



LEADERSHIP EPIPHANIES: ROLE, TACIT KNOWLEDGE AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS OF PUBLIC SECONDARY PRINCIPALS

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CHAPTER 1

"Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world."

-John Milton

ABSTRACT

Principals play a key role in the delivery of quality instruction. Because the principal serves as the educational leader of the school, it is imperative that they have a working knowledge of effective instructional strategies and understand the needs of their students, teachers and communities. Every principal must be anchored in the school system whose roles and responsibilities change the school significantly. Republic Act No. 9155, Chapter 1, Section 7, Letter E, Paragraph 3 states that consistent with the national educational policies, plans and standards, the school heads shall have the Authority, Responsibility and Accountability (AuRA) in managing all affairs in the school. Thus, the success and failure of a school depends on the kind of school principal it has. Principal then in the context of SBM requires a paradigm

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shift in leadership towards a meaningful implementation of programs in the educational system.

This phenomenological and case study of Filipino leaders aimed to describe on the Leadership Epiphanies: Role, Tacit knowledge and Leadership Dimension of a Secondary Principal in the National Capital Region, aimed to describe the different role performed, body knowledge and incidents of the principals as school leaders. It answers the following questions: (1). *What roles do principals performed in transforming the culture of the school?* (2.) *What body of tacit knowledge do principals gain from their leadership epiphanies?* (3.) *What critical incidents encountered by the principal respondents in professional career, personal attitudes, and leadership style?*

This study employed pure qualitative research methods. The qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were used to gather data as these have been found useful to generate phenomenological data. Transcribes field texts were subjected to phenomenological reduction with the researcher interpreting data from the key informant perspective.

The different roles, like *skillful leader, transformer, evaluator, communication, social skills, aesthetic appreciation and emotional intelligence are essential in carrying out their leadership epiphany.*

Key Words: *epiphany, principal, roles, tacit knowledge*

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INSTABRIGHT e-GAZETTE

ISSN: 2704-3010

Volume VI, Issue I

August 2024

Available online at <https://www.instabrightgazette.com>



Introduction

In today's climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to perform varied roles as educational visionaries; instructional and curriculum leaders; assessment experts; disciplinarians; community builders; public relations experts; budget analysts; facility managers; special program administrators; and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. They are expected to broker the often-conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district officials, unions, and state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs. Although that job description sounds overwhelming, at least it signals that the field has begun to give overdue recognition to the indispensable role of and mounting demands on principals (DeVita, as cited in Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2015). This assessment of the importance of principals is echoed repeatedly by educators, researchers focused on leadership, and organizations concerned with ensuring that all students have access to high-quality schools.

A principal can impact the lives of anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand students during a year" (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). But—and this is key to understanding how a good principal supports high levels of teaching and learning— "it is neither teachers alone nor principals alone who improve schools, but teachers and principals working together" (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Principals are increasingly expected to lead their schools within a framework of collaboration and shared decision making with teachers and other staff members.

For more than a decade, the Wallace Foundation has sponsored rigorous research on school leadership. In a recent report, the foundation highlighted an important message from the research: "A particularly noteworthy finding is the empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement" (Wallace Foundation, 2011). The foundation said about this link: Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to

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reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal. (Wallace Foundation, 2011).

Researchers Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) concurred with this assessment and drew from findings of a research project that spanned six years: In developing a starting point for this six-year study, they claimed, based on a preliminary review of research, that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, they are even more

Confident about this claim. To date, they have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership. Why is leadership crucial? One explanation is that leaders have the potential to unleash latent capacities in organizations.

Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school. While evidence about leadership effects on student learning can be confusing to interpret, much of the existing research actually underestimates its effects. The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects. This evidence supports the present widespread interest in improving leadership as a key to the successful implementation of large-scale reform. Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most.... While the evidence shows small but significant effects of leadership actions on student learning across the spectrum of schools, existing research also shows that demonstrated effects of successful leadership are considerably greater in schools that are in more difficult circumstances. Indeed, there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst. (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2014).

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Hence, the objective of this study is to describe the roles performed by the principals in the dimensions of instructional leader, curriculum and development and assessment of learners.

Literature Review

Principal's Role

This paper is grounded on RA 9155 on Governance Act of 2001 on the role of school head stating:

There shall be a school head for all public elementary schools and public high schools or a cluster thereof. The establishment of integrated school from existing public elementary and public high school shall be encouraged, subject to the guidelines that will be issued for the purposed by the Secretary of Education. The school head, who may be assisted by an assistant school head, shall be both an instructional leader and administrative manager. The school head shall form an instructional leader and administrative manager. The school head shall form a team with the school teachers/learning facilitators for delivery of quality educational programs, projects and services. A core of non-teaching staff shall handle the school's administrative, fiscal and auxiliary services. In addition, authority, accountability and responsibility of the School Head is consistent with the law, national educational policies, plans and standards.

Moreover, discussions about the scope of the principal's role too often focus on a to-do list: helping teachers improve their teaching, using data to review and refine the instructional program, and ensuring that the school is kept clean and safe. The more abstract but very tangible elements of leadership, however, are often what spell the difference between adequate and excellent principals. The research can address this aspect of the link between principal leadership and student learning. Louis et al. (2010) offered a definition of "leadership" that is distilled from the essence of their findings: "Leadership is all about

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organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions”.

Leadership effects on student learning occur largely because leadership strengthens professional community; teachers’ engagement in professional community, in turn, fosters the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement” (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Other researchers conducted a meta-analysis that focused on the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. They also found that principal leadership is correlated with student achievement and that there were especially strong links between specific principal behaviors and student learning. One such behavior was the extent to which the principal “is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems” (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2013). In the view of those researchers, “effective leadership means more than knowing what to do—it’s knowing when, how, and why to do it” (Waters et al., 2013).

In a recent report, the Wallace Foundation (2011) identified five key functions or roles of principal leadership: shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards, creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail, cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision. Achieving success as a leader, by virtually any definition, requires ‘doing right things right.’ (Leithwood, 2015). Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost.

A report from Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) spoke to the importance of the vision set by the principal: Effective school leaders know how to focus the work of the school on the essential. They have a clear mission or purpose for the school and identify goals that align with that mission. They communicate the purpose and goals in a

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meaningful way such that all stakeholders understand what they need to do. (McIver, Kearns, Lyons, & Sussman, 2009).

Finally, a study of principals in high-need dis schools characterized most of those principals as falling into one of two categories—"transformers" or "copers." The "transformers" [the more effective principals] had an explicit vision of what their school might be like and brought a "can-do" attitude to their job.... [They] focused intently on creating a culture in which each child can learn. Giving up is not an option. (Johnson, Rochkind, & Doble, 2008) In contrast, the copers were "typically struggling to avoid being overwhelmed" (Johnson et al., 2008). What might those principal behaviors look like in everyday terms? Let's look at two examples: the impact of the principal on attracting and retaining a high-quality teaching staff and the principal's need to focus on the "right stuff."

Pick the right school leader and great teachers will come and stay. Pick the wrong one and, over time, good teachers leave, mediocre ones stay, and the school gradually (or not so gradually) declines. Reversing the impact of a poor principal can take years. (Cerf, as cited in Mitgang, 2008) Johnson (2006) agreed and viewed the principal as the "broker of workplace conditions"—someone whose "influence on the school as a workplace for teachers extends well beyond being in charge of the school". For example, a survey of 40,000 teachers conducted by Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2010) asked teachers about the factors that affect retention. This study found that "supportive leadership is the standout, top-ranked item".. Other studies have made similar findings about the importance of leadership on teachers' attitudes about their working conditions.

Using data from a study of North Carolina teachers, Ladd (2009) found that "school leadership emerges as the most consistently relevant measure of working conditions". School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006) . In another study, Hirsch, Frietas, Church, and Villar (2008) found that "two to three times as many teachers who say they want to remain in their current schools agreed

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with positive statements about school leadership...than did teachers who want to remain in the profession but move to a different school". In response to a study conducted in South Carolina, more than one-quarter of the teachers identified leadership as the "most crucial working condition in making their decisions about whether to stay in a school," and this factor was "significantly predictive of teacher retention" (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2007).

Maryland teachers emphasized the importance of school leadership on teaching retention: School leadership was the most important condition affecting teachers' willingness to remain teaching at their school. Teachers who indicated that they plan to remain teaching in their school were twice as likely to agree they work in trusting and supportive environments. (Hirsch, Sioberg, & Germuth, 2010). Finally, the importance of the school principal in making—or breaking—a teacher's first years in the profession is highlighted in a report by the Public Education Network (2003). New teachers working in schools run by principals they describe as effective and competent had a much easier transition into teaching. Teachers gave high marks to principals who made it easy for them to ask questions and discuss problems, and those that provided them with assistance, guidance, and solutions.

The principal's role is complex and multidimensional, and the effectiveness of principals depends, in part, on...how they allocate their time across daily responsibilities" (Rice 2010). Researchers Leithwood et al. (2014) agreed: "Leaders' contributions to student learning, then, depend a great deal on their judicious choice of what parts of their organization to spend time and attention on. Some choices...will pay off much more than others." Recent research is helping to better define what the right stuff might be. Many of the discussions about principal leadership have focused on instructional leadership—stressing that this should be the core of a principal's job. But the definition of instructional leadership is evolving. For example, in a study of Florida principals, Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010) found that, on average, they spent less than 10% of their time on functions traditionally defined as instruction (such as classroom observations and professional development for teachers). Almost 30% of their time was spent

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on administrative activities, including student supervision, scheduling, and compliance issues; about 20% of their time was spent on “organizational management.” In addition, the researchers found that devoting more time to organizational management was correlated with higher student achievement as reflected by test scores. In contrast, time spent on instructional activities was either not or only marginally related to student performance. On the surface, these findings seem to undermine the argument that the principal is the instructional leader of a school. But it is important to first look at the types of activities—such as ensuring that the school is safe, managing the budget and other resources, and dealing with concerns from teachers—included in organizational management. Effectively addressing such concerns provides staff members and students with a well-organized, learning-focused environment in which to work. Thus, these recent findings “do not necessarily contradict the body of research arguing for principals as instructional leaders, but this new evidence does help nuance [sic] that argument by broadening the definition of instructional leadership to include organizational management skills” (Rice, 2010).

Grissom and Loeb (2009) conducted a similar study and agreed with Rice’s assessment: Principals devoting significant time and energy to becoming instructional leaders in their schools are unlikely to see improvement unless they increase their capacity for organizational management as well. Effective instructional leadership combines an understanding of the instructional needs of the school with an ability to target resources where they are needed, hire the best available teachers, provide teachers with the opportunities they need to improve, and keep the school running smoothly. (p. 32) Effective principals agree with this assessment. Blase, Blase, and Phillips (2010) interviewed 20 principals who had been recognized by their state departments of education as a “high-performing principal of a high performing or significantly improving school”. These principals indicated that effective administrative leadership provides a stable, predictable, and supportive foundation for a high-performing school...[and] that effective administrative and instructional leadership are inextricably intertwined and interdependent processes.

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It is important to celebrate the principalship and talk about the positive impact that effective principals have on their schools. But the broader view of celebrating the principalship should include recognizing that every school—and every student—deserves such a principal. And the bottom line is that there are barriers to ensuring this happens. Many principals feel that they have multiple, often conflicting priorities and that not everything can always be done well. They have multiple constituencies—students, teachers, parents, school board members, and superintendents—and feel that they are always on call and must respond to the needs of those groups. Time is fragmented; principals speak of the intense effort needed to find time to focus on important issues when there are myriad administrative tasks that must be done. Often, they feel that the leadership aspect of the job is shortchanged.

METHODOLOGY

In qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize a population, but to develop an in depth exploration of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2006 as cited in Lucero, 2010). This research method has the power of inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions that explores social or human problem. In this paper, qualitative method is more appropriate than quantitative because of the meaningful experiences of the key informants.

The researcher used convenient sampling technique with fifteen (15) principals of public secondary schools in the National Capital Region. A criteria in selecting the key informants was followed. Ethical considerations were followed considering the willingness and availability of the key informants.

This qualitative research method employed open-ended questions. The researcher used questionnaire to elicit the answers. The open-ended questions directed the key informants to answer on the roles performed by the principals in the areas of instructional leadership, curriculum and development and assessment of learning outcomes.

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The significant statements were coded and were later subjected to a phenomenological reduction via construction of a repertory grid to enable the researcher to observe the cool and warm analyses. The cool analysis consists of the significant answers of the respondents which emerged as basis for warm analyses stage where the categories were thematized, Constant reading and re-reading facilitates the phenomenon. For the validity and reliability of the themes, it was presented to the respondents for verification of authenticity and consistency of the data.

RESULT

The following discussion presents the result of data gathered from the significant statements of the key informants in answering the central question of the study. There is an overarching themes that emerged from the study. It is termed as Typology of Principal's Role (*Skillful Leader, Transformer, and Evaluator*)

Role 1: Skillful Leader (Theme Emerged from Instructional Leader)

Instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth. Quality of instruction is the top priority for the instructional principal. Instructional leadership is committed to the core business of teaching, learning and knowledge. Staff members should meet on a regular basis to discuss how to do their jobs better and ultimately help students learn more effectively.

The following significant statements were generated form the interview of the key informants. These are the 3 instructional leadership skills principals must have in performing their roles.

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1. Instructional resource provider

It isn't sufficient for principals to just know their faculty's strengths and weaknesses. If specific resources can benefit the staff, the principal should be ready and prepared to provide them. They should also clearly recognize that teachers thrive on being appreciated and acknowledged for good performance.

I provide resources for teachers to use in instruction. (Principal 1, 3, 8, 9, 11)

I act as an instructional leader by modelling what is the benefits of instruction. (Principal 2, 4, 7, 10, 13)

I am willing to help teachers in providing resources when needed (Principal 6, 11, 12, 14, 15).

Teachers rely on principals and other administrative officials to be sources of information related to effective instructional practices and current trends in education. Instructional leaders should be tuned in to all of the pertinent issues and current events related to curriculum, effective assessment and pedagogical strategies.

2. Communicator

Of course, instructional principals should be excellent communicators. Interpersonal or people skills are crucial to the success of a principal. They must be able to communicate their beliefs pertaining to education, including the conviction that every student is capable of learning. These skills inspire trust, spark motivation and empower teachers and students.

3. Motivator

Lastly, good principals should be a positive, vibrant and visible presence in the school. Modeling behaviors of learning, focusing on learning objectives, and leading by example are crucial to the success of an instructional principal.

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In addition to these three qualities, a successful instructional principal should also have excellent planning and observation skills as well as proficiency in research and evaluation of both staff and student performance.

Role 2: Transformer (Theme Emerged from Curriculum and Development)

Transformational leadership is a new leadership essential that works in a dynamic educational setting. The role of a principal in curriculum and development is a transformer because he/she tries to implement curriculum that is aligned with what is required by DepEd. Though little has been required of them regarding development of curriculum, their input is significant for curricular reforms and feedback purposes. Being a transformer, a principal has the ability to be flexible and work on available resources in implementing curriculum. From the key informants' significant statements, the following were codified:

We cannot change the DEpEd curriculum, we need to follow because that is mandated. (Principal 2, 5, 9, 10, 11, 15)

Sometimes I help teachers though the different department heads/master teachers to do a little modification of the curriculum especially in some content to fit the needs of the learners. (Principal 2, 5, 8, 11, 14)

I see to it that teachers follow the curriculum guide and if problems arise, I suggest them to innovate and be creative. (Principal 3, 4, 6, 8, 13)

The above verbalizations of the key informants facilitated the coding of the theme which we call as transformer. It cannot be denied that in today's reality, principal's role as transformer is needed to make impact in curriculum and development.

Role 3: Evaluator (Theme Emerged from Assessment of Learners' Output)

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It is also important to recognize the role of the principal in the assessment of learner's output. Though the immediate person who assesses the learning of the individual is the teacher. The principal is only involve in decision- making whether learners are promoted or needed remediation. The following significant statements of the key informants would clearly describe the role of the principal as an evaluator:

I am very particular with the promotion of every learner. (Principal 1, 4, 7, 8, 10)

I see to it that grades are reflections of learner's output and not only for compliance. (Principal 5, 11, 12, 14, 15)

I respect decisions of teachers when it comes to the grades of the learners. (Principal 5, 6, 8, 9, 13).

As pointed out by some principal's respondents, there is a little contribution of principal in the assessment of learner's outcome. They are only involved in decision-making and evaluating.

Discussion

The role of the instructional leader should also be expanded to incorporate a shift away from just "management," or working in terms of administrative tasks, and move toward an emphasis on leadership. In order to achieve this objective, a strong principal with solid ideas is not enough; success will require a redefinition of the role of the principal. Barriers to leadership must be removed by reducing emphasis on bureaucratic structures and procedures. Relationships must be reinvented.

The dramatically different role of the school principal as instructional leader has been described as one that must focus on building a vital community of learners. It also requires shared decision-making and, in a sense, getting back to basics. It will require the leveraging

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of time, the support of ongoing professional development for staff members, creating a climate of integrity, using resources to support a diverse educational game plan and, lastly, plenty of room for inquiry and improvement.

For principals to truly thrive in the role of instructional leader, they will have to work to liberate themselves from being mired in the bureaucratic aspects of teaching. They'll have to redouble their efforts in improving learning and teaching methods. Needless to say, improvement in instructional methods is a goal worth seeking. When successfully implemented, instructional teaching and learning allows students as well as teachers to create a more meaningful learning environment. Ultimately, it enables them to better control their destiny.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the role of the principal is ever changing. There is no fix construct that certain principal would be forever in his/her comfort zone. Interestingly, this paper has identified typologies of principals' role which emerged from the data collected and interpreted. It was found out that there are three typologies termed as skillful leader, transformer and evaluator. To be a skillful leader, the principal must be an instructional resource provider, communicator and motivator. For the principal to be transformer, he needs to perform actions that will make his/her subordinates move for action. And finally, he becomes an evaluator if he weighs things for decision-making.

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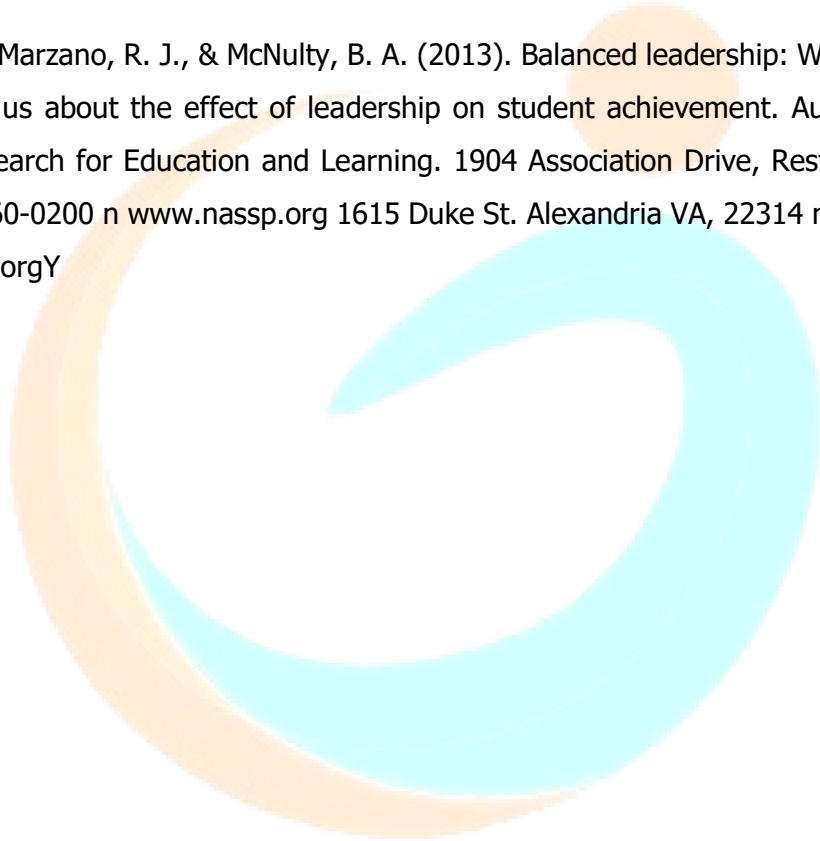
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