



Teaching, Leading, and Learning in the 21st Century Classrooms

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Abstract

One critical challenge facing in all government school systems in India is the urgent need to transform traditional classrooms into 21st century learning environments. To understand what is impacting this transformation in schools is to identify the impact of a teacher's level of transformational leadership on student engagement in the 4Cs of the 21st century like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. The present study highlights to build a case for teacher preparatory programs and policymakers to require the teaching of the transformational leadership theory as a core component of teacher preparatory programs and also an impact of teachers' perceptions of 21st century professional development on student engagement in the 4Cs. The study suggested towards the teachers' growth mindset and their transformational leadership rating to see the possible connections to further support teachers' developing as transformational leaders within the classroom and the study recommends all the government and state educational authorities for professional development for all teachers, changes in the curriculum, teachers' recruitment, teaching learning materials, etc.

Keywords: Classroom, Leading, Learning, Teaching, Student, Teacher, 21st Century

Introduction

Leadership was defined by Bass and Avolio (1997) as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing those followers into leaders. Core characteristics of a leader include trustworthiness, the ability to motivate and inspire each subordinate, the ability to build, lead, and guide a team to success, etc. Extensive research exists on the application of leadership theory to school principal leadership. Studies by Blasé (1990) and Thurston, Clift, and Schacht (1993) support leadership as an effective approach for school principals. Furthermore, research reflects that principals of effective and exemplary schools were described as leaders (Kendrick, 1988; Lontos, 1993; Rodgers, 1994; Sagor, 1992). They built capacity in their schools to promote continual growth in their faculty and their students. By developing a strong school culture that is committed to continual improvement, these leaders paved the way for the transformation of their schools from traditional to highly engaging and motivational 21st century learning environments. Research also shows that principal leadership is responsible for developing effective schools that maintain high faculty and student morale (Sagor, 1992), have increased student achievement (Kendrick, 1988; Lontos, 1993; Sagor, 1992), have lower dropout rates (Lontos, 1993), and have enhanced school climate (Kendrick, 1988). These key indicators are the result of

a transformational principal developing a school culture built on strong, trusting relationships among students, teachers, and administrators. This trust is also the result of the school principals demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the professional growth of the faculty by providing professional development that promotes and develops the talents of each teacher. Research shows that teachers who develop strong relationships that are built on trust motivate their students to engage in difficult and challenging work (Stuhلمان, Hamre, & Pianta 2002). These attributes are directly connected to the characteristics of a transformational leader. Applied to a classroom teacher, then, the ideal result would be a classroom environment that inspires students to be the best they can be and to persevere when faced with challenges based on a trusting relationship with the teacher. Furthermore, the teacher would meet the needs of each student. Intensifying the need for teachers to be transformational leaders in the classroom are the Common Core Standards. Teachers need to support all students in meeting these new standards. Many students, especially students with disabilities, are finding this difficult, and they are becoming frustrated and anxious (New York State School Board Association, 2015). In classrooms where students trust their teacher to support them in reaching these new standards, students are working harder than ever. d for further research that analyses the impact of teacher leadership styles on students (Snell & Swanson, 2000). This need for more research is made more acute by the demands and expectations placed on the 21st century teachers who are leading students in future classrooms, teaching common core curriculum, and charged with preparing students to succeed and to meet the demands of the present classroom, teachers must adjust their classroom pedagogy from the traditional model of delivery of content to being a facilitator of discovery and inquiry-based learning that fosters greater student engagement in content and promotes 21st century skills (Eduviews, 2008). For centuries, schools have been structured and perceived as places for teaching. The challenge in the 21st century is restructuring schools as learning places for both students and teachers alike (Eduviews, 2008, p. 10). In order to support this educational transition, teachers must provide ongoing opportunities to engage in professional development focused on 21st century skills and pedagogy (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). The main goal of the educational transition is to prepare students for their entry into a global society.

Purpose and Statement of the Study

Today's schools and school leaders are faced with a daunting challenge and they must transform the traditional classroom into 21st century learning environments (Bellanca, 2010). School principals, can't do this work alone, teachers must be transformational leaders of their classrooms. They must do the difficult work of adjusting their pedagogy in order to enhance student engagement in the 4Cs and increase rigor while differentiating to support each learner. Policy makers and administrators both need to support teachers in this difficult task by providing ongoing professional development (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). The purpose of the present study is to fill a void in the body of research regarding the role of teachers as transformational leaders in classrooms, particularly, middle-school teachers, because this population is scarcely represented in the published research applying the transformational leadership theory to the classroom environment and the study also assess on the growing body of research on teaching, leading, and learning and understand the influence a teacher's leadership style with levels of student engagement in the super skills and participation in professional development activities focused on future teaching and learning, perception of the impact professional development has on the teachers'

practice in adjusting to any classroom pedagogy, etc. The significance of the study is to provide insight to teacher-preparation programs, policy makers, administrators, and teachers as to how teachers' leadership styles impact student engagement in the future skill development and how professional development programming can support 21st century teachers and their classroom development and also the study aimed towards contributing to the leadership style, student engagement, the professional development of the teacher, etc.

Objectives of the Study

- ❖ To study teaching, leading and learning in the 21st century classrooms.
- ❖ To assess the teacher which perceives professional development towards influence of his/her instruction which impact on 21st century student engagement and learning.
- ❖ To highlight about the application of the transformational leadership in to k-12 school education system.
- ❖ To suggest all students' active participation in the 21st century classrooms learning.

Methodology

The present study is mainly established on secondary data which are gathered from renowned research articles, journals, position papers, etc. and are all related to "Teaching, Leading, and Learning in the 21st Century Classrooms".

Definition of Terms

Collaboration: It is the ability of students to work together to solve problems/answer questions and to work effectively and respectfully in teams to accomplish a common goal and to assume shared responsibility for completing a task.

Communication: It is the ability of students to organize their thoughts, data, and findings and use them effectively through a variety of media, as well as through oral presentations and in writing.

Creativity: It is the ability of students to generate and refine solutions to complex problems/tasks based on synthesis, analysis, and then combining or presenting what they have learned in new and original ways.

Critical Thinking: It is the ability of students to analyse complex problems, investigate questions for which there are no clear-cut answers, evaluate different points of view/sources of information, and draw appropriate conclusions based on evidence and reasoning.

Professional Development (PD): It is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement.

Teacher Leadership: It is defined as the process in which an educator exerts influence over colleagues in a school.

Transactional Leadership: It is a teacher and a student meet for the purpose of exchanging things of value to each.

Transformational Leadership: It is an educator teaches in a manner that elevates both the superior (teacher) and his/her students to higher levels of performance and achievement.

Literature Review

Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Katyal & Evers, 2004; Katzenmeyer & Moller, (1996). developed a theory around teacher leaders as facilitators of student learning and the theory claims that by empowering and

supporting teachers in feeling confident about their ability to lead, fosters within them the responsibility for the learning of all students. Crowther et al. (2002) suggests that teacher leadership is a way of acting that uses the power of teaching to not only shape meaning for children, but for all family members, and it enhances the livelihood of the entire community. Katyal and Evers (2004) also found that autonomous self-learning was perceived as being more authentic to the lives of students by a majority of participants. School-site learning was motivated primarily as a means to meet criteria for promotion. Norton (2012) study suggests that “students who perceive that their teacher exhibits strong transformational leadership behaviours in the classroom also perceive that they are more capable of doing the work; they are challenged to think deeply, and they are less likely to avoid novel challenges”. Gallup (2013) research shows that 21st century skills are advanced skills that prepare and equip youth for the challenges and demands of work. Kivunja (2015) and Saxena (2015) agreed in their work that the 4Cs are the super skills for the 21st century, and they will help to develop the qualities that students need to possess for success in educational institutions, careers, citizenship, etc.

Teaching, Leading, and Learning in the 21st Century Classrooms

Transforming Indian school education classrooms from traditional classrooms to 21st century learning environments is arguably the most important change and transition educators must achieve for their students if the students are to be successful in school and career. Engaging students in the 4Cs is critical to their success in college and career and the international innovative teaching and learning research, referenced earlier in this paper, agrees that students are more likely to build and exhibit 21st century skills if the learning activities in which they engage are part of a class that asks them to demonstrate those skills daily. The present study suggest that teachers who exhibit high levels of the characteristics of transformational leadership, in fact, engage students more often in critical thinking and collaboration, and therefore, they prepare students better for college and career and provides a basis for viewing the teacher as an integral leader in the change process within our schools not just a leader but a transformational teacher leader and is the key to speeding up the process of moving schools forward in the work of engaging students. Teachers must have an increased understanding of how today’s student learns, the skills the student needs and teachers must teach in a way that supports the student’s learning style and models the skills that the student needs to master. In order to lead the teacher in understanding and acquisition of new tools, the district instructional leader must also model these needed skills and establish a vision and direction deeply rooted in student-led and teacher-facilitated learning and continuous reflection and technology is the medium that these students are using to access the information at the instantaneous rate that they are accustomed to doing, and yet reports show that technology use in the classroom is minimally available for learning even in the classrooms that are the heaviest users. Democratic classroom structures allow students to learn based on their understanding and strengths, which include constructing their knowledge from adding one piece of knowledge to another and then another until they get it right. As opposed to much of the adult learning perspective that something is either right or wrong, children see it as a journey towards what works, with many stops along the way to evaluate what did and did not work in the process and it helps move the classroom in the direction of a student-based outcome focus instead of a teacher-based outcome focus and places the learners in the center of their learning. Teachers today have had neither the experience to assimilate the culture of learning or socializing, or a combination of the two in a technology and information-rich 21st century, nor has there been a learner-based

focus or participatory experience of a democratic classroom. This creates a gap between what we believe to be effective classroom structures and instructional skills for teachers to use and what is currently practiced in the classroom. A relation to what 21st century instructional knowledge and experience district instructional leaders need to develop in order to lead teachers in creating 21st century classrooms, a common strand is seen by looking across the elements and items where the lower percentage of correct responses was identified. Overall, while including the self-assessment questions, district instructional leaders did not show knowledge in the element of digital age learning for the instructional leader. Specifically, within the items, district instructional leaders did not know that an understanding and use of the technology and digital age tools, an understanding of what and how to select technology and digital age tools, and being able to troubleshoot systems and programs is a necessary component for teachers and district instructional leaders. In addition, the results suggest a need for more understanding with cultural and global issues in the digital age, institutions and organizations where 21st century instruction, classrooms, and learning are marketed as happening as normal routine could be studied. The present study may bring not only a better understanding as to whether the requisite knowledge exists in educational institutions, but also an examination of where and how the members of the institution were able to acquire such knowledge and understanding.

Conclusion, Discussion and Summary

Addressing the crisis in quality learning requires us to redefine what education systems are for and the skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, etc. that learning and teaching promote must reflect and respond to the needs and expectations of individuals, countries, the global population, and the world of work today. They must not only teach basic skills, like reading and math, but encourage critical thinking and foster the desire and capacity for lifelong learning that adapts to shifts in local, national, global dynamics, etc. These diverse learning goals may seem disparate, but are actually synergistic by encouraging active participation and emphasizing critical thinking, children's acquisition of basic literacy and math can be promoted at the same time they are gaining necessary skills for the 21st century. Teachers are at the core of addressing the crisis in quality learning and the present study suggests that they will be better able to meet the crisis if they possess the characteristics of a transformational leader with intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, etc. Students need to learn from teachers who provide individual learning paths and requires the teachers to develop a series of personalized learning targets for each student, which accounts for their individual strengths and needs. Teachers must provide intellectual stimulation on a daily basis and also requires teachers to develop a plethora of critical thinking activities based on the standards that require students to collaborate, invent, present, research, etc. Students learn best in classrooms that are filled with inspirational motivation and where a classroom culture of respect results in idealized influence. Students engage when they feel that they are genuine members of a community, that the group is organized around a clear purpose, when they are treated as valued and respected members of the group, and when they are treated with fairness. By exhibiting these traits of a transformational leader in the classroom, our teachers will assist our schools in transforming from traditional classrooms to 21st century learning environments, resulting in students being better prepared for college and career. Even though teachers are at the front lines of this work, policy makers must commit to supporting this difficult but imperative transformation within our schools. Policy makers need to provide professional development to the staff of the

state departments of education in order to explain and promote this critical work. Policy makers should call for the integration of 21st century skills into teaching standards across all disciplines and the development of assessments to support this work. Twenty-first century skills cannot be successfully implemented in isolation and learners can only think critically and communicate effectively when they build on a base of core academic subject knowledge. Finally, policy makers must support the development of intense professional development programs that focus on both 21st century classroom models, structures, lessons, etc. as well as developing the teacher as a transformational leader committed to lifelong learning and faculty development offerings should support K-12 and higher education also. School district leaders need to support this work by building capacity in their school districts that leads to the creation of a school culture of risk taking and collaboration. Time must be allocated for teachers to collaborate and discuss 21st century skill development and methods to increase student engagement in those areas. Teachers need to understand that they are transformational leaders within their classrooms and they should identify what traits on the transformational leadership scale they possess and where they need growth. Developing each trait is critical in becoming a highly transformational teacher leader. Therefore, it is the responsibility of our schools to support students in developing these skills in order to secure not only a place for our students in the work force but for our nation's continued growth in the global economy. The study can serve as a springboard for thinking about teachers leading the transformation of our schools from traditional to learning hubs that highly engage all students in the super skills and break down the walls that keep certain students from achieving their own individual greatness. Providing professional development that supports teachers becoming transformational leaders within their classroom may expedite the time needed for all educational institutions to transform. The study also came about as a result of the researcher's involvement in a reform initiative designed to promote and increase student development skills. Preparing the nation's youth through education and instruction can provide a way forward in equipping future generations with the skills that are needed to meet the challenges and take advantage of opportunities for success. Teachers must have relevant training and guidance in order to create best classroom structure and utilize 21st century instructional practices to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need.

Educational Implications and Suggestions

- ❖ A teacher who possesses and practices transformational leadership characteristics positively impacts student engagement in the areas of critical thinking and collaboration.
- ❖ Teacher preparation programs should engage in instruction around transformational leadership.
- ❖ Teachers entering the field of K-12 education must learn about leadership theory and assess themselves continuously.
- ❖ Enhance professional development and certification courses by infusing educational leadership into the core requirements.
- ❖ Teachers who perceived that professional development had a positive influence on their practice made a greater effort to increase student engagement in critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, etc.
- ❖ Promote the professionalization of teaching and educational leadership, as applicable.

- ❖ Professional learning when it's systemic, where it's being done as a sustained process inside a school, when it's ongoing, experiential, collaborative, and connected to students, is more powerful than any video, presentation, or catalogue of workshops.
- ❖ Professional learning for educators is a crucial step in transforming schools and improving academic achievement.
- ❖ Develop a growth mindset in a teacher impacts student engagement in 21st century skills.
- ❖ A teacher's growth mindset supports greater student engagement in generating and refining solutions to complex problems.
- ❖ Teachers with a growth mindset recognize that knowledge and skills arise from effort including a student's creative powers.
- ❖ Teachers need to be taught the importance of being transformational leaders in their classrooms.
- ❖ Students who are engaged in their education do better on a variety of activities, ready for college, the work, and they develop a greater understanding of how to be successful citizens and contributing members of a 21st century democratic society.
- ❖ Students must engaged in learning to grow towards successful adults.

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