SHAPING POTENTIAL TEACHERS
AS ACADEMIC LEADERS

Dr. R.K. Nayak

Abstract

Overcoming the problems plaguing schools requires new and dynamic forms of leadership, which Howey defines as "coalescing others to act when they otherwise might not have" (Howey, 1988). The present study is an ethnographic research to reflect on aspects of grooming and shaping potential teachers to academic leaders. This paper analyses the nature of the present teacher leadership existing in different forms in one of the schools in Bhopal and its contribution to the building of academic climate in school; predicts a structure to groom potential teachers as academic leaders. Underuse and misuse of the talents of teacher leaders by the administrators, job centered interests of leaders and absence of vision to use the talent of leaders for the academic benefits are few highlights of the study. The administrators can identify and groom the potential teachers as academic leaders for organisational improvement, community participation and instructional improvement depending on their talent.

Key words: academic leadership, ethnographic research, shaping, academic cause

Introduction

Teacher leadership has been part of the education reform landscape – off and on – since the mid1980s (Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Murphy, 2005; York-Barr and Duke, 2004).At present teacher leadership is constrained to protect and upkeep the relation between the academic and non-academic activities of teacher. Teacher leaders are facilitators within the school and can be an important element in spreading and strengthening school reform and improvement(CCSRI, 2005). It is increasingly implausible that we could improve the performance of schools . . . without promoting leadership in teaching by teachers(Berry,2019; *Little,1988).* This article focuses on development of teacher leadership at the school level. It is concerned with teacher leadership for classroom and

instructional improvement, school organizational improvement, parental involvement and school–community relationships, among other leadership domains.

Objectives

There is an attempt to suggest practices so as to consciously groom the teacher leaders to be academic leaders. How can the potential of the teacher leaders can be shaped so as to enable them to contribute to the academic aspects of the school? This is about how to nurture the potential teachers to be effective teacher leaders so as to contribute to the building of academic climate of the school.

Methodology

This is an ethnographic research study to collect school culture related to teacher leadership that exists within the minds of the people who make up the school. The method used here is qualitative, inductive, exploratory and longitudinal in nature to achieve a thick, rich description over a relatively small area, teacher leadership in Demonstration School, Bhopal. There are over seventy people associated with this school. The teachers' general informal interaction in the staffroom, canteen, corridor, ground , their discussion in staff meetings, opinions of teachers over online platforms are the sources of the data for this study. The opinions of teachers regarding the curricular changes, transaction strategies, reaction of teachers towards their colleagues' teaching strategies, attitude of school principal towards teachers, interaction of teachers amongst themselves provide an insight to understand the factors contributing to the development of teacher leadership.

The existing nature of teacher leadership is described here. The existing nature of teacher leadership and factors affecting the teacher leadership were part of the study. I explored to identify potential teachers to shape them as academic leaders and suggest ways to make use of the existing teacher leaders towards academic cause. I looked into the circumstances that promote growth of teacher leadership. The areas of influence of the teacher leaders are summed to find the connection between the factors affecting the

growth of teacher leadership.

Result and Discussion

Prevalent nature of teacher leadership

There are teachers who actively contribute on several segments like assisting the principal in preparation of official paper works; addressing untoward incident like conflict with the parents over any issue; handling outsiders intelligently to safeguard the interest of the school. There are teachers who take up the issues of teachers before the administration and point out the mistakes committed by the administration; citing the wrongs committed by their colleagues, some teachers decline to perform their regular duties or underperform; there are teachers who try to escape from the active teaching duty or are facilitated not to take regular class in the pretext of executing essential paper works related to functioning of the school. These teachers are the virtual hands of the principal; they have a say on every issue related to the functioning of the school; the principal feels confident and remains assured of the smooth functioning of the school due to the active involvement of such teachers.

> *One reason for the difficulty is that it's not always clear what teacher leadership entails. In many schools and districts, for example, teacher leaders may be asked to perform quasi-administrative functions, such as communicating messages from the administration, convening meetings, and securing materials. Sometimes, they may be assigned tasks related to instruction, such as sharing lesson ideas and classroom resources. Other times, they may be asked to serve as an emergency substitute teacher or chair the school safety committee*(Cheung, Reinhardt, Stone, & Little, 2018)*.*

These proactive teachers possess leadership qualities; they have the power to attract others towards them; attitude of these teachers towards academic environment of school matters a lot; the opinions of these teacher leaders are like:

"there is no need of having rigorous, structured academic atmosphere; those students who are capable of studying can also otherwise study and progress; there is no output in spending time after the academically weak children; no matter how hard one tries, there won't be any substantial change in the academic performance of a section of poor performing students. Nobody tries to understand the problems faced by the school; nothing better is feasible in these circumstances; the new policies spoiled the system; earlier the system was much better; leave the problem up to us we can solve the problem in better way; the interference by the other agencies in the daily school affairs has complicated the problem; the teachers' non-performance is due to the engagement of teachers in jobs other than teaching; leave everything to us we will show you the result.''

There are fixed mindsets of teacher leaders regarding the reasons for the non performance. They try to take up some popular perception and assign it as the cause of non performance of the system.

Influence of present teacher leaders

Teachers have a tendency to take the side of the established teacher leaders due to the belief that in case they face any trouble in future there should be somebody to support them. They are mentally ready to bear with the repercussions even in the case when their personal principle does not match with that of the leader. The bent of mind of the teacher leader seems to dissuade other teachers from working hard for uplifting the academic status of the school; at times the so called leaders are likely to dissuade the genuine hard working teachers from implementing new strategies. Weak hearted teachers are likely to yield to the persuasions of the teacher leaders towards not working hard, probably going down the line does not require any effort on the part of the teacher. Organisational culture is very complex; there are lot of things going together; any teacher doing well may be a threat to others in the form of increasing popularity amongst the parents, teacher and other administrators; so teacher leaders try to create fear in the mind of a well doing teacher so that he quits doing extra effort; the fear is instilled in many ways as "if you keep on doing such good jobs, you will be burdened with extra odd jobs; you would be in deep trouble in future; do little work, don't be overenthusiastic."

The present teacher leaders' activities may not be conducive towards improving the academic environment of the school; their own fixed mindset is rather dissuading; their perception towards the present curricular strategies needs change.

Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement (CCSRI, 2005). To develop teacher leadership in this direction, it needs constructive effort on many fronts. One suggested way is to expose our present teacher leaders to motivational work environments so as to change their perception; they need to be assigned concrete academic assignments as an organisational challenge. Only by experiencing authentic collaboration with teachers can administrators become confident in teachers' capacity to lead and in their own ability to cultivate teachers' leadership skills(Berry, 2019).

Prospective academic leaders

The primary implication of the insight for teacher leadership development is that this development needs to be systemic. It cannot focus only on teachers who would engage in leadership work. It must focus also on principals and other administrators and on other teachers (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). Some teachers are really doing well in their teaching; they are inspiration to others in the organisation; there is a good scope for young teachers to learn from them; the role of principal is important who needs to work collaboratively with other teachers to find the positive aspects of individual teachers so as to percolate the desire skills among other teachers. These teachers can be encouraged to promote their skills. There are subgroups working within the group of teachers; three to seven teachers with similar thoughts form smaller groups to discuss matters that they cannot express before the bigger group due to a variety of reasons. The reasons need to be explored in detail to understand the social mechanism regulating the behavior of the teachers. One of the probable reasons may be some teachers get the platform in the small group to put their suppressed opinions. Sometimes there is conflict

with the dual versions- versions agreed in bigger groups and versions advocated in smaller groups. The more the dominant the leader of the bigger group, there are chances of having smaller groups. The voices of the small groups working within the big groups and the difference in the opinion of the sub groups lead to conflict in the big group. These voices of smaller groups need to be heard and their concerns need to be addressed to maintain healthy relationships. There is a lot of potential to groom the teachers active in small groups but passive in a bigger   group of teachers as teacher leaders. They may be provided opportunities. These observations are similar to the suggestions: these opportunities include direct engagement with policy makers, congressional testimony, media placements, and public forums for voicing their opinions (Coggins, & McGovern, 2014).

Influence of online social platforms on teacher leadership

Online social platforms encourage teachers to share their ideas and developments. Every teacher is associated with some form of groups; some teachers have formed groups with students to share the tutorial instructions, prompting messages and necessary instructions. Teachers come forward and show their belief in engaging students in academic activities through social media. Teachers show their inclination for online collaboration to share academic activities' but it is restricted to information sharing on activity schedule. Teachers are forming groups on social platforms to discuss and update themselves. Their leadership role is visible with their proactive participation. This is quite similar to the observations of Cynthia Coburn and Jennifer Russell (2008) that while the strength and depth of teachers' learning networks tend to vary considerably, the most productive networks "almost always stretch beyond grade-level groups to include others inside and outside the school."

Effect of school principal

In this case the principal of the school was very supportive to the teachers. He appreciates the initiatives taken by the teachers for the academic cause of the students. He encourages and facilitates the

teachers practising innovative ways. He shows respect to the sincere teachers. He is not biased. He encourages the vertical movement of teachers. Though he could not assign concrete academic goals to teachers, he used to motivate teachers to perform their teaching duties sincerely.   He is spirited, but lacks academic knowledge to have intellectual control over the doings of the teachers. He was good at maintaining harmony among the teachers. Teachers were united despite having differences over opinions about several issues.

Encouraging teachers to do creative works and supporting the new initiatives of teachers is a great quality of school administrators. If the school principal does not appreciate the teachers for their initiatives, the teachers are likely to be dormant; they may not take responsibility to do innovative work. At least encouraging teachers to remain sincere to their present academic duty is an important task of any administrator; if an administrator can at least encourage the teachers to be sincere, then that would be a good start. The principal needs to be a leader to percolate the innovative practice to the end users.

Conclusion

The skills of the present teacher leaders need to be redirected towards improving the academic atmosphere of the school. They have the potential to change the academic atmosphere of the school; they seem to lack inclination towards these academic aspects due to their own vested interest, fixed mindset and unknown factors. The talent of the established leaders can be diverted towards improving the academic culture with support from upper administrative people. There are potential teachers who are active in sub groups of 3 to 7 teachers; these teachers can be groomed to be academic leaders to build an academic atmosphere. The principal plays a vital role in leading the teachers to achieve the academic goals; he needs to be trained to act as a leader of teachers working with him/her.

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