaders and teachers can potentially develop skilled learning communities to sustain the change. This poses a test for policy-makers and school leaders to make the environments conducive enough within which organic leadership can be nurtured.

Keywords: role of leadership, change in education, organic leadership, skilled learning communities, school improvement

1. Introduction

School improvement is linked to educational change. When governments throughout the world attempt to improve students' outcomes, it is often evident in the pace and scale of policy changes (Ball, 2013; Bell and Stevenson, 2006; Rizvi and Lingard, 2009). Therefore, improvement is defined as an increase in performance on national and international assessments. The goal of the policy is to demonstrate strong performance in internally benchmarked assessments to gain a competitive advantage. It is difficult to implement change in an environment of isolated privatism and economic restraints. School leaders play a critical role in implementing change and managing it (Day et al., 2009). A teacher's role as a change agent can be a powerful and effective resource for implementing and maintaining change. It may be beneficial to invest in teachers through various collaborative models of professional development. Throughout the paper, professional development is discussed as the "processes, activities, and experiences that provide opportunities to extend teachers' professional learning", that is regarded as "the development of teacher expertise that leads to improved student learning" (New South Wales (NSW) Institute of Teachers, 2012:3).

Three objectives are investigated in this study: first, the role of school leadership in managing an active learning environment for teachers to participate in and sustain change; second, the link between teachers' professional development and organizational change; and third, the possibility of "organic leadership" (King, 2012) where teachers demonstrate collective responsibility for students' learning outcomes. In this study, school leaders' central role in this process is analyzed. It further examines how collaborative professional development initiatives could bring about change.

The purpose of this study is to explore the findings of a literature review and how they relate to organic leadership, which combines a "change from below" approach with "support from above". Through the distinction between "below" and "above," we can reflect on and evaluate the experiences of schools whose power remains within the organizational hierarchy through managerial structures. Although, it is often found in organizations that senior employees have more authority or influence than junior employees (Lumby, 2016), a more in-depth analysis of leadership is needed (Woods, 2016). For example, in any formal organization, a junior or subordinate may have the capacity to work as a stimulus and

manage change (Sachs, 2003). The study examines how the "below" and "above" forces can be brought together to make an effective and lasting force to generate and sustain change. If empowered from above, teachers may be able to become effective implementers of change through organic leadership (King, 2012). This study seeks to challenge the traditional concept of leadership and argues for developing teacher leadership (Muijs and Harris, 2003) from the bottom up, with the "top" enabling and utilizing professional learning or development. This can help improve understanding of the concept of teacher leadership, which remains underdeveloped and under-theorized (Torrance, 2013). The objectives of this study explore these concepts in the following two areas:

1. How can school leadership support teachers to generate, manage and sustain change?
2. What are the factors that influence change in teachers' practices?

2. Methodology

The study approach used for this research is a literature review project. Reliable scholarly articles and various books in the field of education have been studied. Literature searches were made using keywords: leadership and change in education, leading and sustaining change, the role of teachers in leading change, resistance to change, organic leadership, distributed leadership and organizational change management. A variety of books in the field of education and articles from the past twenty-five (25) years were selected and close to fifty (50) articles were read and analyzed.

3. Literature Review

3.1 The Role of School Leadership in the Process of Change

Although, school leadership is considered a complicated and controversial idea, it is practised in ways that has remarkable effects on managing and sustaining change (Fullan et al., 2005) and improves teaching and learning practices in classrooms (Day et al., 2009; Kervin, 2007). Therefore, it is described as a "relationship of social influence" (Spillane and Coldren, 2011:76) where teachers' willingness can potentially be influenced by the quality and effectiveness of school leadership. However, empathy and effectiveness of leadership are critical to the achievement and success of change or new initiatives. Challenges can arise when there is a difference between the needs of the individual and those of the organization or state, especially in an environment of standardization where leaders try to bring about change in a school or organization by enforcing performance management (Bolam et al., 2005). In such situations, leaders are seen as rigid managers exercising only hierarchical authority, and teachers see themselves as 'technicians executing someone else's policy (Priestley et al., 2011:269). Teachers do not find the autonomy in their professional learning that is important to meet the needs of their students. Research has shown that teachers care more about their classrooms than about national or global policies or initiatives (Kitching et al., 2009).

Knowles et al. (2005) argue and recognize that teachers are at the center of decision-making and are one of the significant factors to understand and engage in adult learning that can lead to teacher ownership and student learning. The existing concept of professional learning advocates strengthening teachers' autonomy and collaborative engagement if the change is to be understood, managed and sustained (Kennedy, 2011). However, this collaboration does not have to take the form of 'constructed collegiality' (Hargreaves, 1994:196), as it takes the form of licensed or controlled collaboration produced by school leaders or managers. Therefore, the actions of school leaders have a significant impact on teachers' commitment and effectiveness in school improvement or new initiatives.

The literature suggests that school leaders need to acknowledge and support change in meaningful ways to manage and sustain it. Distributed leadership (Tian et al., 2016) is one of the approaches that received appreciation lately as it focuses on the interactions where 'influence and agency are widely shared' (Harris and DeFlaminis, 2016:141). I agree with (Preedy, 2016) that distributive leadership theory offers a more hands-on and self-directed form of school leadership because strengths of a teacher are appreciated and reinforced irrespective of their official position. In the literature, distributive leadership is acknowledged but poorly theorized (Tian et al., 2016), that leads to confusion about its manifestations and definition.

Facilitating distributed leadership requires a significant change in authority from formal school leaders to teachers, which can be challenging in an environment of control, accountability and performativity (Preedy, 2016). Harris and DeFlaminis (2016:143) refer this challenge as 'licensed leadership', where teachers have room to maneuver but only to achieve the goals set and dictated by the school management. Many school leaders believe that they are distributing the leadership in their schools when they assign different tasks to their teachers to achieve the set goals. However, the truth is different and teachers practice very little freedom due to the rigid leadership approaches and external accountability pressures. Leadership is distributed, but limited to the parameters set by the school leaders. Burns and Darling-Hammond (2014) highlight the gap in the perception of teachers and school leaders about the scope to which both perceive leadership as distributed or shared. Therefore, distributed leadership may not achieve or reflect the original goals of extending leadership practices to teachers in schools (Torrance, 2012). Therefore, (Torrance, 2012)

rightly argues that the practice of distributed leadership is "context-specific, socially constructed, negotiated and hierarchical". Although, school leaders value distributed leadership, it is not visible because school leaders are under pressure to achieve good results on standardized tests and are also responsible for teaching and learning practices in schools. Therefore, it is limited to the priorities of a single school head and may not be reflected as an effective approach to leadership and change from below. The organic form of leadership, on the other hand, is less tactical and allows teachers the freedom to take risks and be creative, even though it is challenging for school leaders to build the capacity of teachers (Bell and Bolam, 2010). In such situations, the biggest test for a leader is to 'let go' of their leadership egos and show willingness and faith in teachers' values, principles and judgements. However, schools or organizations where teachers value privatism and focus more on what happens in their classroom than on collective responsibility or shared vision or purpose, this can be more challenging (Kitching et al., 2009). Pedder et al. (2008:14) also point out that teachers are reluctant to connect their own professional development goals to 'strategic interests' such as school improvement. Additionally, Opfer et al. (2011) argue that school leaders who recognize the prospective of professional development, real change can be observed. However, professional development needs to be led and managed, it does not just happen' (Earley and Bubb, 2004:80). School leaders can create the capacity of an organization by providing teachers with ongoing support and professional development. Torrance (2012) emphasizes that school leaders must emphasize on educational leadership instead of performance leadership. Thus, if a school leader takes a grassroots approach from the bottom with support from the top, they are able to form a culture of mutual trust that can bring change (Bubb and Earley, 2008) and high levels of self-efficacy (Kitching et al., 2009).

3.2 Institutional Change and Professional Development

Teachers are recognized as 'change agents' in educational practice because they have the greatest influence. Teaching practice is referred to what teachers normally do in classrooms along with their attitudes, values, skills, and professional knowledge (Evans, 2010). The notion of teachers' professional development is central here since participation in professional development activities or events is mandatory. Research shows that few teachers do not feel the need or motivation to change their practices (Bubb and Earley, 2008). It has also been found that many organizations impose a certain number of CPD hours on teachers without requiring them to learn anything or improve their practices (Wiliam, 2011:28). Teachers perceive such professional development activities as unconnected to their professional requirements (Stevenson, 2012). Moreover, the notion of professional development may be viewed by teachers as 'input'. When the focus is shifted from courses or professional development events to the outcomes of those experiences and reflection on daily classroom practices (Bubb and Earley, 2008:26), it is expected to bring improved student outcomes (King, 2014). The concept of professional development (Cordingley et al., 2003:14) therefore emphasizes the three important features of professional development: the experience itself, the influence on practice and the effect on student outcomes.

Private organizations and individual schools prefer to invest in the professional development of their teachers despite distressed times. However, it remains difficult to demonstrate the impact of these interventions. The role of school leaders is crucial here, as they must have the courage to support teachers as agents of change and let them determine their goals for professional development. The right kind of bottom-up approach demands that teachers enjoy the autonomy to tailor their own professional development needs for individual classrooms and are supported from the top (Kervin, 2007). When school leaders support their teachers this way, they not only recognize teachers' skills and values, but also contribute to the development of 'organic leadership' where teachers willingly take ownership of their own learning and their students' outcomes.

3.3 Sustainability of Professional Development and the Role of School Leadership

Professional development does not just transpire - it has to be achieved and led' (Earley & Bubb, 2004: 80). Therefore, leadership can be both transactional and transformational. The transactional model of leadership is based on inspiring teachers to change through extrinsic benefits, while the transformational model emphasizes more on changing attitudes that lead to improved practices and shared values (Ingram, 1997).

The debate on effective professional development has highlighted some key features of such interventions. For example, it is recognized that effective professional development must be actively focused, evidence-based and involves critical reflection (Bell & Bolam, 2010), where teachers can learn and reflect collaboratively (Ainscow et al., 2000). Collaborative professional development is required with specific plans to promote and enable at least two teacher colleagues to learn and support together on a sustained foundation (Cordingley et al., 2004: 2). Friend and Cook (2000) argue that collaboration enables teachers to change their practices to improve student learning. The role of leadership is crucial here in nurturing collaboration between teachers by building collegiality built on trust and respect (Lugg & Boyd, 1993) so that all participants enjoy equal status and their contribution is extremely valued (Slater, 2004). However, if these characteristics are absent and school leaders seek to bring change through a top-down approach or 'constructed collegiality', (Hargreaves, 1994) it will harm the long-term sustainability of collaboration (Fallon & Barnett, 2009).

School leaders can help support change through the development of learning cultures (Leonard, 2002; Fullan et al. 2005) , so teachers can work with a facilitator to improve their practices (Guskey, 1991; Bolt, 2007) and engage themselves in the development of a professional learning community (Kervin, 2007). The professional learning community focuses on collaborative work with shared goals in teaching and learning and reflective professional enquiry (Bolam et al., 2005) that leads to gaining more independence and ownership of school improvement (Seed, 2008) by building distributed leadership (Dinham et al., 2008). Professional learning communities can be very useful in helping school leaders sustain change, but they are rarely used in schools (Harris, 2001). Professional learning communities can be developed by school leaders to help teachers work together on an initiative. If successful, they can serve as a driver for change (Goos et al., 2007) and further lead to various collaborative practices. Hence, professional learning communities and collaboration can be a merchandise of shared professional development rather than something imposed on teachers from above.

The capacity of any organization to provide ongoing support and professional development is a fundamental component of the change process (Fullan, 2005) and should be led by school leadership. Phillips and Glickman (1991) argue that teachers who work in a supportive and positive environment can achieve a higher level of development. Effective leadership interacts with teachers and promotes teachers' professional growth and reflection (Blase ́ and Blase ́, 1998: 3) by providing time and resources (Neil & Morgan, 2003). Cordingley et al. (2003) further argue that teachers need to be provided with non-contact time to ease collaboration for sustained teacher development and time for critical reflection to consolidate learning, as this makes teachers feel valued. Therefore, the need to provide time for collaboration helps sustain change over time and requires deep learning, knowledge (Bolam et al., 2005) and consolidation into daily practice (Earley & Porritt, 2010). Teachers move from procedural level to the conceptual level and they continuously improve their practice to meet their students' needs (Hall & Hord, 2001).

Cordingley et al. (2004: 61) claim that school leaders need to consider all these elements for a sustainable change when designing and evaluating professional development activities or events. School leaders play a very important role here as they give teachers the autonomy to balance their own professional needs, institutional needs and the needs of the state (Bell & Bolam, 2010).

4. Findings

The analysis from the literature review on the role of leadership in promoting change in education, with a particular focus on developing and supporting professional learning or teacher development, highlights the following three stages.

4.1 Initiating Change

Firstly, the study discovers that if change is initiated by aligning the teachers' personal and professional needs and provides embedded opportunities to teachers to adopt leaderships roles, it not only motivates the teachers to lead the change, but helps the school leader to sustain that change, too. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995:598) recognize a 'top-down provision for bottom-up reform' that reflects a potentially more expectant view of distributed leadership. A top-down approach, where a school leader is in control and authority, is one in which a school leader brings an initiative to the staff's attention and asks the coordinator to help teachers implement the initiative (Lumby, 2016). However, the literature suggests that teachers view professional development in terms of individual development (Pedder et al., 2008) and are relatively more anxious with what happens in their classrooms than what happens at the school level (Kitching et al., 2009). Therefore, it reflects teachers' leadership role in learning and teaching (Diamond and Spillane, 2016) rather than the improvement of school, which is a less desirable part of distributed leadership (Harris and DeFlaminis, 2016). This can be seen as indication of Bj ̈orkman and Olofsson's (2009) logic that symmetry between school leaders and teachers' priorities is a catalyst that creates positive conditions for building capacity for change, signifying a shared benefit for both the school leaders and teachers. In addition, the personal goals of school leaders and teachers also play an important role. Reconciling these personal interests can be a real challenge for both. When these personal interests are aligned, not only the school leaders are interested, but they may see this process as a 'vehicle' to introduce collaborative practices into the school to grasp their dream for the school (King, 2011). Consequently, school leaders will be happy to empower teachers to do what they want through distributed leadership (Tian et al., 2016). This reflects the agency of leaders who mediate the structures to achieve their goals and advocate collaborative practices. This top-down approach raises the query of whether distributed leadership only occurs when the goals of school leaders and teachers are aligned and reflect the legitimizing practices of school leadership (Woods, 2016). While, Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) argue the importance of aligning professional development events or activities with teachers' personal and professional needs, it might demonstrate a culture of 'new managerialism' that focuses on accountability or performance, which is the dark side of distributed leadership. However, it also suggests that teachers are committed to the initiatives regardless of their role in the school, reflecting a bottom-up change with top-down support, which is an organic form of leadership.

4.2 Implementing Change

Secondly, the study discovers that school leaders can implement change effectively when organizations build capacity for change by working collaboratively to provide hands-on participation, common goals, ownership and time to implement the initiative to teachers. King (2011) argues that the interdependence between school leaders and teachers is strengthened when school leaders support teachers by creating an organizational capacity for change. Thus, teacher's willingness to participate in the initiative leads to teacher ownership that helps sustain change. In this context, Cordingley et al. (2003) argue that supporting teachers and giving them time is also very important for successful implementation. The tricky issue in education is that one innovation after another emerges without cracking the problems of effective implementation (Sahlberg, 2012).

The active involvement of teachers in professional development activities can only be reliable with the effective role of school leadership (Robinson et al., 2009). Furthermore, through their hands-on involvement, school leaders are more aware of the challenges of implementation and can therefore provide teachers with the necessary support that is consistent with transformational leadership, where leaders and teachers seek to achieve common goals (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

4.3 Sustaining Change

Lastly, the study finds out that providing teachers autonomy, collaborative professional development opportunities, shared responsibility for student learning, an environment of mutual trust and authority to make choices and take decisions are the key factors that help the school leader sustain change. Bell and Bolam (2010) point out that school leaders have the pressure to perform well and yet provide their teachers with the freedom to become creative, take risks, and avoid mistakes. School leaders who rise above managerialism are significant to school improvement as pointed out by Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) as they give teachers autonomy and trust them when deciding what works best for them and their students (Sahlberg, 2007).

Consequently, Robinson et al. (2009) appreciate that school leaders who demonstrate theoretical understanding of the initiative and believe in increasing collaborative practices will surely enhance teachers' performance and improve students' outcomes. For instance, school leaders who facilitate collaborative learning environments and develop professional learning communities (King, 2011) are more likely to encourage and facilitate teachers to become leaders themselves (Goos et al., 2007) and work towards a collective and shared responsibility of their students' learning. By empowering teachers, roles become diffused and a sense of responsibility is developed. As a result of distributed leadership, teachers take ownership of their practices and develop professional learning communities that focus on coordinating the practices with shared goals of improving student outcomes (Bolam et al., 2005). The development of professional learning communities and teachers' enthusiasm for the initiative also encourage other teachers to take part. It is observed that while working in professional learning communities, teachers use a systematic approach to challenge and adapt the initiative according to the needs of their students, showing evidence of deep learning, which is a prerequisite to sustaining change and improving schools (Boardman et al., 2005).

A substantial number of teachers who generally avoid initiatives or resist change engage with them when they hear about how successful it is for their students in classrooms. Moreover, school leaders do not need to micromanage the collaborative practices despite supporting them throughout the process. As a result of this fundamental cultural change, privatism is replaced with collective responsibility (O'Sullivan, 2011). Stoll and Fink (1996) argue that the legacy of a professional development initiative is far greater than the initiative itself, with schools reporting cultural changes that are a core component of school improvement.

Despite a culture of standardization and performativity, school leaders can potentially find space, trust their teachers' values and ideas, and easily provide them with support and time to take risks that will ultimately lead to enhanced student outcomes and teacher achievements. Professional trust and a genuine shift of power to those at the chalk face are what Priestley et al. (2011:270) cite in support of this viewpoint. Dent and Goldberg (1999) cited in Walk (2022) claim that people do not struggle with change in the sense of what change is, but they resist the consequences accompanying with the change implementation, for example, more work hours, change of routine to more unfamiliar tasks, etc.

5. Conclusion

The study finds out a different approach to how new practices or initiatives can be managed and sustained and the way cultural changes can be accomplished in faculty with suitable academic infrastructure (Diamond and author, 2016); the use of a "grassroots approach" (Bubb and Earley, 2008:19) as the method to implement and sustain change. This "grassroots approach" or "organic leadership" opportunity encourages the teachers, despite formal leadership roles or

not, to become responsible for bringing the initiative to the school leaders and combined with the school leader's support facilitates the diffusion of power and divides among the teachers to sustain change. These findings add to the understanding of "education infrastructures" that support or constrain learning and teaching" (Diamond and author, 2016:151).

The study answers its research question that once "below" and "above" forces work collaboratively, they not only bring effective change, but sustain that change, too. The study further concludes that the interdependence between teachers and school leaders is strengthened when school leaders provide support to teachers by creating organizational capacity for change. Therefore, teachers' personal and professional interests, distributed leadership opportunities, collaborative practices, collective and shared responsibility, organizational support and a trustworthy environment are the key factors that help the school leaders bring change and further sustain that change.

6. Implications for Future Aspects

The study attempted to highlight the role of school leaders in leading and sustaining change. Critical questions regarding the role of school leaders in leading change, the role of teachers in managing and sustaining change, factors influencing the implementation of change were all studied, but limited information on the role of students' leadership is available. Students also have an effective and vital role to play in leading and sustaining change in the school organization. I recommend that effective research is done on the role of student leadership as a key factor in leading and sustaining change.

Finally, it is concluded that the significant role of leadership is of utmost importance in developing skilled learning communities to sustain the change.

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