The Challenges of the Rural Principal

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Abstract:

In the Indian context, it is usually seen that rural school principals face a number of challenges that are unique to their surroundings. These challenges do occur from a number of sources, mostly from community perspectives and within the school structure/setting itself. The present paper examines the challenges at the rural school-based level in terms of principals’ professional development, and community-related challenges. The paper is an attempt to suggest a few suggestions to assist rural principals in their professional development and clarifying the role of rural principals.

School leaders are expected to have leadership knowledge and skills to respond effectively to the many challenges that overwhelmed them in their day-to-day work. The rural circumstances create additional challenges for school leaders because rural schools have unique characteristics that separate them clearly from those in urban areas. However, effective professional development can construct necessary leadership ability that go on supporting rural schools success. This article mainly discusses the need of professional expansion of rural school principals to meet the demands of school development. This paper also provides direction for the development of professional development activities that can enhance the principals’ leadership skills to attain higher standards of holistic accomplishment.

KEY WORDS: Rural school principals, leadership skills, professional development, community-related challenges etc.

The role of the school principal is constantly changing. Now more than ever before principals are needed to acquire a variety of skills to comprehend sustainable accomplishment in an administrative position. They are expected to travel along with change while producing, maintaining and nurturing school environment that rationalizes the development and awareness of the students within the school.

As Normore (2004) rightly states,

The role of the principal in successful schools has transcended the traditional notion of functional management, power, behaviour style, and instructional leadership. Today’s principals face more complex expectations forged by a very different student population and a new generation dissatisfied with the educational status quo. (p. 2)
It is accepted that rural principals face challenges that are unique to their environment. In modern years much research has been undertaken on the topic of the challenges facing by rural principals. The present paper determines what is presently being recommended to help out rural principals in facing these challenges, and where insufficiency still exist in this regard.

Today’s school principals are expected to learn from throughout their careers to adapt to the changing demands of students and schools. There is an utmost need for schools to improve; therefore we cannot afford to ignore the critical needs of school leaders to be more efficient at their work. They should get professional development to become more effective, well-informed and competent to facilitate constant enhancement. In order to fulfill the demands of educational reform, formal leadership has been developed over the last decade. Preparing principals who are more than managers and more than administrators is required to meet the challenges of increased public demands in the twenty first century.ii

Progressive leadership is required to achieve reformation in educational system. However, Elmore (2002) argues that many school leaders do not have the essential acquaintance and skills to deal with standards-based school reform.iii Hausman, Crow and Sperry (2000) agree that for the sake of educational reformation, educational leadership must be toughened and professional development for principals must be updated.iv

The job of administrative leaders is now changed, it is mainly about enhancing the skills and knowledge of the people in the organization, generating a culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the entire organization together in a productive relationship and making each individual accountable for his/her function to the collective results. Effective principals bring to their schools innovative ideas, programs, and instructional strategies that can develop teaching and learning process. They also connect teachers, parents, and community members as associates and leaders in the efforts of school improvement. They put together professional communities by managing time and financial resources that hold all individuals accountable to meet the demands of instructional improvement.

In rural areas, people’s faith and practices are still alive and valued and these may challenge what the school aims to uphold. Some traditional beliefs and practices may act as stumbling blocks to school leaders if
they fail to understand cultural environment in which they work. Religious and other interest groups may also make an authoritative influence on various dimensions of the school organization. The community’s lack of understanding of modern day education can create a major challenge to school leaders working in rural settings where the community is not prepared to assimilate with newest developments in education. Say for technological improvements, is likely to be misinterpreted by them. Further, vernacular-speaking residents with little or no English may dominate in rural communities by insisting their mother tongue.

Local management committee/school board does not consist of members having well educated and vision of educational developments. Because of the multiple changes in educational schemes, it is required to have educated people in the Board, who can wholeheartedly support the school leaders to work for the better prospects.

Barley & Beesley rightly state that Principals are supposed to be instructional leaders, but they are deprived of sufficient time for such an important aspect of their work. They convey their annoyance about growing bureaucratic interference, which creates obstacles before the actual nature of their administrative and professional role. The priority is often given to unrelated works that take their substantial time to perform most essential part of their profession that is teaching-learning activities. (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Principals now feel alienated from debates on educational reforms and policy-making, for which earlier they wholeheartedly connected. The fact is that they are marginalized and ignored by education bureaucracies.

As far as socioeconomic factors are concerned, rural areas are greatly diverse from urban areas. People are poor and be likely to have a shared life style. In such existing circumstances, rural schools do not get the kind of support and resources schools in urban areas. Due to communities are economically worried, the schools are found in struggling for resources.

Teacher recruitment is indeed more of a challenge in rural areas. Academic qualifications, pre-service and in-service training, experience, content knowledge and skills in learning and teaching are some strong indicators of teacher quality. People who are recruited to teach without having any formal qualification in teaching are most likely to affect the qualitative aspect of learning–teaching. Their lack of
pedagogical knowledge and skills relating to teaching may have serious effects on children’s school. In such circumstances rural school leaders struggle to improve the core business of learning–teaching in order to narrow the achievement gaps between rural children and their urban counterparts. Therefore there is a need for specific and unique professional development for rural school principals becomes more important. Technology has indeed helped to bridge the gap between rural administrators and their colleagues. Technology could be used for rural administrators to gain access to centralized professional development sessions through video conferencing or other forms of technology, but this would not address the need for principals to meet and network with their colleagues. Beyond limited access to professional development opportunities, rural principals also have fewer opportunities to network with colleagues in face-to-face environments. While there are of course several means of communication that can help to alleviate this feeling of isolation, email and the telephone cannot fully replace regular face-to-face contact amongst colleagues. In short, principals need to talk regularly with other principals who share similar circumstances.

Good leadership is not inborn. Leaders must be able to set up expectations on the norms of teaching and learning for all members of the learning community by sustaining and preserving a professional climate. Therefore, rural principal leadership today requires the aptitude to assemble elements to undertake challenging work in the constantly change world.

References:


